Forged Ties: the 'Comitatus' and Anglo -Saxon Poetry.

Leslie Ann Stratyner
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Forged ties: The comitatus and Anglo-Saxon poetry

Stratyner, Leslie Ann, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1991
FORGED TIES: THE COMITATUS
AND ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Leslie Stratynker
B.A., State University of New York at Albany, 1985
M.A. in English, State University of New York at Albany, 1989
December 1991
### Chapter III
**Fall and Redemption: "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood"**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Genesis B&quot;</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Dream of the Rood&quot;</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter IV
**The Pattern in the Void: The Vanished Comitatus in the Elegies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Wife's Lament&quot;</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Husband's Message&quot;</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Wulf and Eadwacer&quot;</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Deor&quot;</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Ruin&quot;</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Resignation&quot;</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Wanderer&quot;</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Seafarer&quot;</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion** | 221  
**Works Cited** | 226  
**Vita** | 243  

iii
Abstract

The focus of this study is the illumination of the most unchanging and consistent aspect of Anglo-Saxon poetry: the poetic representation of the ethos of the warrior band. The ideals of the comitatus offer a contributing, if not controlling, structure to nearly the entire corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

That warband could attain no finer poetic representation than Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," which, in presenting not only positive but negative models of behavior, best exemplify the ideals of the comitatus as embodied in Anglo-Saxon verse. Chapter 1 examines the institutions and practices of that masculine circle as illustrated in these poems.

The second chapter is as a vital companion to the first. Though the comitatus is exclusively male, it is a mistaken presumption that women had no influence with regard to that group. Contrary to common perceptions, women had a critical position within the male organization of the warband. Chapter 2 examines that role.

This, however, is not the entire scope of the dissertation. Of course, it is virtually impossible for a dissertation to detail every reference within Anglo-Saxon verse where the ideals of the comitatus are pertinent; thus, chapters 3 and 4 focus on the manifestations of the
comitatus in the poetic situations where we would least expect it.

One would hardly anticipate discovering the ethos of the comitatus permeating Eden or Calvary. Yet undeniably it does. Chapter 3 discusses the Anglo-Saxon "reinterpretations" of the fall of man and his redemption (seen in "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood").

The speakers of the elegies are all deprived of a comitatus. Chapter 4 focuses on these poems, where ironically, we can ascertain the vitality and importance of the warband through an analysis of the consequences of its lack, and even its apparent repudiation. By examining cases in which the ideals of the comitatus seem irrelevant to the poetic situation, those ideals are in truth revealed to be the dominant paradigm. Thus, the controlling structure of the comitatus is explicated in various genres extant in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
Introduction

"Much that is characteristic of the oldest Germanic literature turns on the relationship between the companions and their lord."

Sir Frank Stenton

When the English historian Frank Stenton wrote those words in the early 1940s, he was not asserting anything revolutionary, even back then. Why then, fifty years later, is it still necessary that we continue to expound upon the influence of the comitatus on Anglo-Saxon poetry? Anyone even haltingly familiar with criticism concerning Anglo-Saxon verse knows that the territory is rife with exploration of the various institutional factors which comprise the framework of the comitatus and its atmosphere. For example, James Earl's "The Role of the Men's Hall in the Development of the Anglo-Saxon Superego," and Kathryn Hume's "The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry" provide a wealth of information about Anglo-Saxon mead halls. For a thorough understanding of boasts and oaths, see Nolan and Bloomfield's "Beotword, Gilpcwidas, and the Gilphlæden Scop of Beowulf." In addition, studies of the influence of the warrior ethos upon the poetry are not limited simply to the heroic poems, such as Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon."
Both Kathleen Dubbs and Robert Diamond write about heroism in the Anglo-Saxon crucifixion poem "The Dream of the Rood." Yet these are only sparse examples from an exceedingly abundant well of scholarship. What is the purpose in treading the path that has been trodden so many times before?

I have undertaken this study because, to my knowledge, no one has ever attempted to detail fully and in book-length form the many elements that comprise the ethos of the comitatus, and then apply that analysis to other Anglo-Saxon poems. Edward B. Irving, with A Reading of Beowulf and Rereading Beowulf comes closest, though of course he limits himself to Beowulf. There are, admittedly, a plethora of articles which concern, explicitly or tangentially, the influence of the comitatus ethic upon the poetry. Yet a more comprehensive study is required. The ideals of the comitatus in one form or another offer a contributing, if not controlling, structure to nearly the entire corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry. A thorough rather than incidental illumination of the ethos of the warrior band as depicted in the poetry is not merely warranted, but demanded.

The first chapter of this dissertation attempts to do just that. In it I examine the poetic representation of the comitatus within the poems where it is most evident; as my examples for the poetic representations of the comitatus, I choose exclusively Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon." It
is these two poems which, in presenting not only positive but negative models of behavior, best exemplify the ideals of the warband.

The second chapter serves as a vital companion piece to the first. Though the comitatus is exclusively male, and chapter 1 will accordingly focus on the institutions and practices of that masculine circle, it would be erroneous to presume that women had no influence with regard to that group. Contrary to common perceptions, women had a critical position within the stereotypical male organization of the warband, and we must examine that role.

This, however, is not the entire scope of the dissertation. If indeed the comitatus and the ideals and practices surrounding it serve as a controlling element within Anglo-Saxon poetry, it is vital that we examine how those ideals and practices influence those poems where the warrior's milieu, or concerns specific to an Anglo-Saxon woman, would not seem to be apropos. It would be far too great a task, however, within this (or perhaps any) forum to highlight and detail every single pertinent reference to the comitatus, or the woman's role in connection with it. I have chosen, therefore, to focus chapters 3 and 4 on the manifestations of the comitatus in the poetic situations where we would least expect it.

One would hardly anticipate discovering the ethos of the comitatus permeating the Garden of Eden, or Calvary.
Yet undeniably it does. Chapter 3 discusses the Anglo-Saxon "reinterpretations" of both the fall of man and his redemption (as seen in "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood"), and how the fall and redemption are represented in terms that any pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon would understand.

The speakers of the elegies are all deprived of a comitatus. Chapter 4 focuses on those poems—poems where, ironically, we can ascertain the vitality and importance of the warband through an analysis of the consequences of its lack, and even its apparent repudiation. The abandonment of earthly values in favor of transcendent and eternal ones are the last situations in which we would expect to find validation of the warrior band. It is there, however, that the validation is its strongest.

Although this study will concentrate almost exclusively on poetic representations of the comitatus, the question does arise as to the relation between poetry and historical reality, and how the historicity (or lack thereof) of the comitatus should impact on my conclusions. How much does the poetic warband reflect the actual warband as it existed in England between Rome's abandonment and the Norman conquest?

A poem like "The Battle of Maldon," though ostensibly concerned with the historical event, focuses almost exclusively on the heroic action and reaction of Byrhtnoth and his comitatus. The poem is more than just a dry
historical account; it is a fusion of poetry and history, and a paradigm for heroic behavior.¹

That paradigm was just as relevant in the seventh century as it was in the tenth. Despite the changes which occurred during the Anglo-Saxon period within the society itself, the ideal of the comitatus, as it is depicted in the poetic tradition, remains relatively constant. Of the comitatus, F. M. Stenton wrote:

No Germanic institution has a longer history. The phrases in which Tacitus describes the retinue of a first-century chief can be applied to the companions of King Cynewulf of Wessex in the eighth century and to those of Earl Byrhtnoth of Essex in the tenth. (302)

Indeed, the ideal as presented throughout the poetry is remarkably stable, never seeming to waver from its set precepts. The poetic comitatus may not have always represented the actual historical comitatus, but it always represented an abiding ideal in the Anglo-Saxon mind.

Furthermore, according to some, the difference between poetry and fact is unimportant. "As far as barbarian culture at the birth of the Middle Ages is concerned," Robert W. Hanning wrote in 1974, "distinctions between history and poetry are distinctions without a difference. The cultural inheritance of a preliterate culture assumes
poetic form for mnemonic reasons" (78). Hanning's assessment, however, is sweeping and a little too dismissive of the relevance between the "history" these poems claim to represent and the poetry itself. Declaring that there is no difference between the history and the poetry is an oversimplification, in that the problem is eliminated instead of faced.

The problem of historical accuracy and date is one primary to many Anglo-Saxonists. Yet the difficulty that we have in ascertaining the historicity and date of composition of many of the poems is directly related to the representation of the comitatus itself within that poetry. The poems are chronologically unfocused because, as Stenton pointed out, the ideal of the comitatus itself remained a constant even over many centuries. Thus the paradigms that surrounded and embodied the comitatus were themselves unconcerned with the development or decay of the warband as it actually existed. Most of the poems are not anchored within a specific historical period, and thus are undatable by anything other than circumstantial internal evidence, which is always subject to refutation.

Despite this, and though the historical and sociological background of Anglo-Saxon England is not the focus of my argument, it seems necessary to offer a rudimentary assessment of the accuracy of the poetry in representing the warrior band, or at least the problems in
determining that accuracy. Since Beowulf is the focus of the most major controversy over dating, and "The Battle of Maldon" the focus of debate over historical accuracy, these two poems serve as appropriate examples to illustrate those problems. Since I also use these two poems as the paradigms for my discussion of the comitatus in chapters 1 and 2, the choice of Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon" is especially relevant.

"The Battle of Maldon" concerns an actual conflict in 991 between the solidly historical Wessex ealdorman Byrhtnoth and his equally verifiable Viking challengers. Yet "Maldon" is a poem fraught with difficulties. The question of "historicity" with regard to "The Battle of Maldon" does not concern the poem's date, or if the battle itself happened, but whether the poem represents that battle accurately. As Abels asserts, the army of Byrhtnoth's was composed of landowners as well as his retainers. Is the poem, which seems to present Byrhtnoth's retinue as a seasoned army of nobles, more literature than history?

Perhaps. Yet Abels asserts that, though the comitatus is idealized, the portrayal "would not have struck its audience as too far removed from the reality that they knew" (147). It seems that "perhaps" is the most decisive word we can use in light of the debate as to the historical accuracy of the poem, which is by no means conclusive. Hanning calls the heroic ideals "anachronistic" (78). Gatch claims that
"the poet has hearkened to a genre of Old English poetry which no longer fit the case" (135). Blake indeed claims that "there is no need to posit any historical knowledge on the poet's part" (129, emphasis mine).

Still, Dobbie (1942), R. K. Gordon, and F. M. Stenton believe that the poem is a fairly accurate record of the battle. Irving (1961), in fact, considers the account accurate enough to call it a "fragment of medieval journalism" (458). However, I think the best perspective is Bessinger's (1963), who believes that "The Battle of Maldon" is "only secondarily about events;" it is "rather about men seen and heard in typical heroic action" (252). Thus the historical aspects are relevant, but become subsumed under the poet's goal of presenting his models of behavior. Byrhtnoth and his army, though they were authentic, concrete, and tangible men, in the end served more importantly as paradigms for heroic conduct.

Relevant to the historicity of Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon" is the problem of ascertaining their date of composition. "The Battle of Maldon" is distinct from most Anglo-Saxon poetry in that it can be dated relatively precisely. That poem was composed about an actual conflict between Byrhtnoth and the Viking raider Olaf in 991. But we are not so lucky with Beowulf. There seems to be no critical consensus as to when the poem was written.² Complicating matters is the question of whether Beowulf
actually existed. On this, we can only speculate. However, perhaps the question of Beowulf's existence may be a moot point, for in the end, though the hero of Beowulf may seem more than a bit mythic, the social institution that he represents was not.

Many scholars have and continue to reason the date of Beowulf's composition to be not after the ninth century. Others, citing evidence involving everything from anachronisms to Athelstan's association with Offa and Mercia, posit a late ninth or tenth century date. Kevin S. Kiernan even believes that the poem's date "is contemporary with its extant manuscript" (9), which dates from about the early eleventh century.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument for an earlier date is also the least complicated: the Vikings were raiding England by 835, so why would an Anglo-Saxon poet wish to venerate the actions of a people whose heathen descendents were looting and killing Englishmen? And why would Anglo-Saxon people want to listen to him even if he did wish to? Page specifically refutes this line of reasoning, believing that it underestimates the sophistication of the Anglo-Saxon audience. The English who listened to Beowulf, according to Page, were perhaps "mature enough to make the distinction" (113) between the marauding Danes and the Danes in Denmark.
That perspective is flattering, but unrealistic, and ultimately seems to ignore a very basic pattern of human behavior. When any conflict between countries arises, it seems human nature, whether right or wrong, to hate not only the soldier who burns your house, steals your belongings and rapes your wife, but also his place of origin and his people. This seems true not only on a national scale but at every level in between, from civil war down to the feuding Hatfields and the McCoys. If it is true, as N. P. Brooks asserts, that the Vikings "paralyzed and overran long-established and wealthy kingdoms" (20), why should we assume that the Anglo-Saxons were sophisticated enough to enjoy a poem valorizing the Danish while the inhabitants of Denmark were practicing extortion and murder upon them? Thus, I too assume an eighth century date, since there has not to date been enough evidence to refute my basic sense that the Anglo-Saxons must have resented not only the Viking intruders, but their place of origin as well.

In the end, though it is obviously imperative that we remain aware of the current hypotheses regarding historical questions like the dating of Beowulf and the accuracy of the poetical interpretation of "The Battle of Maldon," it would be unwise for us to become so fixated on these questions that we lose sight of the poems themselves. It does seem crucial that anyone seeking to examine the comitatus as expressed in the poetry have more than a nodding
acquaintance with the historical comitatus. Yet since the paradigms remain constant in the poetry, it is not essential to become preoccupied with questions of the exact date and historicity of the poems, least of all because we can never really establish the date (and thus the historicity) with any full and unimpugnable doubt. Thus, the focus of this study will be to illuminate what is unchanging and consistent: the poetic representation of the ethos of the warrior band, and its necessity and influence.
Notes

1. As Kirby points out, men in the tenth century may have needed such a paradigm, since it was "a time of widespread treachery and cowardice on the field of battle, and poems like that on Maldon may have been a method of exhortation to better conduct" (149).

2. The battle, however, continues to rage. I cannot, of course, give a complete and comprehensive history of the scholarly debate as to the poem's date, for that I recommend the varied contents of Chase (1981), especially chapter 1, which contains his own review of opinions dating back to 1815.

3. On the one hand, in support of Beowulf's existence, we have the presence within the poem of clearly historical details and persons, such as the Geats, the Danes, and the Frisians, not to mention Beowulf's lord, Hygelac, who can found in Gregory of Tours' History of the Franks. On the other hand, we find the intrusion not only of fantastical monsters but also of an almost superhuman hero. How could Beowulf, who swam miles in his armor and fought the demonic Grendel weaponless, ever have existed (not to mention the demonic Grendel)? This is not an issue that should overly concern us. As F. M. Stenton points out, the imposition of the fabulous into the mundane world is not something at which any Anglo-Saxon would have raised an eyebrow, since "to the thegn or peasant of the eighth century the supernatural world to which these figures belong was in the immediate background of life" (195).


5. For evidence involving anachronisms, see Goffart. Thundy cites Athelstan's involvement with Offa and Mercia. For additional opinion citing a tenth century date, see Murray, Stanley (1981), and specifically Niles (1983), who ties the poem to a time "not distant from the reign of Athelstan" (117).

6. See Whitelock (1951) especially in this regard.

7. See Asser's Life of King Alfred for a contemporary source as to the severity of the Viking raids.
Chapter I

The Web of Obligations:
Ties That Bind the Comitatus

Introduction

We can form no understanding of how the ethos of the comitatus influences Anglo-Saxon poetry until we understand the many and varied practices and institutions, and persons and types, which emerge out of it. The mead-hall, the scop, vengeance and ring-giving are all part and parcel of the ethos of the Anglo-Saxon warband. This first chapter will serve as a primer and introduction to the comitatus. In the first section, the practices and institutions of the warrior band will be elucidated, such as the lord/thane bond (and its origin within the kinship group), the mead-hall, the concepts of vengeance and wergild, and the vital elements of treasure and ring-giving.

From dealing with practices and institutions which form the comitatus ideal, we will move to a discussion of individuals. Discussion of the lord/thane bond, treasure, and the mead-hall will serve as a necessary, if extended background to the treatment of individual lords and thanes, which will define both their behaviors and their obligations and responsibilities, to themselves and to each other. A full and thorough understanding of the comitatus and the
before any comprehensive look can be taken at the "hero-ideal," a concept that both emerges out of and transcends the ethos of the comitatus.

Part 1: Practices and Institutions

The Lord/Thane Bond

Swa sceal [geong g]uma gode gewyrcean, fromum feohgiftum on fæder [bea]rme, pæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen wilgesiðas, ponne wig cume, leode gelæsten; lofdædum sceal in mægpa gehwære man gepeon.²

(Beowulf 20-25)

Thus must a young man perform good with splendid gifts while he is in his father's possession, so that in his old age dear companions will still remain with him, his troop serve him when war comes. In tribes everywhere, a man must prosper through praiseworthy deeds.

This passage, significantly situated at the beginning of Beowulf, sets forth a clear picture of the mutual responsibilities of the parties involved in the comitatus.
The reciprocity of the arrangement is obvious: the budding lord performs "good deeds with splendid gifts" and the troop, in repayment for his generosity, will "serve him when war comes." The lord gives gifts to his thanes, and his thanes return his generosity with their obedience and loyalty, within the hall and on the battlefield. This bond of loyalty, this reciprocal arrangement, was literally the glue which held the comitatus together.

Much of this chapter consists of an elaboration of what it means for a lord to do "good deeds with splendid gifts" and for a thane to "serve" that lord "when war comes" (since those phrases entail much of what it means to be a good lord or a good thane). This arrangement was desired by both parties, and it was not something which any good lord or retainer entered into or fulfilled hesitantly.

Ideally, lords and thanes with good intentions both willingly and joyfully fulfill their commitments. In Beowulf, Hrothgar builds his hall specifically so that he can give treasure to his thanes; his primary desire in building Heorot, the Beowulf poet tells us, is to "eall gedælan/geongum ond ealdum, swylc him God sealde" ("distribute all to young and old such as God had given him" 71b-72).

Good thanes, according to the poetic ideal as expressed in poems like Beowulf, fulfill their part of the bargain unhesitatingly, rushing to fight for and by their lord, as
in Eadric's case in "The Battle of Maldon":

se cniht nolde
wacian at þam wige pa he to wæpnum feng.
Eac him wolde Eadric his ealdre gelæstan,
frean to gefeohhte.
(9b-12a)
The youth did not wish to weaken at that battle when he took to weapons. In addition Eadric wished to help his lord at the fight.

A thane such as Eadric (or Æschere, or Wiglaf) does not need to be coaxed into helping his lord, just as a lord like Hrothgar does not need his arm twisted to prod his generosity. This is not to say that thanes do not fail at need, or that lords are never ungenerous (as we shall soon see), but thanes and lords honoring the ideal of the comitatus offer loyalty and treasure because they desire to, not because they are forced to.

The good faith with which lords and thanes enter into their reciprocal relations is indicated not only through those individuals whom our poetic texts hold up as exemplars, but through their words and speeches also. Loyn (1955) ties the epithets "wil" and "swæse" (in relation to the term gesith) to underscore the voluntary reciprocal arrangement between lord and thane, stating:

It is to be remarked that the epithet, wil meaning willing, perhaps, too swæse
meaning dear and eald meaning old or tired, indicates the voluntary nature of the tie between lord and hearth-troop in the German epic society. Loyalty is gained by generosity to free servants, not by payments made to servile dependents. (531)

Thus, always implicit in the comitatus ideal is the aspect of free will. The social contract is not something to be filled dispassionately and mechanically. Good thanes want to find and serve a lord, as good lords want to find and reward good thanes.

At this point it would seem logical to attack my evaluative dichotomy, which utilizes such apparently simplistic terminology as "good" and "bad" to characterize members of the comitatus, as I have done here and will continue to do with my discussion of both ideal and bad lords and thanes later in the chapter. Yet, this evaluative dichotomy is basic in the texts themselves, which deal much of the time with praise and blame. "Pæt wæs god cyning!" ("That was a good king!") the Beowulf poet says of Scyld on line 11 of that poem, yet that affirmation is anything but simplistic or naive. The terms are absolute because the demands upon a lord or thane were absolute; with lives at stake there could be very little room allowed for a grey area, even to account for human frailty.
The importance of fulfilling one's role as a good thane or lord, demanding as the responsibilities of that role could be, is best ascertained when we examine the consequences of those who are deprived of that opportunity. The depth of sorrow and despair felt by the individuals who find themselves bereft of a comitatus illustrates just how vital that structure is. A later chapter will deal exclusively with the elegies, in which this problem comes into central focus; however, even within the heroic poems mention is made of the plight of leaderless people without a comitatus. Within the first few lines of Beowulf, for example, the state of leaderlessness (as previously suffered by Scyld's followers) is described as "fyrendearfe" (14) or "great distress." At the end of the poem, the Geats are consigned to oblivion—a great distress to be sure—because of Beowulf's death after fighting the dragon.

Yet, the comitatus did not simply provide its participants with a chance to socialize. The practical advantages to a lord of having a warband at his disposal are obvious, as are the advantages of stability and protection from the thane's point of view. But the comitatus not only provided for the practical, physical and material needs of the participants (a hall and security of the group for a thane, a group of war-tried toughs doing their lord's bidding); it provided for the social needs of the participants as well. The lord/thane bond itself became a
social need. Warriors were more willing to risk their lives because of the sense of identity that the comitatus provided them. The warband gave them military motivation by creating a sense of belonging for its members.

The Kinship Group

The ties of the comitatus ultimately have their origin in the kinship group, an amorphous and extended coalition of blood relatives, both matri- and patrilineal in origin. Our first problem is the difficulty in ascertaining just how widely the term "kin" could be flung in Anglo-Saxon England. The many and varied terms for nephew, son, grandfather, cousin, etc. that the Anglo-Saxons used are imprecise by today's standards.³

Still, though the group itself could sometimes be ill-defined, the bonds of the kindred were powerful ties. Indeed, the kinship group, the group one was born into, was a tie which even today seems deep, as Loyn (1974) describes:

Under normal circumstances a kindred gave support and standing, fed a man if he were in prison, took on responsibility for the baptism of infants, looked after orphans, guarded the insane and the deaf-and-dumb, and curbed evil-doers. (205)
The key word here is, I think, "responsibility." One's kindred was, far more than today, legally responsible for the actions of its members; kin could be called upon to vouch for accused relatives, for example, or aid in the rearing of a child if the father died. The kindred also collected wergild, or blood-price, for slain kin. The feud, certainly a hazard of life within the comitatus (as we shall see), has its origins in the blood-feud of the kindred, who exacted vengeance if wergild was not paid, or paid wergild themselves if a relative killed a member of another kindred.

The ties of the kindred were apparently unassailable, yet they were superceded undeniably by a bond that became even more important than the bond of kinship: the bond between lord and thane. Two superb illustrations of this appear, one in Alfred's laws, and one in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

The laws of Alfred reveal much about the importance of the lord vs. kin:

\[
\text{mon mot feohtan mid his geborene mæge, gif hine mon on woh onfeohtep, buton wip his hlaforde: þæt we ne liefaþ.}^6
\]

a man can fight with his born kinsmen if he is wrongly assaulted; except against his lord. That we do not allow.
In other words, an individual is perfectly free to fight alongside his kin, unless that fight is against that individual's lord. The most striking element in this passage, however, is the insistence that even in the case of one's kinsman being "wrongly assaulted" by one's lord, one must still not take up arms against him. Obviously, concerns over the justice or injustice of the lord's actions, the danger to the family, and the family bond itself all are secondary to the thane's bond to the lord.

The conflict between Cyneheard and King Cynewulf as narrated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Classen and Harmer) for the year 755 is another key piece of evidence. Alfred is again involved in our knowledge of this incident, since he was at least partially responsible for the Chronicle itself. The fact that it was compiled under his reign is enough to indicate this. Alfred doubtless utilized both law and history in an attempt to motivate his followers and consolidate his power, yet even considering those conditions, the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard is worth very close scrutiny.

King Cynewulf of Wessex was seeking to drive out a noble named Cyneheard, whose brother Sigeberht Cynewulf had helped to depose previously. Unfortunately for Cynewulf, while visiting his mistress he was ambushed by Cyneheard and killed. Cyneheard, however, did not have a quarrel with Cynewulf's retainers, who had accompanied their king to the
site of his tryst. Cyneheard offered them not only their lives but money as well, if they would only give up the thought of vengeance for their fallen lord, and peaceably allow Cyneheard to reign. All refused, and nearly all were killed by Cyneheard's forces. The next morning, the rest of Cynewulf's thanes, hearing that their lord had been killed, rushed to do battle with Cyneheard, who again offered money and their lives if they would hold off fighting and let him have the kingdom.

Cyneheard's "ace-in-the-hole," so he thought, was the fact that he had kinsmen of Cynewulf's thanes on his side. But, as the entry for 755 shows, on that particular issue the thanes of Cynewulf made their feelings known:

and þæt hie þæt him nærig læg
leofra nætre þonne heora hlaford, and
hi nætre his banan folgian noldon (17)
and they said that to them no kinsman could ever be dearer than their lord, and that they would never serve his slayer

Cynewulf's thanes did give their relatives a chance to go away unharmed, but they did not take it. So, for the sake of their lord, who was of course already dead, Cynewulf's thanes spilled the blood of their own kin, killing not only Cyneheard, but all of their own relatives who had aided him. Kingship took priority over kinship.
It is true that kinship ties can aid and foster the bond between lord and thane; often, a thane was a blood relative of his lord, or vice-versa (we see this in the poetry, for example, with the bonds between Hygelac and Beowulf and then Beowulf and Wiglaf). But in cases where kinship and lordship did not overlap, it is obvious which tie took precedence. As Fisher states: "the claims of kindred were still recognized," but "they were, if necessary, subordinated to the superior claim of lordship" (130).

"Sele-dreamas": The Joys of the Hall

Pa wæs Geatmægcum  geador ætsomne
on beorsele  benc gerymed;
þær swiðferhþe  sittan eodon,
þryðum dealle.  Þegn nytte beheold,
se þe on handa þær  hroden ealwæge,
scencte scir wered.  Scop hwilum sang
hador on Heorote.  Þær wæs hæleða dream,
duguð unlytel  Dena ond Wedera.

(Beowulf 491-498)

Then a bench was cleared for the men of the Geats, together in the beer hall. There the strong-minded ones went to sit, the mighty famous ones. The thane performed
his office, he who bore in his hand the adorned ale-cup. He poured clear sweet drink. The scop sang for awhile, bright-voiced in Heorot. There was the joy of heroes, a large band of tried retainers of Danes and Geats.

As this quote from *Beowulf* illustrates, being a member of a comitatus entailed not just treasure and the thane-lord bond, but the myriad of ways in which that bond was expressed. Much of the time those means of expression were played out within the mead-hall, where the voice of the scop, and feasts and fellowship found there, served in blissful apposition to the dangers of the rest of the world.

The intangible bonds of loyalty between a lord and a thane were manifest within that quite tangible hall, and it was within the hall that much of the "bonding" took place. Here rings were dealt, feasts were held, and here the scop sang his songs of the glory of warriors past. Hume (1974), Earl, and Halverson recognize the concept of the hall as the perpetual "inside," a place set apart and hopefully safe from the ravages of the "outside," a world of danger and insecurity. The hall, a place of ring-giving, food, mead, and song, was a place of warmth and comfort for the lord and his thanes, buffering them against the chaos of the outside world, in which feuds raged, and monsters roamed.
The Feast

The feast is perhaps the occasion when we see the comitatus at its happiest and best. As the *Beowulf* poet states when he describes the feast after Grendel's death:

\[
\text{Ne frægen ic þa mægbe maran weorode ymb hyra sincgyfan sel gebær.}
\]

\[
\text{Bugon þa to bence blædagande, fylle gefægon;}
\]

(1011-15a)

I have never heard of a greater troop around their treasure-giver, bearing themselves better. The glorious ones sat down at the bench, rejoiced in the feast.

At the feast, in an atmosphere of camaraderie and good fellowship—not to mention plenty of mead to enhance the already elevated mood—thane and lord reaffirm their ties of loyalty to one another. Wiglaf specifically refers to the feast ("par we medu þegun," "where we partook of mead" 2633) as the situation where Beowulf's thanes pledged their service to him, as does Ælfwine concerning the pledges of himself and Byrhtnoth's retainers to their lord (212-224).

Even Berger and Leicester, who speak of the "latent disfunction" of the feast in that it may provide the hall with a false sense of safety, acknowledge that "its manifest function in *Beowulf* is to heighten the sense of group
security" (56). The hall-feast is the occasion which is described throughout the poetry as most joyful, for it symbolizes the chance for thanes and their lord to enjoy the bonds of loyalty without experiencing the terrors of battle.

The Scop

Involved in the feast is the scop, for it is he who provides the entertainment for the lord and his thanes while they eat, drink, and perhaps engage in treasure-giving. Yet, the scop does not merely provide a diversion. As Nolan and Bloomfield state:

It is he who must maintain the long tradition of ealdgesegena, 'remembering' and reiterating anew the moral values which distinguish every hero from his fellows. (511)

We must not undervalue this contribution to the comitatus. The scop translates the values of the warband into poetry, reinforcing the traditions and the beliefs with his song. The scop "authorizes" the behaviors of the comitatus, valorizing and vilifying appropriate and inappropriate actions. As Niles points out:

the songs of the scop had the central importance of defining and reinforcing
the values of society by showing praiseworthy actions and their opposites. (53)

In addition, if a poem like Beowulf, was even in a remote way, produced or fashioned by scops (and it would be unwise to discount that influence), then we must view the poem itself as an extended artistic assessment, in which the scop presents the values of the Anglo-Saxon warband not dispassionately, but with an eye towards judging the actions of those who, both good and bad, comprise that group. Whatever we assign as the poem's ultimate purpose, didacticism must not be far from our minds, as Garmonsway asserts:

those in authority might have seen pictured their obligations and responsibilities, from which they could have gleaned political wisdom had they so desired, and learned some useful lessons about current moral sanctions governing behavior in general, and heroic conduct in particular. (139)

Thus, when we assign didactic, or any other sort of value to the poem, we also in a sense assign that value to the scop, who both creates and transmits that message. It is he who praises and blames.

It is within this milieu of feasts, song, and fellowship that other concomittants of life within the
comitatus find expression as well. Beside the tales of past glory which are valorized by the scop, we find forecasts of future deeds, and the fulfillment of promises made by lord and thane alike. Though the concepts of boasts and oaths were not tied inextricably to the mead-hall, it is there that we often find them made.

"He me aþas swor": Boasts, Oaths and the Comitatus

Beowulf maðelode, beotwordum spræc
niehstan siþe: "Ic geneðe fela
guða on geogoðe; gyt ic wylle,
frod folces weard, fæhðe secan,
mærðu fremman, gif mec se mansceasæa
of eorðsele ut geseceð."

(Beowulf 2510-2515)

Beowulf spoke, said words of boasting for the last time: "In youth, I ventured much in war; yet I, wise ruler of the people, seek a feud, to further my fame, if the evil-doer comes from his earth hall to seek me.

As the scop vocalizes upon past deeds, so do those within the hall about what is to come. Boasts and oaths, related concepts, are a vital feature of the comitatus, and
especially of hall-life, since it is within the hall that retainers have the most opportunity and most important audience to express themselves. While the boast and the oath both involve promises, there is a definite, if subtle, distinction between them. Oaths are usually interpersonal promises of loyalty or aid. Boasts are more bombastic in nature, and, most importantly, they usually involve a test of the boaster's strength.

The value of the oath as a pledge between individuals can be seen in Beowulf in a number of places. When Beowulf arrives in Hrothgar's court, Hrothgar reminds him of Ecgtheow's (Beowulf's father) old trouble with the Wylfings, and how Hrothgar settled that feud with wergild. "He me apas swor" ("he swore me oaths" 472) Hrothgar states. The specific oaths that Ecgtheow made to Hrothgar are not related, yet we see the result. Years later, Ecgtheow's warrior son has come to aid the struggling king who now has his own trouble, in the form of Grendel. Ecgtheow's actual oath, then, must have consisted of something like: "for what you have done for me, I put my myself and my family at your service. If you ever need aid, I will try to help you or send help." Ecgtheow is not an oath-breaker. He does indeed send help, years later, in the form of Beowulf.

Much later in the poem, when he is near death, Beowulf recounts to Wiglaf his successes as king of the Geats. One of the attributes Beowulf claims for himself is that "ne me
swor fela/aða on unriht" ("not much did I swear false oaths" 2738b-2739a). The importance of keeping one's oaths is paramount; in Beowulf's eyes it ranks with keeping his people from the terror and oppression of neighboring tribes. In fact, according to Murphy, the oath or vow "was meant to keep at a premium the loyalty and pride in martial prowess essential to the survival a tribe or nation" (106).

While the oath carries the overtones of an interpersonal pledge, the boast belongs more in the category of the bragging promise. Boasts are usually heard before the boaster attempts a physical feat of daring-do. Hrothgar speaks of his own thanes, drunk with beer, and their boasting of how they would vanquish Grendel:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ful oft gebeotedon} & \quad \text{beore druncne} \\
\text{ofer ealo-wæge} & \quad \text{oretmecgas} \\
\text{þæt hie in beor-sele} & \quad \text{bidan woldon} \\
\text{Grendes gupe} & \quad \text{mid gryrum ecga.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(480-3)

Full often the warrior-thanes, drunk with beer, boasted over the ale-horns that in the beer-hall they would await Grendel's fight with the terror of (their) swords.

Of course, the boasts of Hrothgar's drunken thanes go tragically unfulfilled. Yet, despite that, it would be unwise to utilize that incident to characterize the boast as mere palaver. The boast most definitely sets up an
expectation that should be met, as we see in "The Battle of Maldon" when Ælfwine attempts to marshall Byrhtnoth's men after their leader has fallen:

"Gemunan þa mæla þæt we oft at meodo spræcon, þonne we on bence beot ahofon, hæleð in healle, ymbe heard gewinn;
nu mæg cunnian hwa cene sy.

(212-215)

I remember the times when often we spoke at the mead-drinking, when we raised up the boast on the bench, heroes in the hall, about hard turmoil. Now the one who is bold may try. Ælfwine seizes upon the former boasting of these warriors, reminding them that their promises must be kept. Beowulf fully understands this concept as well. He has no intention of making boasts he cannot fulfill, any more than he would swear a false oath. Each time Beowulf boasts, he does so before attempting a dangerous task, and each time, he succeeds in completing his task. Beowulf boasts before undergoing the sea competition with Breca, and before his fight with Grendel. And though Beowulf claims to forgo boasting ("gylp ofersitte" 2528) before fighting the dragon, the Beowulf poet clearly states on line 2510 that his words against the dragon are indeed "beotwordum" ("boastwords"), another boast which Beowulf also fulfills. The contradiction is curious, but when fully considered it aptly
serves to underscore the doubt in Beowulf's own mind about the outcome of the battle. He succeeds at his boast, but he loses his life.

In the end, Beowulf's succession of boasts serves to illustrate the best distinction to be made between the boast and the oath themselves, in that it is plain one is adversarial in nature and the other is not. A boast is a personal statement of will, ability, and individual intention, directed outward at a foe (as in Beowulf's boast against Grendel) or competitor (as in the case of Beowulf's swimming match with Breca). The boast can also involve both a foe and fellow competitors, as we have seen with the inebriated boasting of Hrothgar's thanes.

The oath, however, does not tend to have that whiff of bombast, because the character of the oath relates more to establishing or solidifying a bond between individuals. Ecgtheow makes his oaths to Hrothgar in gratitude for his aid. Beowulf takes it as a point of pride that he did not swear false oaths. Yet, bombast or no, once made, both boast and oath must be fulfilled, and it is that expectation which is inextricably wound into both practices.

Feuds, Vengeance, Wergild, and the Comitatus

Pa was synn ond sacu Sweona ond Geata
offe [w]id wæter, wroht gemæme,
There was then for the Swedes and the Geats common hostility over the wide water, severe quarrel after Hrethel died. Ogentheow's sons were bold and warlike; they did not wish to hold peace over the sea, but around Hreosnabeorh often performed horrid malicious slaughter. My kinsmen avenged that, feud and crime, as it was often told.

"Feuds are dangerous in proportion to a people's freedom," Tacitus said (179), and though unpleasant, feuds were a perpetual fact of life for those in and around the comitatus. The feuds tended to be ongoing because inherent in the ethos of the comitatus is the requirement that vengeance be exacted for the loss of a lord or a thane, or else a sum of money paid for the death to settle the feud. Vengeance and wergild were both appropriate, accepted measures of compensating for the loss of a lord or a thane.
Wergild, that is the blood-price paid for the lost man, had the advantage of being a bloodless method of settling a budding feud, or avoiding the other alternative, vengeance. Vengeance, of course, meant killing the person responsible for the death, and perhaps his kinsmen as well.

It is obvious that societally, the acceptance of wergild would be infinitely preferable to attempting vengeance, which might begin or perpetuate a bloody and dangerous feud. Yet, throughout the poetry, and not least in Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," vengeance is the preferred and somehow nobler course of action for the warrior. In fact, vengeance almost seems inevitable. Even the "payment" of a daughter in marriage, which is the method in which Hrothgar intends to settle his feud with the Heathobards, is doomed to failure, as Beowulf notes when he tells Hygelac of the Danish king:

[h]aфа₃ pæs geworden wine Scyldinga,  
rices hyrde, on þæt ræd talað,  
þæt he mid ðy wife wælfæhða dæl,  
sæcca gesette. Oft seldan hwær  
æfter leodhryre lytle hwile  
bongar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge!

(2026-2031)

The friendly lord of the Scyldings, guardian of his kingdom, has worked this. He maintains the counsel that with the
wife he will settle his portion of the deadly feud, the quarrel. It happens often that seldom anywhere after the fall of a prince does the deadly spear rest for a short time, even if the bride is good!

Beowulf knows well how the Heathobards will be inflamed when they see their weapons worn by the Scyldings, how that will lead to a resurgence of hostility. Beowulf himself as well does not speak of settling feuds with money. He believes, as he accepts the challenge of fighting Grendel's mother, that it is "selre bið æghwæm, /pæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne" ("better for each one that he avenge his friend, than he mourn too much" 1384b-85). Even God exacts vengeance; the evil tribe (monsters, elves, the undead) that wage war against him, as the poet states, is "paid back fully" ("he him ðæs lean forgeald" 114).

As with the comitatus itself, we can perceive the importance of vengeance and wergild through their absence. One of the most powerful attestations to the importance of vengeance in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons occurs in the Hrethel digression in Beowulf (2430-2471). Hrethel is described as suffering mightily over the death of his son Herebeald, specifically because vengeance is not an option (his son was killed by a stray arrow shot by another son, Hæthcyn). Hrethel literally wastes away because "wihte ne
meahte/on ʒam feorhbonan fæghēe gebetan" ("he could not settle the feud against the slayer" 2464b-65).

The threat of vengeance or the compensation of wergild stand as the consequences to all acts of violence done to the lord or thane, and thus to the comitatus itself. This will become even more evident when we discuss both the actions of Grendel and his mother, and those of the retainers of Byrhtnoth who fight on after he has died so that they may avenge him.

Treasure and the Comitatus

He beot ne aleh, beagas dælde,
sinc æt symle

(Beowulf 80-81a)

He did not fail his boasts; he dealt rings, treasures at the table.

"The most admired virtue of an early king was generosity to his followers" said F. M. Stenton (306). And indeed, the dealing of rings, of "treasures at the table," was still more than just an admired virtue; it was the glue which held the comitatus together. A lord like Hrothgar, as described in the above lines from Beowulf, knows that his generosity will ideally be repaid with loyalty from his
thanes, as his thanes know that their loyalty will be repaid with generosity. But is it as simple as that?

There are those who believe that the practice of gift-giving is somehow inherently devious, that gifts manipulate the one who receives them into actions he would not otherwise commit. Berger and Leicester believe that gift-giving is a deeply contentious activity. Charity is wounding, and "kings like Hrothgar depend on the potential wound charity can inflict to tighten the bonds of loyalty and fellowship" (47). In other words, according to this interpretation, Hrothgar's only purpose in treasure-giving is emotional blackmail. He wants to create and reinforce a sense of debt owed him by his thanes by endowing them with charity. Gift-giving does indeed enhance the bonds of loyalty, but the assessment that the bestowal of treasure is mere charity, and somehow negatively charged, is ill-supported by any textual references. The overall tone of Beowulf towards the giving of gifts is not pejorative in any respect. Disparagement is reserved for lords who fail to deal treasure (the implications of Heremod's situation will be explored in a forthcoming section).¹⁴

Gratitude and love, as well as the expectation of good service from a thane, are motivations for gift giving. Witness Hrothgar's words to Beowulf after the warrior has killed Grendel:
Now Beowulf, best of men, you will be as my son, beloved in my heart. Hold well this new kinship on your way. There will not be for you any lack of worldly things. You can have anything I control.

Hrothgar's love and generosity towards Beowulf go hand in hand. With any exchange of gifts, there is of course a resulting "obligation." Hrothgar again calls on Beowulf for his services when the hall comes under the attack of Grendel's mother. It is obvious, however, that Hrothgar's emotions are more than just a facade to bamboozle Beowulf into further acts of loyalty. That is a response worthy only of the most unrepentant of cynics.

So, the gifts of a lord are not charity. Yet, in its most elemental sense, could not the giving of treasure be seen as akin to payment for services both forthcoming and already rendered, as in Beowulf's case? Not likely. That reading seems logical at a very basic level, yet remains an extraordinary oversimplification. Within Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," treasure is consistently presented as
symbolic of intangible qualities beyond the reach of commerce. Since treasure plays such an essential part in the social contract of the comitatus, perhaps it would be wise to examine just what it seems to symbolize in that context.

What treasure does not symbolize is money for its own sake. There is not even a hint of what we would call consumerism in Beowulf or "The Battle of Maldon," nor any notion of what the treasure could be traded for in terms of real goods. We never see a thane wondering if he could get a horse in exchange for his ring, or trade a bracelet for cloth or grain. Treasure is not given or received in order that it be used to buy something else. Retainers kept their rings, because they represented something more than just purchasing power, as Abels notes:

> a gift in that society bore a value beyond its simple market price, for it created, symbolized and confirmed the relationship between a man and his lord. (31)

A retainer did not go off and sell his rings, because those rings meant more to him than what they could be traded for in money or goods. Thus, rings and treasure cannot be regarded as a "salary," since ring-giving was not simply about legal tender.

The symbolic value of treasure has a vital sustaining effect on the comitatus. The tangible presence of treasure
emotionally affects the wearer, spurring him on to fulfill his pledge of servitude to the lord, serving as a physical reminder of the bonds of loyalty between a lord and a thane. We can see this most clearly when we examine Wiglaf's speech to Beowulf's cowardly thanes, as he urges them to help their lord in his fight with the dragon:

\[
\text{Ic ȣæt mæl ēgeman, þær we medu þegun,} \\
\text{þonne we geheton ussum hlaford} \\
\text{in biorsele, ðe us ðas beagas geaf,} \\
\text{þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon,} \\
\text{gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,} \\
\text{(2633-2637)}
\]

I remember that time we partook of mead in the beerhall, when we promised our lord, he who gave us these rings, that we desired to repay him for this wargear if need befell him.

Wiglaf urges the thanes to fight by referring to the gifts Beowulf has given them, using the rings and wargear as a physical reminder of the bond with their lord. The refusal of the thanes to help Beowulf is doubly shameful because they are wearing the very symbols of their obligation to him.

When the cowardly thanes do emerge from the woods, after the battle has been fought and their lord lies dead, the Beowulf poet makes ironic reference to the armor Beowulf had given them. Ashamed, "scyldas bæræn, guðgewædu" ("they
bore shields, war-weeds" 2850b-2851a) to where Beowulf lay
dead. The cowardly thanes bear their war-gear to Beowulf
when it is far too late to help him. Wiglaf, too, vilifies
the thanes by claiming that Beowulf "wraðe forwurpe"
("grievously threw away" 2872) his gifts of armor to the
thanes who refused to fight with him. The armor, once a
symbol of the bond between Beowulf and his thanes, now
becomes a symbol of the thanes' cowardice and disloyalty.

Yet, though rings and treasure symbolized the bond
between a lord and a thane, that is not the limit of their
meaning. Gifts and treasure from a lord became tokens of
obligations that should be fulfilled, yet treasure can also
be a reward for exceptional service, and thus come to
symbolize that exceptional service.¹⁵ In terms of the
comitatus, rings and treasure are representative of glory
and power, the glory and power of a thane who performs
exceedingly well (and thus gets treasure as a result), and
the glory and power of a lord who is either able to gain
treasure from other tribes or refuses demand for such
tribute. Plunder taken from an opposing nation reflects
upon the lord who is capable of seizing it.

A thane such as Beowulf desires treasure as a
representation of heroic deeds, proof that he has achieved
glory through his acts of bravery. This can be seen in
Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar before he descends into the
mere to battle with Grendel's mother. Here Beowulf tells
Hrothgar what to do with the treasure he has already received (for the killing of Grendel) in case he does not return.

swylce þu ða madmas, þe þu me sealdest, Hroðgar leofa, Higelace onsend.
Mæg þonne on þæm golde ongitan Geata dryhten, geseon sunu Hrádles, þonne he on þæt sinc
stårað, þæt ic gumcystum godne funde
beaga bryttan, breac þonne moste.

(1482-87)
also send the treasure that you gave me, beloved Hrothgar, to Hygelac. When the lord of the Geats perceives that gold, when he stares on that treasure, he, the son of Hrethel, will understand that I found a good ring-giver of manly virtue, and rejoiced while I could.

Beowulf's speech indicates first that he regards the treasure as symbolic of the relationship between himself and Hrothgar. The treasure will transmit to Hygelac that Beowulf indeed rejoiced in that relationship, receiving good gifts from the virtuous Danish King. The meaning of the treasure will be transparently evident to Hygelac; he will need no message, no words to tell him whether Beowulf found
a good lord. The munificence of the treasure is symbol enough to testify to the strength of that bond.

Yet, the treasure will tell more than that, and Beowulf knows it. The treasure will tell Hygelac that Beowulf performed deeds enough to earn it. Hygelac is well-informed that the purpose of Beowulf's mission is the killing of Grendel; seeing the treasure is as good as formal notification that Beowulf, even had he died in the mere, accomplished his primary task. The treasure itself symbolizes not only Hrothgar's generosity and his bond with Beowulf, but also the acts of bravery and heroism that Beowulf had to achieve to merit it.

Numerous examples attest to the power and glory that treasure represents in a lord. In Beowulf, Scyld demonstrates his power by exacting tribute from neighboring tribes (9-11a); in fact, it is immediately after we are told that Scyld exacted tribute from the "ymbsittendra" ("neighboring peoples" 9b) that the Beowulf poet announces "Pæt was god cyning!" ("that was a good king" 11b). It is Scyld's ability to wrest duty from other tribes which here plainly defines him as an excellent leader.

In "The Battle of Maldon," Byrhtnoth is faced with a band of Vikings who wish to exact tribute of their own, and it is plain that an acquiescence to the Viking messenger's demand for such tribute would have cost Byrhtnoth more than
just the monetary value of the gold. Byrhtnoth would have been shamed by the act, as he himself states:

To heanlic me þinceþ
þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scipe gargon
unbefohtne, nu ge þus feor hider
on urne eard in becomon.

(55a-58)

I think it too humiliating that you go to your ship unopposed with our treasure, now that you have come in this far on our land.

Byrhtnoth understands well what a willing payment of tribute would mean; he would not simply be giving over the money, he would be granting the Vikings power over him, power to take what they want, and the incentive to return for more when whim or need beset them. By granting them their request Byrhtnoth would become akin to the "egesode eorlas" ("terrified earls" Beowulf 6) who are cowed by Scyld.

In the Frankish kingdom, as Timothy Reuter describes, tribute "served to create and reinforce political relationships, to determine military and hence political power" (87). This is equally true of the Anglo-Saxons, even through the late tenth century, when to acquiesce meekly to the Viking demand for tribute could have only insured that the demand was perpetual.17
Part 2: Persons and Types

With the conclusion of the discussion of treasure and the comitatus, we move from activities and institutions surrounding the comitatus to particular human types and examples. The excellence (or lack of excellence) in these human types is exhibited in terms of the activities as discussed in the first half of this chapter. Yet, before the concept of ideal lordship as expressed in the poetry is examined, perhaps it would be wise to set forth the mode of operation for these next sections. The concepts of the ideal lord and the ideal thane must be defined, as well as their opposites; yet, of course, the concept of lordship (and thanehood as well) is not that simple. The categories of "good" and "evil" become rudimentary when we consider the actions of characters who are too complex to be paradigms. For example: in Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," we are presented with lords who are not bad, but yet cannot fulfill their duties. Hrothgar is such a lord, a failing leader who through no fault of his own can no longer be classified as "ideal." Neither are all thanes simply "bad" or "ideal." I would suggest that Grendel himself is not merely monster or demon, but in fact, an "anti-thane," a creature who understands and desires the comitatus and yet seeks to destroy it.
The Ideal Lord

...her stent unforcüð eorl mid his werode
þe wile gealgean ðeþel þysne,
Æðelredes eard ealdres mines,
folc and foldan.

("The Battle of Maldon" 51-54a)

Here stands an undisgraced nobleman with his company who wishes to defend this homeland, the land of my lord Æðelred, the people and country.

Byrhtnoth's words to the Viking messenger typify much of what being a good lord is about. He is undaunted when faced with a challenge and protective of his territory, his troop and his people. In addition, Byrhtnoth is also generous with his wealth. Not only did he give the cowardly Godric "mænigne oft/mear" ("often many a horse" 188), but he is explicitly described as a "sincgyfan" ("treasure-giver" 278).

Yet, mere wealth, even in exchange for loyal service, is certainly not enough to make a lord ideal. Those gifts will quickly become plunder for other tribes if the lord does not have the wherewithal in battle to prevent that from happening. An ideal lord provides tangible goods for his thanes, not only treasure but weapons and horses, and he
also provides the protection of the hall. And an ideal lord is a wise lord, providing counsel in matters of war, and that most intangible of qualities: leadership.

Certainly in this context we must view martial prowess as one prerequisite for the classification of a lord as ideal. The ideal lord not only protects his own domain, but, if he can, wins tribute from other tribes. In the opening lines of *Beowulf*, Scyld, whom we are told was a "god cyning" ("good king" 11), is classified as such precisely because he was able to gain tribute from the "ymsittendra" ("neighboring peoples" 9). Conversely, Byrhtnoth is a worthy lord because he refuses to pay the Vikings.

Byrhtnoth is also a praiseworthy leader because he provides leadership, that almost indefinable quality which he nevertheless exhibits quite well as he prepares his men for the fight with the Vikings:

\[
\text{Da þær Byrhtnóþ ongan beornas trymian, rad and rædde, rincum tæhte hu hi sceoldon standan and pone stede healdan, and þæt hyra randas rihte heoldon, fæste mid folman, and ne forhtedon na. (17-21)}
\]

Then there Byrhtnoth began to marshall the men, he rode and he counselled, taught to the warriors how they must stand and
hold their ground, and bade that they
should hold their shields correctly, fast
with their hands, and not ever be fearful.
The best of lords must not only be able to fight well
themselves, but to give that knowledge to their thanes; thus
they are truly a part of, yet somehow above, their
retainers. Never foolhardy, they are concerned for the
welfare of the group yet ever mindful of the criteria of the
comitatus that all should be willing to die for. These are
qualities that Beowulf, for all of his many attributes, does
not seem to have. He is a great hero, but not a great lord,
as will be seen later when the notion of "Beowulf and the
Hero-Ideal" is explored.

The Bad Lord

Hine sorhwyłmas
lemede to lange; he his leodum wearð,
eallum æþellingum to aldorceare.
(Beowulf 904b-906b)
His surging sorrows
oppressed for too long. He brought to his
people, all his nobles, great misery.

Heremod, as described in these lines, is the
prototypical "bad lord." The bad lord is distinguished by
his unwillingness to deal treasure and/or by his hostility towards his thanes. The failing lord, through no intentional fault, is somehow unable to fulfill his side of the social contract of the comitatus, whether it be a failure to provide treasure or protection, or both. In this section I propose to discuss these two types of lords who do not fit into the ideal. Heremod is the archetypal example of a bad lord; Hrothgar is the example of a well-meaning and kindly leader who fails despite his good intentions.

Heremod is a bad lord in every sense of the word. He is moody, treacherous, bloodthirsty, and not least of all tightfisted:

breat bolgenmod  
beodgeneatas

eaxlgesteallan,  
opbæt he ana hwearf,
mære peoden  
mondreamum from.

Deah pe hine mihtig god  
mægenes wynnum,
eafeþum stepte,  
ofer ealle men
forþ gefremede,  
hwæþere him on ferhþe greow
breosthord blodreow.  
Nallas beagas geaf

Denum æfter dome;  
dreamleas gebad,
þæt he þæs gewinnes  
weorc prowade,
leodbealo longsum.

(1713-1722a)

Enraged, he cut down table-companions, comrades, until he, the mighty prince, turned alone, traveling forth from the
joy of life among men, though God gave him the joys of might, and advanced his strength over all men. Nevertheless in his mind and spirit he grew bloodthirsty. Not at all did he give rings to the Danes after glory. He abided joyless, so that he suffered and struggled over that deed, the long-lasting harm to his people.

This passage reveals Heremod to be the ultimate evil lord, malicious in intent and deed. Instead of sustaining his thanes in safety and benevolence, and rewarding them with treasure, he deprives and kills them, inflicting "aldorceare" ("life-sorrow" 906). There are no joys of the hall and of the comitatus. In refusing to provide protection and reward loyalty, Heremod violates the two most central tenets of good lordship.

Heremod's evil is undeniable, yet perhaps it is most important to note that Heremod's actions, which are so very detrimental to the welfare of his people, in the end do not bring him any benefit either. The good lord rejoices in his responsibilities, and the fulfillment of those responsibilities bring joy not only to his retainers, but to himself as well. Heremod's evil actions not only bring sorrow to his thanes, but sorrow to him. If, as Berger and Leicester suggest, the reciprocal arrangement between lord and thane is mere manipulation by the lord, then a bad lord
like Heremod would not suffer emotionally over his failure, as Heremod most certainly does.

The Failing Lord

A bad lord like Heremod suffers. Failing lords suffer too, but for different reasons. Any reader familiar with *Beowulf* might question the mention of Hrothgar in the context of bad and failing lords. Unlike Heremod, Hrothgar is not a bad lord, not by anyone's stretch of the imagination. Indeed, the *Beowulf* poet explicitly exonerates Hrothgar, stating that he is "æghwæs orleahtre" ("blameless in all" 1886b). At the same time, Hrothgar is certainly not an ideal lord. Though he is generous with his gifts, and though he has provided a hall for his thanes, he is not capable of protecting them against the ravages of Grendel. He is, according to Kaske, "a model of kingly sapientia no longer supported by *fortitudo*" (279).

Though he is blameless in his actions, his suffering is greatest because it is his responsibility to keep Heorot safe. Grendel's attacks on Hrothgar's thanes cause him "sidra sorga" ("great grief" 149):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Swa ða mælceare} & \quad \text{maga Healfdenes} \\
\text{singala seað;} & \quad \text{ne mihte snotor hæleð} \\
\text{wean onwendan;} & \quad \text{wæs pæt gewin to swyð,} \\
\text{laþ ond longsum.} & \quad \text{(189-192a)}
\end{align*}
\]
So then the kinsman of Healfdene brooded always over the sorrow of the time, nor could the wise warrior turn aside woe; that strife was too strong, too hateful and longlasting.

Heorot, once "husa selest" ("the best of houses" 146), now stands "idel" ("empty" 145). Grendel has almost managed to empty the mead hall. Whoever he has not eaten he has scared away. Hrothgar, despite his agonized attempts to remedy the problem, has failed to provide the protection necessary for his thanes, and he is a wise enough lord to know this and feel guilty about it.18

Yet, the poem does not indict Hrothgar for his failing. He is old. His spirit is willing but his flesh is weak, a fact which the poem recognizes:

\[
\text{paet waes an cyning}
\]
\[
\text{aeghwæs orleahtre, oppæt hine yldo benam}
\]
\[
\text{mægenes wynnum, se pe oft manegum scod.}
\]

(1885b-87)

That was one king in everything blameless, until old age seized him, the joys of his strength, that which has often injured many. Hrothgar wishes desperately to be able to save his thanes himself, yet his old age prevents him from doing so. Hrothgar is a failing lord, and yet not a bad lord, because his intent is pure. On the one hand, Heremod can help his
thanes but he wishes not to. On the other, Hrothgar wishes to help his thanes but cannot, a factor which makes all the difference.

One final question remains to be answered. If Hrothgar is indeed blameless in everything, why is he "failed" while Byrhtnoth is "ideal"? I believe that it is Hrothgar's paralysis, in contrast to the vigor of Byrhtnoth who also loses not only thanes but his own life, which is the key element in determining his "failure."

Though his old age certainly is not his fault, Hrothgar is thoroughly incapacitated by it, and can do nothing himself, save call for help from the Geats. Yet, Byrhtnoth is also old, being described on 1. 169 as a "har hilderinc" ("hoary warrior"). In the face of overwhelming adversity, however, the reactions of these two old men are startlingly disparate. Hrothgar descends into brooding desperation, but Byrhtnoth comes into his own as a leader, marshalling his men for a conflict where the outcome is less the issue than the stand itself. In the end, Hrothgar is overcome by old age, as most men are, but Byrhtnoth is able to transcend it. That is what makes Byrhtnoth ideal, why Hrothgar fails.

The Ideal Thane

Setton him to heafdon hilderandas,
bordwudu beorhtan; þær on bence was
ofe ðælinge yðgesene
hæposteapa helm, hringed byrne,
þrecwudu þrymlíc. Wæs þeaw hyra,
þæt hie oft wæron an wig gearwe,
ge æt ham ge on herge, ge gehwæþer para
efne swylce mæla, swylce hira mædryhtne
þearf gesælde; wæs seo þeod tilu.

(Beowulf 1242-1250)

At their heads were set the battleshields, the bright linden-wood. There could be seen on the bench over each noble a helm towering in battle, a ringed corslet, and splendid spear. It was their custom that they always be prepared for war, at home or abroad, for whichever occasion would happen such as their man-lord might have need of them. They were a good troop.

Hrothgar's men, prepared to defend their lord even as they sleep, embody the attitude of ideal thanes, since the first and most important characteristic of an ideal thane is that he always be ready to defend and fight by his lord. Indeed, a good thane is not merely ready, but eager to do battle by his lord's side. If we examine the actions of the two archetypal "good thanes" in Beowulf, Hrothgar's thane
Æschere and Beowulf's thane Wiglaf, we can get the fullest understanding of just what it means to serve one's lord well.

After Æschere is murdered by Grendel's mother, Hrothgar can offer no stronger praise than to describe his actions in battle. Æschere was as close as a brother to Hrothgar, yet it is Æschere's behavior by Hrothgar's side when they were at war that speaks most of his value as a thane:

```
eaxlgestealla, ḷonne we on orlege
hafelan weredon, ḷonne hniton feðan,
eoforas cnysedan. Swy[lc] sceole eorl wesan
æþeling ærgod, swylc Æschere wæs!
```

(1326-1329)

He was my shoulder companion when we at war protected our heads, when the troops warred together, boar-helmets clashed. Such must a man be, good of old, as Æschere was!

Æschere knew his responsibilities as a thane and upheld them, not only following his lord into battle but fighting with him at the shield-wall—the equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon front line.

Wiglaf, too, despite Beowulf's entreaty for he and his companions to remain behind and allow Beowulf to fight the dragon alone, cannot bear the sight of his lord fighting, and perhaps dying, without the aid of a loyal thane, a thane
who had received wealth from his lord and is now prepared to
defend him:

Gemunde ða ða are, þe he him ær forgeaf,
wicstede weligne Waegmundinga,
folcrihta gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte.
Ne mihte ða forhabban; hond rond gefeng,
geolwe linde, gomel swyrd geteah,
(2606-2610)
He remembered then the honors that he had
given to him before, the rich dwelling place
of the Waegmundings, each folk-right that his
father had possessed. He could not then hold
back. His hand gripped the shield, the yellow
linden wood; he drew the old sword.

Wiglaf helps Beowulf because it is his duty to, despite what
his lord has said. Unlike Beowulf's cowardly thanes, Wiglaf
remembers the gifts he has received from his lord and
realizes that he must, despite Beowulf's injunction to the
contrary, go to his side. Wiglaf knows that even direct
orders from Beowulf himself cannot relieve him of his duty.
As the poet comments: "sibb æfre ne læg/wiht onwendan þam ðe
wel þenceð" ("nothing can ever turn back kinship in he who
thinks rightly" 2600b-2601).

Certainly, no one would dispute that it is a thane's
duty to fight beside his lord. However, the idea that men
were expected to die with their lords is still under
dispute, specifically with regard to "The Battle of Maldon." According to Rosemary Woolf (1976), the ideal of men dying with their lord as presented in "The Battle of Maldon" is not consistent throughout the poetry or in historical reality. When Byrhtnoth's thanes choose to die beside him, Woolf asserts, they only illustrate "the heroic dimensions of the human will" (81); they do not perform a moral imperative.

Yet, perhaps there is something else we ought to consider. Vengeance for Byrhtnoth is a major concern for those who fight after he has died; the "wlance þegnas" ("proud thanes") who do not flee desire one of two things, "lif forlætan oppe leofne gewrecan" ("to give up their lives or avenge their lord" 208). Leofsunu and Dunnere specifically both speak of avenging Byrhtnoth.

Now, Woolf would no doubt agree that vengeance for a fallen lord is a moral imperative. And at this point, a note of practicality might be injected here. Vengeance against a known enemy whose whereabouts are stable or at least approachable is a workable proposition. But the Vikings were raiders, likely as not to never be seen or heard from again, for all Byrhtnoth's retainers knew. Vengeance, as they saw it, might not have been possible unless they attempted it there and then. Victory is not presented as the goal of Byrhtnoth's retainers; they want simply to slaughter as many Vikings as possible, and to do
that they must fight until all are dead. I do not say, then, that dying with one's lord was mandatory in all cases, yet in this one, it may have been the only way for Byrhtnoth's thanes to get the full measure of vengeance. Whether or not one needed to die by his side, vengeance for one's lord certainly was mandatory.

Bad Thanes

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

(Beowulf 2596-2599)
The comrades, children of nobles, did not at all stand around him with battle virtues, but they fled to the woods to save their lives.

A bad lord, as we have seen, fails in his promise to share the wealth. A bad thane, as we see in Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," fails in his promise to protect and serve, as Beowulf's thanes fail when they run to the protection of the forest in order to save their lives.

Both Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon" contain examples of good thanes, yet perhaps to set the deeds of the
good thane in relief, each poem presents numerous bad thanes as well. The two most striking examples, especially in terms of their similarity to one another, are the flights of both Beowulf's and Byrhtnoth's thanes into the woods when their lords need them most.

The instance of Godric and his brothers in "The Battle of Maldon" is a case in point:

There the sons of Odda became first in flight; Godric left the battle, and abandoned that good one who had often dealt him many a horse. He leaped upon the warhorse which his lord had owned, on those trappings, which was not right, and his brothers, Godwine and Godwig, both galloped with him. They did not care for battle, but turned from that fight and sought
the wood. They fled to that place of safety and they protected their lives.
Instead of seeking vengeance against the Vikings, who have killed their lord and now seek to despoil the body, Godric and his brothers abandon the battle. To enhance the wrongfulness of their actions, Godric is said to escape on his lord's horse. We are also reminded that Byrhtnoth has also made gifts of many horses in the past, gifts which Godric obviously had no trouble accepting. Where Godric does have trouble is when he has to exact his part of the bargain, which in this case would be to attain vengeance for his lord.

In *Beowulf*, Beowulf's thanes also retreat to the woods when he fights the dragon. The voices of both the *Beowulf* poet and Wiglaf denounce them for this. The retainers who remain in the woods during Beowulf's struggle are described on lines 2846 and 2847 as "hildlaten" ("cowards") and "tydre treowlogan" ("craven traitors"). When they skulk out after the dragon has been vanquished, Wiglaf makes the consequences of their deeds all too clear:

```
Wergendra to lyt
þrong ymbe þeoden,  þa hyne sio þrag becwom.
Nu sceal sincþego  ond swyrdgifu,
eall eþelwyn  eowrum cynne,
lufen alicgean;  londrihtes mot
þære mægburge  monna æghwylc
```
Too little defenders pressed around the prince when hardship came to him. Now must receiving of treasure, and giving of swords, all enjoyment of estate, all comfort cease for your kin. Every man of that clan, deprived of landrights, must go, after nobles from far hear of your flight.

Each of the cowardly thanes has broken his faith with his lord, sundered the "contract" of loyalty and service that bound them to Beowulf. Their sin is so deep that it affects not only themselves but also their kin, and the shame of their cowardice has a pollutive effect on the respective families both spiritually and physically.

Thus, we can see that the glorious fame or notorious infamy of one individual colors the family; this principle was illustrated with Grendel, whose descent from Cain robs him of the possibility of goodness. In Hrothgar's case, the Beowulf poet does not even introduce him until after his spectacular lineage is presented. It is evident that the reputation of the deeds of one's family members is either to be lived up to or to be overcome, no matter what one's own immediate personal situation might be. Thus, even if the
Geats had continued on and survived without Beowulf, the cowardly thanes, and their families, would have been stained by sin.

The cowardice of Beowulf's thanes has helped to doom them. "Nobles from afar" will hear of their retreat, and realize that without Beowulf there is nothing to fear from the Geats. Had the cowardly thanes acted to help their lord, perhaps he would have taken less damage from the dragon. Perhaps he would have lived to lead them yet for a while. As the situation stands at the end of the poem, without Beowulf the Geats are lost.

Yet, there is one more oft-forgotten factor, which must also be considered when analyzing the actions of Beowulf's thanes. Beowulf himself explicitly told them that he did not want their help:

Nis þat eower sið,  
ne gemet mannes,  nefne min anes,  
þat he wið aglæcean  eofoðo dæle,  eorlscype efne.  

(2532b-2535a)  
That is not your journey, nor is it in the power of any man, except for me alone, that he fight with strength against the monster, perform nobility.

It is obvious here what Beowulf wants. He means to tackle the dragon in single combat, without any aid from his
warrior band. In fleeing to the forest, were not the cowardly thanes simply carrying out the orders of their lord? They were told to wait for the outcome of the battle, not to get involved, and they did not. Why, then, are Beowulf's thanes vilified? Indeed, they themselves realize the nature of their misdeed; upon emerging from the forest after Beowulf's death, they are ashamed ("scamiende" 2850).

They are vilified and ashamed because the ethos of the comitatus, which demands loyal service and protection of one's lord, is so strong that it applies at all times and in all situations, superceding the immediate wishes of a particular lord, even Beowulf. This instance alone illustrates powerfully how the bond between lord and thane goes far deeper than simple obedience. Obedience is not the issue. Protection and loyalty, even if the lord seems to command otherwise, is not only expected, but demanded. Beowulf was in need and they did not rush to his aid. Their failure renders them, and everything Beowulf has ever given them, worthless.

Grendel, the Anti-Thane

In any discussion of thanes, Grendel might seem out of place. Murderous, monstrous, he does not seem to meet with any of a thane's criteria, good or bad. Yet, I think that Grendel is presented as a perverted thane, a thane who
is neither good nor bad in the purest sense of those words, but a perversion of thanehood itself.\textsuperscript{20}

What, then, is the distinction between the "perversion" of Grendel, and Beowulf's thanes who are merely bad? As bad lords abdicate their duties, so do bad thanes, as we have seen. Grendel is a perversion of thanehood because he does not "abandon" the expectations of the comitatus, rather he turns them violently inside out. Bad thanes do not repudiate the standards of the comitatus; they simply do not live up to them (as was seen with Beowulf's cowardly thanes). Grendel actively attacks the norms. We will see this idea developed further when we examine Grendel's basic understanding of some precepts of the comitatus (wergild and the gift-seat, for example).

Our first clue, however, is Grendel's abode; it is perhaps the most obvious feature which would link him to a thane. As Hume (1974) asserts, Grendel's lair is described as a hall, or varieties thereof, and bears many of the interior characteristics of a hall as well:

\begin{quote}
It is a hof, niðsele, hofsele, 
reced; it has a flet, treasure 
and walls hung with weapons.\textsuperscript{21} (68)
\end{quote}

Certainly the terminology must remind us of a hall, and if we can associate Grendel's lair as akin to a "hall" of sorts, similar to Heorot for example, then can we not make
the leap to viewing Grendel as some sort of a thane, since he inhabits that hall?^{22}

Before we are to accept this, however, an argument might be made that, because Grendel has a hall, he is not a perversion of a thane but a perversion of a lord. That assertion is not without merit, especially when one considers the sea-monsters that inhabit the mere, and their possible status as Grendel's "comitatus." The sea-monsters are not mindless creatures; clearly they are aligned with Grendel and his dam, and wish to aid them, as we see when Beowulf descends into the mere and the sea monsters are eager to attack him, but not Grendel's mother (1509b-1512a).

Still, there is no mention in Beowulf of Grendel showing any characteristics of "lordship" over either his mother or the monsters. Indeed, he seems unconcerned with the activity in his own mere, preferring instead to devote his attention to the goings-on in Heorot. The connection between Grendel and the mead-hall, savage though his intentions are, is far more pronounced than his connection with his own home. It is for this reason that I choose to align him clearly as a "thane" of Heorot, and not a lord of the mere.

It follows from this that Grendel himself, then, is not alien to the concepts of the comitatus, specifically the comitatus of Heorot. Firstly, Grendel understands the notion of wergild, as the poet tells us:
sibbe ne wolde
wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
feorhbaelo feorran, fea þingian,
ne þær nægig witena wenan porfte
beorhtre bote to banan folmum,

(154b-158)

He did not wish peace with any of the men of the host of the Danes, to remove the deadly evil and settle it with money. None of the wise men had any reason to expect the bright remedy from the murderer's hands.

Grendel's very rejection of wergild proves that he understands it. He does not settle the feud by using the "bright remedy," but it is implied that he could if he wished to. He does not wish to.

Grendel is also well acquainted with the process of treasure-giving and the gift-seat, which God prevents him from approaching:

no he þone gifstol gretan moste,
maþum for metode, ne his myne wisse.

(168-169)

he was not permitted to approach that gift-seat (gain) treasure because of God, nor did he (Grendel) perceive his mind.

The fact that Grendel was not permitted to attack the gift-
seat, or gain treasure from it, indicates that he is indeed well aware of it and its purpose.23

I would assert that Grendel's disturbing understanding of and kinship with the rituals and trappings of the comitatus, such as the gift-seat, is what makes him so terrifying a threat. He is the most fearsome monster in Beowulf, even moreso than the dragon, because he not only understands the nature of the comitatus, but uses that knowledge in effort to destroy it. Grendel's first approach to Heorot illustrates this effectively:

Gewat 8a neosian, sypðan niht becom,
hean huses, hu hit Hringdene
æfter beorþege gebun hæfdon.
Fand þa ðær inne æþelinga gedriht
swefan æfter symble; sorge ne cuðon,
wonsceafht wera.

(115-120a)

After night came, Grendel then went to inspect the exalted house, and how the Ring-Danes had settled in it after beer drinking. He found there inside a band of retainers, asleep after the banquet.

They did not know sorrow, the misery of men.

Grendel does not merely leave his den and attack whatever comes along, nor does he chance upon Heorot and go on an impromptu killing spree. He carefully examines the
mead-hall before attacking, and thus his murderous rage is far from indiscriminate. Grendel seems to choose whom and where he will strike.

I would assert that Grendel attacks Heorot, and attacks the comitatus, because he is outcast from it. His anger springs from a rejected desire to somehow take part in the activity of the hall.\textsuperscript{24} The blissful satiety of Hrothgar's thanes, settled safe and happy in their hall, sets into relief Grendel's own sorrow. He is a "wonsæli wer" (105) an "unhappy man," and terming him as such here also lends credence to his status as thane and not merely monster.\textsuperscript{25}

As a member of Cain's kin,\textsuperscript{26} Grendel is deprived of the opportunity to be a member of Hrothgar's comitatus; he is prevented from approaching the gift-seat and receiving treasure, which suggests that his inclination would be to do so if God did not forbid it.\textsuperscript{27} He can never know the joys of the hall, and thus others' expression and demonstration of those joys cause him misery. Grendel suffers "pæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde/hludne in healle" ("because every day he heard rejoicing loud in the hall" 88-89b).\textsuperscript{28}

Scorned, evil (though not wholly unsympathetic),\textsuperscript{29} he seeks to destroy what he can never attain. He can never be part of Heorot so he will kill those who are, and kill again until Heorot is deserted, useless to anyone. He will kill
until those who do not know "the misery of men" become as desolate, as "wonszli" as he is.30

In contrast, Grendel's mother operates as any thane would expect her to. She avenges her kin. Her actions are motivated by vengeance for her fallen son.31 The dragon, too, after the theft of the cup, behaves as one would predict: he indiscriminately wreaks havoc as a result of the affront. Neither the dragon nor Grendel's mother seem to be motivated by a desire to eviscerate the social structure of the hall.

Grendel, on the other hand, causes the breaking up of the comitatus.32 Structured into the poem itself are the perverse parallels between Grendel's unholy deeds and the goings-on in Heorot. His "feasting" mirrors the feasting in the hall before his attack, his death song the song of creation sung by the scop. The actions of a good thane bring praise, as the actions of a bad thane bring shame. Grendel's actions inspire horror because he is a thane turned demon who knows the customs and practices of the hall, and in his rejection, has twisted them and made them monstrous.

The final, and perhaps most persuasive piece of evidence supporting Grendel's status as thane can be found on line 142, where he is referred to as such ("heal-segnes"). This instance, the only one in which Grendel is specifically referred to as a thane, is worthy of attention:
Then it was easy to find one who sought rest elsewhere, bed among the huts, far away, when the hall-thane's hate was pointed out, said truly through clear sign. He who held himself far and more securely escaped that fiend. So Grendel held sway, and fought against right, one against all, until that best of houses stood empty.

It is the context here which is most important, and that context is highly ironic. As Irving (1968) has pointed out, Grendel is named a "hall thane" at the precise moment that his destruction of the social system within the hall is complete. The men have abandoned Heorot, in fear of him. Yet, it is then that his status as "anti-thane" comes to fruition. The apex of Grendel's accomplishment, and the
poet's affirmation that he is indeed thane, are born from the annihilation of the comitatus. Grendel's new home is not a full, but an empty hall.

The final question to be posed is: what bearing Grendel's status as an "anti-thane" has in terms of the comitatus? What could be more proof of the importance of the comitatus than to note that to be deprived of it literally makes one a monster? It is obvious that Grendel is more than the product of his unfortunate ancestors. It is the denial of access to the comitatus, combined with his evil heritage, that creates his character. Even a mortal man, a man who is not a cursed descendent of Cain, is lost without the warband, despairing in his lack of a lord and hearth-companions. In a "man" tainted to begin with, that despair turns monstrous.

Beowulf, Byrhtnoth, and the Hero Ideal

Aras ða bi ronde rof oretta,
heard under helme, hiorosercean bær
under stanclifu, strengo gutruwode
anes mannes. Ne bið swylc earges sið!

(Beowulf 2538-2541)
The strong warrior arose then with his shield, brave under the helmet, bearing a coat of mail under the stone cliff. He
trusted in the strength of one man. That
is not a coward's journey!

No discussion of the comitatus is complete without an
eexamination of the hero, and how he fits into the ethos of
the warrior band. Though a man like Æschere fulfills every
criteria of a good thane, he does not ever achieve the
status of a hero. In this last and perhaps most important
section, I wish to analyze the hero in the context of the
comitatus. Who is a hero in Anglo-Saxon poetry? What
actions elevate a merely good king or thane to heroic
status? How is Beowulf a hero? Why is he viewed as such by
the poet who told of him, and, we can assume, the audiences
who heard his story? And how is he a product of the
comitatus?

The hero cannot be seen as an average representation of
the comitatus. One can be a perfectly respectable member of
the warband, doing service for the lord, fighting and eating
and drinking beside him, and yet never distinguish oneself
as a Beowulf. It is not a disgrace to fight simply to the
best of one's ability, even if that ability is less than
that of a great warrior.33

Who is, then, a hero? Though emerging out of the
comitatus, the hero desires to perform deeds of will and
fortitude which will distinguish him from it. The hero's
actions are far more individuated than those of the
archetypal "good thane." He seeks, and succeeds, in alone performing deeds that go beyond fighting beside one's lord at the shield wall, or avenging his death. The hero desires the singular challenge, one that will test his strength and his strength alone, success which will elevate his status above and beyond that of his peers. And as we shall see, ironically, the hero seeks to increase his martial glory to such a degree that, in pursuit of glory, he often performs actions which are detrimental to the comitatus which has nourished that desire. Beowulf, I believe, is the only true "hero" in Old English heroic poetry. His closest competitor comes in the form of Byrhtnoth, and Byrhtnoth is more a great lord and leader, carrying out his duties as such, than a great hero.

What differentiates Beowulf from Byrhtnoth, and how does that help us further define the concept of the hero and the ideal lord? As I have stated, the hero's acts, Beowulf's acts, are far more individuated. Byrhtnoth fights beside his men, not by himself. Though he speaks his mind, he does not speak only on behalf of himself, but for all his people. His actions are geared not only to bolster and reinforce his men, but to protect the ideal, inherent in the comitatus, of the honorable fight. Byrhtnoth is the fruition of the ethos of the warrior band.

A hero such as Beowulf is also a product of the comitatus. Yet, as we have seen in Grendel's case, the
inherent character traits of the individual sometimes have an effect on how they react to the comitatus ideal. Beowulf's character trait is pride. Perhaps that is an essential character trait of all heroes (self-confidence is surely a necessity, and the line between pride and self-confidence is often difficult to distinguish). In Beowulf's case, by the end of the poem, his actions are no longer geared to preserving the values of the warrior band, but rather toward preserving and increasing personal fame. Though he is warned against pride by Hrothgar, the rewards of Beowulf's heroism continue to provide the impetus for his deeds.

Yet, is that not what Byrhtnoth does when he allows the Vikings across the water? Does not the word "ofermód" itself conjure up the "sin" of pride? I would assert no. Taken in context, and understood in regard to the poetic ethos of the comitatus, Byrhtnoth's decision to grant land to the Vikings is not an expression of personal pride. Neither the poem itself nor any of Byrhtnoth's followers indict him for his actions, which is the most substantial clue.

This is in direct contrast to the response even of the loyal Wiglaf to Beowulf's determination to fight the dragon alone. Nolan and Bloomfield believe that the actions of a hero like Beowulf are "only and always for the good of the community" (503). Yet, Wiglaf notes that no one in the
community could dissuade Beowulf from his mission, and now all the Geats must suffer because of it. In contrast, no one reproaches Byrhtnoth. He is not vilified for his "ofermod;" his decision is stated relatively matter of factly, as is the narrator's comment, often interpreted as condemnatory, that Byrhtnoth gave the Vikings "landes to fela" ("too much land" 90). I believe, as does George Clark, that the report of Byrhtnoth's allowing the land is not a rebuke, but "rather forewarns the audience of its outcome" (70). As Galloway states:

The clearest consequence of Byrhtnoth's decision is that it leaves the outnumbered and soon to be leaderless English with only one choice, shameful fight or honorable death. (199)

A shameful fight in this warrior society is a shameful life, and, as Wiglaf tells his cowardly compatriots after Beowulf's demise: "Deað bið sella/eorla gehwylcum þonne edwit-lif" ("For every man, death is better than a shameful life" 2890b-2891). Paradoxically then, it is better for Byrhtnoth and his entire band to die fighting than to live on having violated the ideals of the comitatus. The warriors themselves are killed, but their code of honor is valorized in verse. The notion of the comitatus, unstained, is preserved, if not those who fought for it.35
The clearest parallel in the life of Beowulf is his fight with the dragon. There he engages in activity and makes decisions that add to his own personal glory but sentence his people to be swept away by the tide of dynastic warfare. In other words, by fighting the dragon, Beowulf is not preserving the ethos of the comitatus, as Byrhtnoth was when he fought the Vikings, but his personal standard of heroism. Why does Beowulf do this? According to John Halverson:

it is not Beowulf's pride that brings about the ultimate catastrophe, but precisely his heroism. He is not a victim of ego inflation; he simply cannot see any other alternatives to his own way. He is a victim of the heroic milieu; he is molded gloriously and inflexibly by his world. (608)

Halverson is right in recognizing heroism, not vanity, as the source of Beowulf's fall, yet Beowulf is not wholly a victim. Yes, his world does encourage heroic action, but pride is a factor in that heroic action, and it causes him to forgo the welfare of his people. Leyerle stresses Beowulf's assertion of individual heroic will and his pride, both of which commit him to action (namely, the unassisted confrontation with the dragon) which is not for the public good:36
The hero follows a code that exalts indomitable will and valor in the individual, but society requires a king who acts for the common good, not for his own glory. (89)

But "glory" is the holy grail of the hero. Indeed, singular and individual heroic action, and the heroic milieu, are encouraged within the comitatus, the hero's "society" itself. How? The good thane, such as Æschere, gets his share of treasure and glory. Yet, performance above and beyond the call of duty is rewarded with even greater fame, and greater gifts as well. Beowulf, like any good thane, receives treasure from Hrothgar. But the munificence of his treasure is in direct relation to the difficulty of the task which he has accomplished. Hrothgar indeed is so grateful that he is willing to give up everything to Beowulf:

Ne bið þe næmigre gad worolde wilna, þe ic geweald hæbbe. Ful oft ic for læssan lean teohhode, hordweorpunge hnahran rince, sæmran æt sæcce. þu þe self hafast dædum gefremed þæt þin dom lyfæ ða to aldre.

(949b-955a)

You will not want for anything of my worldly
goods. Full often I have appointed reward for less, honoring lowlier warriors, lesser at battle, with gifts. You yourself have performed a deed assuring that your fame lives for ever and ever.

Gifts, a degree of glory, and respect from a lord are the rewards for a good thane. As this passage suggests, those benefits multiplied are also the rewards of heroism. The impetus for Beowulf's actions are both the respect of Hrothgar and Hygelac, and the treasure and glory awarded him. He was, after all, as the poet states, "lof-geornost" ("most eager for praise" 3182). Beowulf becomes a hero because he has an excessive appetite for praise and glory, and because he has the physical and emotional wherewithal to accomplish deeds which will get him both.

The question then becomes, does heroism, which is valorized by the comitatus, in fact, by necessity imperil it? Is Beowulf, as Halverson suggests, molded "inflexibly" by the heroic milieu, or is there some degree of play in any assessment of a hero? Is the logical consequence of the heroic milieu the hero's retreat into an insular pursuit of personal glory at the expense of the comitatus?

I would suggest that the answer is yes, and that this is the ultimate paradox inherent in the attainment of the heroic ideal as expressed in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The ideals of the comitatus valorize and encourage loyalty and martial
performance, yet the hero develops his capacity for martial performance to a disproportionately large level. In his desire for glory, he often seeks to engage in "heroic" behavior, yet that behavior can be detrimental, even dangerous to the literal warband. The ideals of the comitatus, which encourage the development of such heroes, must be preserved, yet the preservation of those ideals often can plunge that hero's warband into destruction and ruin.³⁷ The Geats are doomed to die out because Beowulf insisted on fighting the dragon, and fighting him alone.³⁸

A key passage in understanding this is Wiglaf's reaction to Beowulf's decision to fight the dragon. Of course Wiglaf realizes his duty to his lord, and helps him when he is in need, but after Beowulf has died, we see clearly that Wiglaf opposed Beowulf's desire to fight the dragon, and in fact tried to dissuade him from it:

"Oft sceal eorl monig    anes willan
wraec adreogan,    swa us geworden is.
Ne meahton we gelæræn    leofne þeoden,
rices hyrde,    ræd ænigne,
þæt he ne grette    goldweard þone,
lete hyne liçgean    þær he longe wæs,
wicum wunian    oð woruldende;
heold on heagesceap.

(3077–3084a)

Often must many earls, because of the
will of one,\(^{39}\) suffer distress, as is happened to us. We were not able to persuade the beloved prince, guardian of the kingdom, by any counsel that he not approach that gold-keeper, that he allow him to lie where he long was, and remain in his dwelling-place until the end of the world.\(^{40}\) He held to his high destiny!

Wiglaf here shows his understanding of both the duties of the leader and the obligations of the hero. It is evident that (at least in Wiglaf's estimation) it was not good for the community or the comitatus (the "eorl monig") for Beowulf to stir up the dragon.\(^{41}\)

Yet, Wiglaf is not critical of Beowulf's actions.\(^ {42}\) How could he be? It was Beowulf's "high destiny" that led him to the cliff by the sea. That high destiny is the destiny of the hero, who must pursue battle and glory even to the exclusion of the welfare of the comitatus itself.\(^ {43}\)

Heroes such as Beowulf, while epitomizing the ultimate values and aspirations of the comitatus, paradoxically must engage in behavior that is harmful to that social structure. Winning individual glory as a warrior (which is manifest in a variety of different ways, as we have seen) is encouraged, and is certainly what every member of the comitatus, including the Lord, aspires to. Yet, the glory of one often
leads to the downfall of the comitatus which nurtured that ideal.44

Berger and Leicester go so far as to suggest that Beowulf's heroic prowess might paradoxically have caused his warriors to become too dependent, relying on him to fight all their battles. They explain the great "double-bind that confronts the great hero as a ruler":

if by his excellence he holds fearful aggressors in abeyance, keeps raid and feud to a minimum, he erodes the great warrior ethos; if, on the other hand, he wages continual warfare every trophy he wins creates new enemies and a lust for vengeance. (65)45

Byrhtnoth, who is a great ruler rather than a great hero, has no trouble counselling his men, and his willingness to fight results from his desire to preserve what he has, not acquire a new "trophy."

Does Beowulf then go for the trophy, or is he just greedy for the gold? We may indict Beowulf as being prideful, or we may subsume that judgement within an assessment that Beowulf merely acts a model of the heroic ideal, yet one thing we cannot accuse Beowulf of, as do E. G. Stanley and others, is simple greed.46 Beowulf is not avaricious; yes, he desires the hoard, but he desires it as a token of what he will have accomplished in getting it:47
the winning of fame and the verification of his battle strength in killing of the dragon. That he accomplishes, but his people are lost without him.

Conclusion

What I have done here, I hope, is to set forth some basic concepts, concepts that can be called forth later when they are discussed in different contexts. Anglo-Saxon poetry cannot be fully appreciated unless one has at least a nodding acquaintance with the poetic ideal of the comitatus. "Genesis B" is simply a reinterpretation of a biblical story, unless one can both appreciate and understand the thane/lord bond which resonates through it. Likewise, "The Dream of the Rood" is just another crucifixion tale, albeit a curious one, until we realize that it is an amalgam of the crucifixion and Anglo-Saxon ethos. The elegies may seem dull, even whiny, until we can perceive the vitality and importance of what the exiles are mourning. It is not just these limited selections that are affected, however. Once the poetic representation of the warband is explored, all of Anglo-Saxon verse begins to resound.
Notes

1. A "ceorl" (free peasant) of the eighth century might have been referred to as a thane in the tenth. The words "gesip" and "gesipcund," as well as the word "pegn" were in use as well. As Bloch points out, the terminology was imprecise, due to the "fluidity of verbal distinctions" (183). My use of the word "thane" can be taken as Bloch takes it, that it is "the label of a much more highly regarded class of military dependents" (183). That distinction is appropriate considering my analysis of Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon."

2. All quotes throughout each chapter are taken from The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, edited by Krapp and Dobbie from 1931 to 1953. All translations are mine.


4. See the Laws of Ine in Whitelock (1955), no. 38.

5. For a discussion of kinship and wergild, see Kirby, 141-147.


7. The question of how involved Alfred was in the composition of the Chronicle is still unsolved. At a minimum, he probably gave royal encouragement to the annalist.

8. For an excellent introduction into the world of the Anglo-Saxon scop, who he was, how he learned his craft, the function (and the importance of that function) he performed, see Niles' chapter "The Art of the Germanic Scop" in Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition.

9. Oaths took a different form in the life of the average Anglo-Saxon; in that context an oath was something he took to attempt to clear himself or another of criminal charges. For a detailed summary of this practice, which operated on terms similar to the wergild system (the oaths being only as valuable as the measure and status of their givers), see Chadwick (1963) 134-153.

10. See also Murphy and his distinction that the boast refers to the past, and the vow to the future. Parks terms them "prospective" and "retrospective" (49).
11. For a reading of the heroic oath in *Beowulf*, see Renoir (1963).

12. For an emphasis on the boast as performance, see Conquergood.

13. Nolan and Bloomfield have developed an eight-part structure involving the boast (incorporating the concepts of "gilpcwide" and "beot" in the process): the feat will require enormous strength, the hero will act alone, supported, however, by willing retainers, the hero selects appropriate weaponry, the deed will involve a risk to life, the accomplishment will have a social good in mind, the outcome depends on God, and the hero accepts the possibility of death. I do not necessarily agree that every incident of boasting conforms to those criteria. See especially the "boasts" made by Hrothgar's thanes against Grendel (480-3) and Beowulf's report of the boasting that occurred between himself and Breca (535-8). Even Beowulf's boast against the Dragon (2510) does not conform, since Beowulf does not intend for his retainers to help him, and the notion that killing the dragon is a "social good" is questionable.

14. Gift-giving, as opposed to the extortionary notion of tribute, also has the power to unite nations. Note these words in Hrothgar's parting speech to Beowulf (1860-1863a):

```
mapmas gemane, manig oberne
godum gegrettan ofer ganotes bað;
sceal hringnaca ofer heafu bringan
lac one luftacen.
```

15. For a discussion of the role of land as a reward for military service, see Nicholas Brooks.

16. See Goldsmith (1968) for her emphasis on the gifts of Hrothgar as signaling "the munificence of the royal giver" (90).

17. Of course, this was indeed the case after Byrhtnoth and his men were killed. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Vikings demanded and received their tribute, of which the first installment amounted to at least £10,000.

18. Moorman believes that Hrothgar's failure is avoidable, because he could have given up the throne while in his prime and did not, and ties this "failure" to that of Beowulf's later.
19. Mellinkoff (1979 and 1980) ties the "monstrosity" of Grendel and his mother to pseudographical Nochaic tradition, which told of an ancient cannibal race of giants that sprung from Cain. She suggests that the Beowulf poet believed (from some unknown source) that some of Cain's offspring survived Noah's flood, and begat the "race of monsters" of which Grendel and his mother are a part.

20. See also Irving's (1968) interpretation of Grendel, whom he calls both a "negative man" (15), and a "mock thane" (18).

21. For further discussion of the similarities between Heorot and Grendel's mere, see also Dragland.

22. Irving (1978) gives particular attention to the entrance of the hart in respect to the status of the mere as "anti-hall":

"That it is the hart, totem animal of the Danish dynasty and very symbol of its hall, which is most dramatically placed in conflict with the mere's malice is interesting, to say the least" (Irving 1978, 117).

23. There has been and continues to be a great deal of critical speculation as to which "he," Hrothgar or Grendel, cannot approach the gift-seat. Hume (1974), Chaney, and Earl assert that it is Grendel who cannot have access. Earl specifically names Grendel's destructive actions as spiteful in light of his exclusion (152). Greenfield (1974) believes that the "he" who cannot approach the gift-seat is Hrothgar. Either interpretation, however, reinforces the importance of the tenets of the comitatus. Hrothgar's absence from his gift-seat endangers the lord/thane bond within his host. Unable to deal rings, the specific purpose for which Heorot was built, his lordship is imperiled.

24. Irving (1968) sees Grendel as rebellious of the social order, but tones down his desire to partake of it:

"he is the rebellious exile, the ymbshettend, the neighbor who cannot be tamed, will not pay tribute, refuses to be brought within the frame of social order by force of arms or rule of law" (93).

25. Carlson believes that the perception of Grendel (and his mother) as monstrous is almost solely due to the way the poem has and continues to be translated. "[f]felcyn," for example, could be "foolish race" (of men), not "race of monsters."
26. For possible sources (exegetical, mythological, and literary) of Grendel's status as descendent of Cain, see Peltola, Bandy, and Mellinkoff (1979 and 1980). For a concise review of scholarship referring to Grendel's ancestry, see Fajardo-Acosta, 45-46.

27. John Golden sees the kingdom of Hrothgar as the "heavenly city," and Grendel as Cain; Grendel's desire to approach the throne is not reflective of a desire to receive treasure, but a desire to possess the throne as a "symbol of stability"—the stability being that of a lawful kingdom as opposed to Grendel's lawless exile.

28. Cohen, concerned with the motivations for the attacks of all the monsters in Beowulf, believes also that the singing of the scop is the motivation for Grendel's raid.

29. Chapman believes that the Beowulf Poet shows sympathy for Grendel and his mother (as evidenced by his descriptions of them), and that sympathy can be traced to the poet's failing commitment to the Christian notion of providence. Baird stresses that the human element in the character of Grendel would have caused the audience of Beowulf to experience pity for the monster. According to Baird, the audience would have perceived Grendel not just as a demon, but as an exile, and as such, he would be deserving of some pity in addition to the repulsion he inspired.

30. Malone (1948) views the poem as essentially Christian, and sees Grendel less as a "character" than in terms of symbolic evil in apposition to Beowulf's symbolic good.

31. See Cohen.

32. Irving (1968) makes a fascinating parallel between the tearing and eating of the hall and the tearing and eating of the men:

Destruction of society and of the individual, tearing open the hall and tearing apart the man, become parallel destructive acts. This murdering demon not only paralyzes the functioning of society by occupying its vital center, he eats men (111).

The "evisceration" of the comitatus is both literally and symbolically achieved by the evisceration of its members.

33. There may be those who would disagree with me here, especially regarding Beowulf's words towards Unferth. In that case, since Beowulf implies it is Unferth's lack of battle-strength which has condemned Heorot to the ravages of Grendel; it might seem that having a lesser ability is a
disgrace. Yet, Beowulf is not really criticizing Unferth's fighting mettle; he is bothered by the fact that Unferth has the nerve to criticize his might when he has not been of any use himself in fighting the monster. The poet does state that Unferth "lost fame" ("dome forleas" 1470) because he did not test the water of Grendel's mere as Beowulf did; however losing fame is not synonymous with winning disgrace.

34. There are, of course, many differing opinions on whether or not the word "ofermod" is used pejoratively. Considering the "semantic possibilities" of the word, Cross (1974) concludes that "'Pride' or 'overcourage' appear to be the choices for the word 'ofermod'" (247). Tolkien (1953) also believes that Byrhtnoth's ofermod is pride, in the form of what he calls "chivalric excess." Tolkien sees both Byrhtnoth's and Beowulf's actions as evidence of this "chivalric excess." Their actions are not, according to Tolkien, necessary by heroic standards. It is "the element of pride, in the form of desire for honor and glory, in life after death" which becomes their "chief motive" (14). For an argument in which the word "ofermod" is used more positively, see George Clark.

35. On the other hand, Stuart believes that the poem is ultimately anti-heroic, and ironic in its treatment of Byrhtnoth as a hero, portraying the aging leader as brash and youthful to highlight that irony.

36. Conversely, Niles attributes Beowulf's insistence on fighting the dragon alone not to a desire for glory, but to an overriding concern for the welfare of his thanes.

37. Niles believes the "fatal contradiction" in Beowulf is not inherent in the heroic society, or any society-"It is lodged within the recalcitrant breasts of human beings who in times of crisis find themselves unable to live up to the ideals to which their lips give assent" (247). In other words, Beowulf, and the heroic ideal, do not embody any paradox. It is human failure which is to blame.

38. In her chapter on "The Nature of the Hero," in The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, Goldsmith ties Beowulf's death fighting the dragon to "the flaws in his human nature" and "the legacy of Adam's sin." According to Goldsmith, Beowulf's failure is not a result of his unconquerable heroic impulse, but represents a "tragedy of fallen man" (239).

39. Though the "one" here is usually interpreted as being Beowulf, see Kendrick (n. 14) for his belief that it refers to the pillager of the hoard.
40. For a reading of Wiglaf and the rest of Beowulf's thanes as underestimating the dragon's wrath (a reading which is thus more positive about Beowulf's motivations in fighting), see Malone (1972) and Ogilvy and Baker (84).

41. Wiglaf makes it clear that Beowulf's thanes, most notably Wiglaf himself, tried to dissuade their leader from fighting the dragon, most likely sensing that it would result in Beowulf's death and the dissolution of his comitatus. Nevertheless, holding to his "high destiny," Beowulf insisted on fighting.

42. See also Mitchell concerning his view that the Beowulf Poet is not critical of Beowulf's actions regarding the dragon. See Tolkien for further discussion of Wiglaf's "indictment" of Beowulf. McGalliard takes the peculiar position of asserting that Wiglaf's lament criticizing Beowulf for attacking the dragon is "an expression of intense grief" which "involves the distortion of perspective that sometimes accompanies deeply felt emotion" (269). In other words, it's the grief talking, not Wiglaf.

43. Smithers (1970) also believes in the nobility of Beowulf's death "because he exercises the highest courage and thus fulfills his destiny" (80).

44. According to Fajardo-Acosta, this elegiac quality of the poem is not due to any conflict between the heroic ideal and the duties of kingship, but the poem itself lamenting the "loss of the human being" (3) Beowulf at the hands of the monster-Beowulf, a tragic transformation of a "mild and generous individual" to a "fierce and implacable warrior who will stop at nothing in his pursuit of fame and wealth" (2).

45. Halverson believes that Beowulf dooms the Geats through single encounter with the dragon. Berger and Leicester believe it is Beowulf's entire career which dooms them.

46. In contrast, Silber believes that Beowulf's reasons for going after the gold are "pure, even praiseworthy." She sees the fault as not being with Beowulf himself, "but in the society." (19).

47. Donahue believes that in achieving the acquisition of the hoard for his people, Beowulf moves into the realm of the truly charitable, as opposed to his place within the system of gifts and counter-gifts in Hrothgar's kingdom.

48. Renoir (1963) also believes that Beowulf's viewing of the wealth is not to be interpreted as a greedy pawing of the treasure, yet he thinks it should be seen as Beowulf's reassurance that he has won the wealth for his people.
49. Hanning sees the dragon and the hoard as a symbolic microcosm of the historical challenges besetting the Geats, believing that "Beowulf's catastrophic intersection with the dragon and the horde is a personal version of the Geats destruction by the weight of history—the inherited enmities of neighboring nations" (98).
Chapter XI

"Cynna Gemyndig": Women and the Comitatus

Introduction

Since the comitatus, strictly speaking, includes males only, women might seem irrelevant to any discussion of it. Women do not find and serve a lord as a male thane does, nor are they lords themselves. Yet, though a poem like Beowulf is centered around activities involving males, it is not populated strictly with men. Women appear, and are given significant attention by the poet. Women participate in the activity of the hall, and even help in the negotiation of "foreign policy" (relations with other tribes), so they most certainly bear on any understanding of how the comitatus in the poetry functions. Women have a distinct impact on the males-only world of the comitatus, and that fact alone would merit attention.

When considering how women function around the comitatus, there are two aspects that must be dealt with. The first is how women operate within the traditionally male setting and system of bonds. What is the importance of women as cup-bearers, peace pledges, and treasure-givers? What is their relationship to boasting, feasting, feuding, and death in the battlefield? Although they are not themselves the prime participants in these activities, women
offer their own light and affect this world in ways that are not often realized. As Michael Enright has recently suggested, we must seek to integrate the role of women into the perception of the comitatus as a group.

Women have their own "ties that bind," ties that are startlingly similar to the ties within the comitatus. The woman owes allegiance to her husband much as the male thane owes allegiance to his lord, since she is the primary inheritor of the kinship structure. As we have seen in chapter 1, for the male, the bond of lordship supercedes the bond of kinship. This is not so for the female. Her husband is her lord, and her family, not the comitatus, her main concern. In fact, though the husband/wife relationship seems patterned after that thane/lord bond, the wife's allegiance to her husband, and her other kin, oftentimes is at odds with the welfare of the comitatus itself.

Again, Beowulf will serve as my exemplary text, for a very practical reason: Beowulf shows the typical role of the woman and the comitatus in the home setting most clearly. There are indeed many poems that feature women in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry, poems that concern female saints and warriors, but Wealhtheow is a far more typical representative of the female in relation to the comitatus than Judith, Elene, or Juliana, whose stories are highly complicated by exceptional circumstances (kidnapping, attempted rape, forced marriage), as well as religious and
attempted rape, forced marriage), as well as religious and hagiographic factors.

Beowulf, by contrast, displays not only the fundamentals of the male comitatus, but the role of women both within and more apart from that structure. The poem sets up a series of opposites which I will explore, opposites which are engineered at least in part to demonstrate what the proper behavior of a queen was. So firstly, the notion of the "good queen" needs to be elaborated. Are there any responsibilities that go along with being a wife to the lord of men? If so, what are they? Were women like Wealhtheow merely ornamental, or did they serve some specific purpose? Perhaps more important: what were the fundamental concerns of women, apart from the rituals of the comitatus?

Wealhtheow and Cup-Bearing

Perhaps the most obvious role, because it verges on the ritual, is the position of woman as the cup-bearer, both to her husband and to other members of the comitatus. It is tempting to view this activity as a minor social triviality, expected of women because they were "unfit" for anything else. Yet, a careful examination of key passages within Beowulf reveals a different story; the woman who bears the cup does not only deliver mead. This is first and
most clearly seen in the following passage when Wealhtheow
greets the Geats and their leader:

Eode Wealhþeow forð,  
cwen Hroðgares cynna gemyndig,  
grette goldhroden guman on healle,  
ond þa freolic wif ful gesealde  
ærst Eastdena eþelweard,  
bæd hine bliðne at þære beorþege,  
leodum leofne. He on lust geþeah  
symble ond seleful, sigerof kyning.  
Ymbeode þa ides Helminga  
duguþe ond geuguþe dæl æghwylcne,  
sincfato sealde, oppþæt sæl alamp,  
þæt hio Beowulfe, beaghroden cwén  
mode gepungen medoful æþær;  
grette Geata leod, gode þancode  
wisfæst wordum þæs ðe hire se willa gelamp,  
þæt heo on ænignre eorl gelyfde  
fyrene frofre.

(612b-628b)

Wealhþeow came forth,  
Hrothgar's queen, mindful of courtesies.  
Adorned with gold, she greeted the men  
in the hall, and that excellent wife  
first gave the filled cup to the guardian  
of the land of the Eastdanes, bade him
rejoice at the beer-drinking, beloved of his people. He, the illustrious king, took it in joy, the hall-cup and feast. The wife of the Helmings then went round to tried retainers and youths, offered the jewel-adorned cup, until the time came that she, the ring-adorned queen, exquisite in mind, bore the cup to Beowulf. She greeted the man of the Geats, thanked God with wise words that that her desire came to pass, that she from any man might count on help against crimes.

This passage is not merely the description of a servant offering drink to the comitatus. It is perhaps the most telling passage in all of Anglo-Saxon literature as to the function, purpose, and expectation of the aristocratic woman in a warrior society. It does not depict Wealhtheow as a mere menial laborer; in this passage she is the deliverer not just of mead but of hospitality. As soon as she enters the mead-hall, Wealhtheow becomes the center of attention. She may have a comparatively small number of lines in the poem devoted to her, but whenever she appears, and especially in her first appearance, her presence is riveting.
What we notice most about Wealhtheow is that she is a force of welcome, bidding Hrothgar to rejoice, offering the cup to all. In this context, Wealhtheow's primary function is to greet her husband and her guests, and to greet them well. And that she does. The first words spoken of her, other than as an indication of her entrance, are that she is "mindful of courtesy" (613b).7

What is the importance of this "courtesy," then, and how does it function within the comitatus? The service that a woman like Wealhtheow performs enriches the hall and its inhabitants, and by extension, as Hansen (1976) asserts, the entire community:

Her traditional offering of the cup of mead, first to her lord and then to his retainers, symbolizes both the duties and the merit of the woman who thus ceremoniously binds society together in hospitality and good cheer. (111)

Wealhtheow's offering has a ritually symbolic meaning, extending beyond the mere utilitarian nature of providing drink. She extends and indeed embodies the hospitality of her home.

Yet, even in her hospitality there is method. Though she is primarily egalitarian in her passing of the cup, she attends to two men especially: her husband Hrothgar and Beowulf. To Hrothgar she offers the cup first, doubtlessly
underscoring his authority over the hall.⁸ To Beowulf she offers the cup last, in recognition of his status as honored guest, and prospective deliverer from Grendel.⁹

It is that offering to Beowulf which provides a clue to a subtler, yet vitally important function latent in her cup-bearing. I would suggest that Wealhtheow's offer of the cup to Beowulf, along with the words she utters while doing so, symbolically charges him with the task of defeating Grendel. His acceptance of the cup, in addition, signifies his acceptance of that duty. The Beowulf Poet only reveals Wealhtheow's words indirectly (see 625-628b above); we must envision the scenario ourselves to receive the full impact of it. As Wealhtheow gives the cup to Beowulf, her words to him might run something like "Thank God my wish is fulfilled, and we will have aid from you against the crimes of Grendel, Beowulf." With the offer of the cup she offers words, an exhortation for him to fight against the ravager of her people. By accepting the cup, Beowulf tacitly accepts the difficult task she has described for him as well.¹⁰ It is no coincidence that she waits for the precise moment that her hand extends the cup to extend her expectations as well, and no coincidence that, immediately after its acceptance, Beowulf rises and vows in front of everyone in Heorot that he will defeat Grendel or die in the trying.
This is not, however, the only incident where the acceptance of a cup from Wealththeow is contractualized. Her offering to Hrothgar of a cup on line 1169 is combined with another exhortation, this one asking Hrothgar, despite his burgeoning devotion to Beowulf, to remember his own sons first (the relevance of this action will soon be more fully discussed). "Onfoh þissum fulle" ("accept this cup") she says to Hrothgar, before telling him to leave his nation and lands to his sons and not to the Geat. When Wealththeow extends the cup for acceptance, she also extends her words, and an acceptance of the cup implies endorsement of her request as well.

We need not merely speculate on this. Wealththeow herself indicates that those who drink from her cup have a duty to obey her wishes. At the end of her speech to Beowulf on lines 1216-1231, she states of Hrothgar's retainers: "druncne dryhtguman doð swa ic bidde" ("having drunken, the retainers will do as I bid"). Wealththeow is not saying that a tipsy thane is a more agreeable thane. Here she elevates the act of cup-bearing past servitude. She states that each man who takes her cup is obligated to her.

Wealththeow's status as bearer of the cup, and the importance attached to that ritual, prove that women are anything but simple, decorative additions to the hall. Yet,
the function of women in relation to the comitatus is not limited to cup-bearing, as we shall see.

Treasure-Giving

Like her husband, a queen gives gifts to thanes and visitors alike, as we see in the cases of both Wealhtheow and Hygd. Wealhtheow gives Beowulf a number of treasures upon his departure: mail-shirts, rings, and specifically a gold collar which the Beowulf Poet states is "mæst/para þe ic on foldan" ("the greatest ever on earth" 1195b-1194a). Not only does Wealhtheow give the gifts, she exhorts Beowulf to enjoy them, and tells him "Ic þe on tela/sinc-gestreona" ("it is proper that I grant you these treasures" 1225b-1226a).

Perhaps what is most important to notice is that Wealhtheow's role as treasure-giver here is not merely that of a conduit between Hrothgar and Beowulf. She herself is the agent of giving, and she asserts that in action and word. It is indeed proper that Wealhtheow herself give gifts to the deliverer of her people.13

Hygd, the wife of Hygelac, is also noted for her generosity, and is doubly praised because she is generous in spite of her youth and her relative newness to Hygelac's court:

Hygd swiðe geong,
Hygd (was) very young, wise and accomplished, though little winters had Hæreth's daughter spent in the castle. She was not therefore thus meaner nor sparing in gifts, precious treasure, to the men of the Geats.

Hygd is the soul of generosity, a female ideal who serves in stark contrast to the cruel Modthrytho, whose story is described immediately after. ¹⁴ Within Beowulf, through examples like Hygd and Wealhtheow, we see that women were treasure-givers as well as the men. Certainly it would not be wise to overestimate the importance of that function; treasure-giving is the lord's duty first and foremost, and it is his gifts to his thanes which are paramount in fostering the thane/lord bond. Yet, the mere fact that the female is party to and indeed participates in this activity is testament to her position and importance within the hall.
Peace-Weaving

One of the most crucial functions which the Anglo-Saxon woman performed was that of "peace-weaver." She often was sent as a bride to a rival nation to be a token of peace between the two tribes, to mingle the blood of her people with the blood of another. Wealhtheow's reaction to Beowulf shows that the creation of some sort of a bond between two "rivals" can often be an effective way of reducing the chances of conflict. This is the role of the "peace weaver."\

Unfortunately, the two primary examples of peace-weavers found in Beowulf, Hildeburh and Freawaru, exemplify what can happen when the hatred between two peoples is too strong for one woman to quell. The Finnsburn Episode (1068-1159b) tells the tragedy of Hildeburh, wife of the Frisian King Finn, and sister of Hnæf of the Half-Danes. Upon visiting Finn's court, Hnæf's band is attacked. In the conflict, both Hnæf and Hildeburh's son are killed.

That episode serves as a foreshadowing of Beowulf's tale of Freawaru, the daughter of Hrothgar who is pledged to Ingeld to alleviate the feud between the Danes and the Heathobards. Though Beowulf's story is only conjecture, it is nevertheless important, since it voices the difficulty in preserving a "peace-pledge." The presence of Freawaru's Danish attendant, wearing a sword taken by his father from a
Heathobard, will inflame the old hatred. As Beowulf states, "Oft seldan hwær/æfter leodhryre lytel hwile/bongar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge!" ("Seldom anywhere rests the death spear after the fall of a prince, even for a little while, though the bride is excellent!" 2029b-2031).

Yet, though Beowulf is not confident about the Heathobards' ability to keep their part of the bargain, Freawaru remains blameless (as does Hildeburh). She is not at fault for the sundering of the peace pledge. And Beowulf does not subvert the idea of a peace-pledge, he is merely cynical about the prospective outcome. The fact that Freawaru was given as a peace-pledge at all implies that the practice must often have worked.

In fact, a latent respect for the notion of a peace-pledge can be found in the tales of both Hildeburh and Freawaru. In both cases, the pledge fails not by any intrinsic conceptual fault of its own, but through the treachery of others. Hnaef's men are attacked, unprovoked, by their hosts. The Heathobard attacker is goaded and provoked by "sarum wordum" ("cruel words" 2058) and becomes an oath breaker. In other words, he should have had respect for the peace-pledge; it is not to Freawaru's detriment that he did not.

When the peace-pledge fails, it is certainly tragic, especially for the women involved. Yet, we must not lose sight of the intention of its design. Women like Hildeburh
and Freawaru do not function as commodities to buy off a debt of wergild, but as living symbols of the initial good will of the two tribes. Ideally, the peace-weaver becomes a presence for harmony in the rival court, reminding all of the new bond between former enemies, and giving birth to children that become the living product of the union of those two tribes. The fact that this bond often fails does not bear on the goodness of the bride, as Beowulf says.

The "Evil Queens": Modthrytho and Grendel's Mother

If the responsibility of the Anglo-Saxon woman within the comitatus is to provide a wise, welcoming presence for her husband's thanes and his guests, indeed personifying the notion of "hospitality," then it is likely that the more nefarious versions of women within Beowulf would be, first of all, inhospitable. As Heremod's evil nature is characterized by his refusal to fulfill his primary role of generously dealing treasure, a queen like Modthrytho is made evil by her refusal to fulfill her role as well. Indeed, she is more than just an example of a "bad hostess;" she is in truth quite vicious:

  fremu folces cwen, firen ondrysne.
  Naenig þæt dorste deor geneban
  swæsra gesiða, nefne sinfree,
  þæt hire an dæges eagum starede,
ac him wælbende weotode tealand
handgewriþene; hraþe seoþan wæs
æfter mundgripe mece gebinged,
pæt hit sceadenmæl scryran moste,
cwealmbealu cyðan. Ne bid swylce cwenlic þeaw
idese to efnanne, þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy,
pætte freoðuwebbe feores onsaæce
æfter ligetorne leofne mannan.

(1932-1943b)
That excellent queen did terrible wickedness.
Not any of the dear retainers dared venture,
unless a great lord, to stare at her by day;
for him the deadly bond was destined, the
reckoned bond woven by hand. Quickly
thereupon after the handgrip the sword was
appointed, that the damascened sword must
settle it, make known death-evil. It is
not a queenly practice for a lady to perform,
though she be beautiful, that a peace-weaver
take lives of beloved men after insult.

This passage is very telling for a number of reasons. Of
course, first to be noticed should be Modthrytho's almost
bloodthirsty attitude towards the men who approach her. She
invents false accusations. She has them killed. No one
even dares to come near her; all are in fear for their
lives.
As in Heremod's case, Modthrytho's crimes are all the worse because she completely subverts what is ideally expected of her. Instead of offering hospitality to those who enter her hall, she offers death. Unlike Wealhtheow, who moves through the hall attending to the needs of all those within, Modthrytho sets herself apart, remaining completely and thoroughly unapproachable. In truth, she does not even offer death; she "offers" nothing. Men must approach her, and those who do seldom live to regret it.

Ironically, the story of Modthrytho offers within itself a contrast, a "before and after," which thus serves in the end also as a testament to the positive power of a virtuous queen. Upon her marriage to Offa, Modthrytho is apparently reformed of her evil ways, and in fact goes on to do great service within Offa's kingdom:

\[
\text{ðær hio syðan well}
\]
\[
\text{in gumstole, gode, mære,}
\]
\[
\text{lifgesceafhta lifigende breac,}
\]
\[
\text{hiold heahlufan wip hælepa brego,}
\]
\[
\text{ealles moncynnes mine gefræge}
\]
\[
\text{þone seleston bi sæm tweonum,}
\]
\[
\text{eormencynnes. Forðam Offa wæs}
\]
\[
\text{geofum ond guðum, garcene man,}
\]
\[
\text{wide geweorðod, wisdome heold}
\]
\[
\text{eðel sinne;}
\]

(1951b-1960a)
afterwards, she, good and famous upon
the throne, well enjoyed living there,
rulled with high love by the chief of heroes
(I heard that he was the best of kings of
the land of all mankind from sea to sea).
Therefore Offa, the spear-brave warrior,
was widely honored with gifts and battles.
He held his homeland in wisdom.
The "forðam" of 1957b implies that it is Modthrytho's
nobility and goodness, and her love for her husband, that enables Offa to gain victory, treasure, and wisdom. Perhaps Modthrytho's role was not the major factor in his success, but one cannot read these lines without receiving at least an impression that her presence aided him greatly in his heroic endeavors.  

We come then to Grendel's mother. What role does she play when we are considering women within the comitatus? Is it even fit that we discuss her? Obviously she is not a part of any traditional comitatus that we could see, save for the "comitatus of monsters" mentioned in chapter 1. Yet, her son, as we have seen, bears many of the markings of a thane, if a perverted one, as his home bears many of the markings of a "hall." If Grendel is a thane, then we can make the leap into viewing Grendel's mother as a perversion of an ideal queen.
On a purely elemental level, the Beowulf poet himself describes Grendel's mother with the terms reserved for human women, albeit intermingled with words that are more fittingly appropriate for her monstrous nature. She is both an "aglāc-wif" ("monster-wife" 1259) and a "mere-wife" ("sea-wife" 1519), and more specifically described as being "idese onlicnæs" ("in the likeness of a lady"). As Chance notes, "ides" is a word more generally ascribed to Wealhtheow and other females like her, yet Grendel's mother is "described in human and social terms, and through words like 'wif' and 'ides' normally reserved for human women" (95).

According to Chance, Grendel's mother is an "Epic Anti-Type" (as the title of chapter 7 suggests) because she "inverts" the woman's primary role as peace-weaver, and becomes a weaver of war. She "arrogates to herself the masculine role of the warrior or lord" (97), which Chance suggests is what makes her so abominable. Yet, as we have seen, women like Wealhtheow possess some characteristics of a lord—dealing treasure and offering wise words. And we need only veer as far as "Judith" to see a representation of a woman "warrior" venerated and praised for her deeds.

To my mind, Chance is correct that Grendel's mother is an anti-type. However, within the hall (and Beowulf fights Grendel's mother within her hall) the primary role of the woman was to provide hospitality. Weaving peace and
providing hospitality are not necessarily the same thing. Chance's argument works very well if you subscribe to her notion that the woman's primary role is that of peace-weaver, but the role of women like Wealhtheow is more complicated than that. Peace-weaving is only one of a woman's roles, a primary one perhaps when dealing with other tribes, but not primary within the hall. Within the hall, providing "hospitality" (a more complex concept of which "peace" is often but not necessarily a part) is Wealhtheow's fundamental responsibility. In fact, many of Wealhtheow's actions (as Damico suggests) may even subtly subvert "peace."19

Though she provides drink for all, Wealhtheow privileges her husband, consistently asserting his position of power. When Hrothgar hints of treasures forthcoming to Beowulf after the defeat of Grendel (perhaps, one might speculate, even Hrothgar's throne), Wealhtheow reminds him to keep the kingdom for his sons. What "peace" could those words have woven if Beowulf had coveted Hrothgar's kingship?

Grendel's mother is not an "anti-type" of the peace-weaving aspect of aristocratic Anglo-Saxon womanhood. She is an anti-type of the woman as hospitaler. As we have seen, both in Heremod's case and in Modthrytho's, bad lords and bad queens are characterized as such by their refusal to conform to their respective ideals. Heremod keeps his treasure. Modthrytho is impassively devious. Yet,
Grendel's mother is a special case. Like her son, she is a perversion of what is good, not an abnegation of it.\textsuperscript{20}

What is the nature, then, of her "hospitality?" That is, what is her response to Beowulf's intrusion into her "hall?" Indeed, Grendel's mother does not lie in wait for Beowulf, seeking to ambush him; she rushes towards him almost as if to welcome him. Yet, she pulls him into her hall not with the intent of making him at home, but of killing him.

The words used to describe both the "hall" and Beowulf himself are key here. The word "niðsele" (1513) could be interpreted as the "violence-hall," the "affliction-hall," the "persecution-hall," or the "hall of ill will." In any case, the hall is by its very name characterized as inhospitable. The ill will, the inhospitality of Grendel's mother permeates the atmosphere.

As if to reinforce the fact that Beowulf is a visitor to the niðsele, he is specifically described as a "sele-gyst" ("hall guest" 1545). This use is highly ironic, since the behavior of Grendel's mother towards her company at that precise moment is anything but courteous. She sits on him and tries to stab him to death.\textsuperscript{21}

Grendel's mother does not ignore the ideal of feminine hospitality, as does Modthrytho (at first), she completely subverts it, as her son subverted the role of thane. Unlike
Modthrytho, she is eager for her guest, and pays him close, if deadly attention.

Woman as Thane, Kinship as Comitatus

Until now I have centered on the activities which tie women to the traditionally male-centered grouping of the comitatus, and how women act and react in relation to that group. Yet, the woman herself had her own lord, and her own "comitatus," which carried with it many of the responsibilities similar to that of the original warrior band. All of the previously described behaviors are central to the woman's role within the male comitatus. The comitatus of a woman like Wealhtheow was her husband and her family, a social structure separate but parallel to the social structure of the comitatus. It was within the family unit that her primary concerns, the concerns of her heart, lay. As a thane wished to serve his lord well, so did a woman. In Beowulf, of course, the women portrayed are all aristocratic, with husbands who are themselves lords of other men. Yet, this fact does not diminish the singular, if similar, relationship that a woman had with her husband.22

Perhaps the idea of a female as "subjugated" to a male grates on our modern sensibilities (though the males within the comitatus are certainly subject to other males as well),
nevertheless, a close examination of the relationship between the lords in Beowulf and their consorts reveals not only aspects of the thane/lord relationship between man and wife, but an abiding sense of something more akin to (but certainly not synonymous with) a partnership.

Of course, the most obvious evidence for the thane/lord bond between wife and husband would be the manner in which the husband is addressed. At least once, Wealhtheow addresses her husband Hrothgar as "my lord" ("freo-drihten min" 69). If that were not enough, certainly we can ascertain from the progression of events that it is Wealhtheow's concern for her husband that influences what she does. Modthrytho is perhaps the most outstanding example of a woman "controlled" by her husband. Offa "put a stop to" her murderous impulses. As soon as she was pledged to him, she seemed to bend to his will. Yet, there is no sense that she was browbeaten or forced to obey in any way.23 Like a good thane, once she found a good lord (a husband, that is) she obviously wished to do his bidding.

The reaction of a woman like Modthrytho is most telling. As we have seen, implicit in the bond between a lord and a thane is the free will of both, who choose to fulfill their respective roles out of love and loyalty, not through force or coercion. Modthrytho's relationship with Offa seems truly to mirror that aspect of the bond. If anyone would be likely to rebel, she would. It is not fear
of Offa which motivates her actions, but devotion to him.

Wealhtheow does not have any such history with Hrothgar. Her concern for her husband and her people serves as a subtext for everything that she does, yet the primary "threat" to Wealhtheow's "comitatus," after Grendel has been killed, is Beowulf himself. We have seen Wealhtheow demonstrate consideration for her husband, but Wealhtheow's concern is not only for Hrothgar, but for the welfare of her sons. Wealhtheow's situation regarding the "threat" that the Geat poses to the inheritance of her sons illustrates most clearly in Beowulf how the true comitatus of the woman is not the thanes in the hall (who might certainly be better off with Beowulf), but the family.

Though she is appreciative of Beowulf's spectacular feats of strength and courage, she is slightly apprehensive about Hrothgar's burgeoning devotion to him. The fact that Hrothgar has come to love Beowulf as a son is a potential threat to her own sons, since their succession might be usurped by man like Beowulf, who is not only a great warrior but beloved by Hrothgar as well. Wealhtheow is both aware and concerned about the status of her own sons, and Beowulf's potential position as an interloper. This is most clearly evident in her words to Hrothgar in the mead-hall after Beowulf has killed Grendel:

\[\text{Me man sægde, } \quad \text{þæt þu de for sunu wolde hererinc habban.} \quad \text{Heorot is gefælsod,}\]
They have said to me that you would have the warrior for a son. Heorot, the bright ring-hall, is cleansed. While you can, make use of gifts from many, and when you must go forth, behold death, leave to your kinsmen folk and kingdom.

One gets the sense that Wealhtheow, now that Beowulf has performed his duty, wishes that the powerful Geat would go home. The sight of him sitting there on the mead-bench between her two sons (thus symbolically he becomes another "son") not only rankles but must truly distress her.

The question might be asked, then, as to why Wealhtheow is so gracious to Beowulf, asking that he become a sort of "godfather" to her sons, encouraging him to counsel and form a bond with them. "Ond þyssum cnyhtum wes/lara liðe" ("and to these boys be good in counsel" 1219b-1220a) she states. Are her true motives really a desire for Beowulf to continue a relationship with her sons? Peripherally, perhaps. Yet, I would suggest that her primary motive for fostering the connection is not to provide her sons with advice, but with protection. A friendship between Beowulf and Hrethric and
Hrothmund might keep Beowulf from attempting to wrest the throne from them (how ironic that the true threat comes from within the family, in the form of Hrothulf, and not from without). "Be þu suna minum/dædum gedefe" (1226b-1227a) Wealhtheow tells Beowulf: "Behave graciously to my sons." Again, as with the offering of the cup, she is attempting to imbue Beowulf with a sense of duty, thinking that if Beowulf views her sons as younger foster-brothers, he will not behave ungraciously by taking their throne.

Our own understanding of Beowulf, and his actions later concerning the throne of Hrothgar, might color our view of this interchange. There is obviously nothing for Wealhtheow to worry about, since Beowulf does not desire to succeed Hrothgar. Yet, Wealhtheow does not know this. We must view Beowulf from her perspective, and from there he looks to be a serious threat.

The tragedy of Hildeburh, in the Finnsburh Episode, reveals that her concerns are centered around the family as well. In Hildeburh's case, it is not the violence done to the comitatus (either Hnaef's or Finn's) which brings her grief, but the violence done to her family which causes her pain:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{beloren leofun} & \quad \text{at þam lindplegan} \\
\text{bearnun ond broðrum;} & \quad \text{hie on gebyrd hruron} \\
\text{gare wunde;} & \quad \text{Þæt wæs geomuru ides!}
\end{align*}
\]

(1073-1075)
she was deprived of loved ones at that
dayplay, son and brother. They were fated to
fall, wounded by spears. That was a mournful
wife!

She was sorrowful not because of the treachery in her own
court, and the losses to both sides of members of the
comitatus (as would be the concern with a lord or a thane);
her grief is for her family members, her comitatus. This,
of course, is not to say that Hildeburh was not concerned
with the upheavals in the male comitatus, but rather that
the "comitatus" of kinship was more important to her. She
was caught in the most terrifying position for any woman,
that of having two members of her family at odds with one
another.

Conclusion

Many assign little worth to the function of women
within Anglo-Saxon poetry, equating a paucity of line space
with a lack of importance. As I hope to have shown here,
nothing could be further from the truth. Not only did
Anglo-Saxon women serve a fundamental role within the hall
itself, but through their role as peace-pledges, they had
the power to affect the fates of their own and other nations
as well. Unless we understand what the role of the "ideal"
Anglo-Saxon woman in the poetry is, what she does, and what
she wants, the Anglo-Saxonized Eve of "Genesis B" remains an enigma, or misunderstood, the depth of the tragedy of the wife in "The Wife's Lament" is not perceived, and the hope of "The Husband's Message" is unrealized.
Notes

1. Enright insightfully provides an extended analysis of *Beowulf*, using it in an attempt to "sketch some of the notable ways in which royal (and noble) consorts routinely contributed to the enhancement of stability within a volatile warrior society" (171).

2. It would seem, perhaps, that a thorough discussion of all, or nearly all of the women evident in the entire corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry might better serve my thesis. Why not incorporate Judith, or Elene? To put it simply, I think that doing so would unnecessarily complicate things, and deviate from the pattern I have set up in discussing the masculine dynamics of the comitatus in chapter 1. In that chapter, I addressed the basic fundamentals of male, aristocratic warrior society as expressed in the poetry. In this one, I will address the fundamentals of being female within that society.

3. See chapter nine of Haarder's *Beowulf: The Appeal of a Poem* for a reading of the poem as a construct of contrasts, with specific attention paid to the contrasts between the women of *Beowulf*.

4. See Fischer for a philological study of Anglo-Saxon words relating to all aspects of marriage. Fischer centers his study around the language of Old English, rather than Anglo-Saxon England itself, devoting attention to the frequency of verbs, nouns, and stems in Old English relating to engagement, wedding, and the state of matrimony.

5. For further consideration of the ritualistic aspects of cup-bearing, see Enright. It is, according to Enright, a highly specialized ritual, and the acceptance of the cup had "both legal and religious significance" (179). Enright insists that we must "dispel any notion that the drinking procedure she (Wealhtheow) initiates and which brings her into immediate contact with the high seat is anything like a commonplace act of service" (174).

6. Crepin gives particular attention to the Beowulf poet's regard for Wealhtheow's queenly bearing, lineage, and overall character.

7. Klaeber specifically translates "cynna" on line 613 as courtesy, as do Chickering and Greenfield (1982). An alternate translation, that she was "mindful of kin" seems equally appropriate.
8. Chickering also makes note of the order of Wealhtheow's offering of the cup (304). See Maxims I, 11. 84b-92, for a pointed illustration of how important it is to offer the lord the mead-cup first.

9. Irving (1978) believes that Wealhtheow's positive assessment of Beowulf has healing power in terms of the morale of her people: "her expression of confidence in the providential coming of the hero helps move the demoralized Danes psychologically from Unferth's envious snarls toward more positive forms of willing and hoping" (74).

10. Chickering makes a similar assessment: "In accepting the cup, Beowulf accepts a symbol of the obligation to help Hrothgar" (304).

11. This particular line has been the focus of much critical debate, as to whether or not the use of "druncne" is pejorative (those who believe so would take it to mean "inebriated"). Rosier (1962) believes that the use of the word throughout Beowulf is always deprecatory. Bammesberger, however, states that "druncne need in no way have had the sense 'inebriated' when used in reference to alcoholic drink" (207). Magennis defends drinking in Beowulf as "a symbol of social cohesion" (164).

12. Both Bammesberger and Robinson (1985) focus on the importance of drinking and cup-bearing as important ceremonially, Robinson stating that "modern readers, to whom drinking seems more often a social problem than a social ritual, are apt to miss the significance of serving the cup to men" (75), and Bammesberger believing that "it is likely that 'drinking' was linked to important ritual performances like uttering a vow" (207).

13. See J. Hill (esp. 185-191) for particular focus on Wealhtheow's utilization of gifts to keep the proper distance between Beowulf and the Danes.

14. For a reading of the contrast between Hygd and Modthrytho as resulting from their respective names, see Malone (1941). In The Digressions in Beowulf, Adrien Bonjour also suggests that Modthrytho and Heremod are to be seen in contrast, his reasons being that both misuse power and are contrasted with Offa. Of course, this understanding does not obviate the need for seeing Modthrytho as an evil queen to be contrasted with women like Wealhtheow; perhaps the sense of "contrast" is in fact further enriched if both perspectives are accepted simultaneously.
15. Sklute believes that the word "freoðuwebbe" is vital, yet need not in all cases refer to a woman betrothed to end a feud. The word, he insists, is a poetic metaphor for a woman who promotes "friendship and amnesty."

16. Klaeber notes that the story of Modthrytho fits well (as do the stories of other women such as Brunhild of the Nibelungenlied) with the "Taming of the Shrew" motif: a seemingly intractable woman won over by an excellent man.

17. Fajardo-Acosta makes a rather shocking (and, based on flimsy textual evidence, truly unbelievable) assertion tying Grendel and his mother to Hrothgar's comitatus by blood (not shed, but shared). According to Fajardo-Acosta, Grendel and his mother are Hrothgar's son and sister, respectively. Fajardo-Acosta believes that there is significant evidence (all circumstantial) within the poem and from analogues to assert that Hrothgar had incestuous relations with his sister and then sent her and their son into exile. This rather fabulous argument would explain the hatred of the monsters, but not the monsters themselves.

18. For a reading of Grendel's mother and her strength as springing from Celtic (not Germanic) antecedents, see Puhvel.

19. Damico believes that Wealhtheow is not all peace-pledge and mead cups. In fact, she asserts that, because she urged Beowulf to battle, "she (like the other female characters) does instigate turbulent and destructive activity" (19).

20. Irving (1978) suggests that Grendel's mother may be, at least from one perspective, Grendel himself brought back to life. Irving states that "it is almost as if in his mother something of him still writhes and strikes back" (112).

21. Chance illuminatively explicates the fight between Grendel's mother and Beowulf as a parody of sexual intercourse (102-106).


23. Indeed, there is little, if any, actual violence against women found in all of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Freawaru's situation, as postulated by Beowulf, would seem to be the one fraught with the most potential for violence. Yet, Ingeld's hate is reserved for the Danes. His feelings of love for Freawaru may cool, but that is the extent of his actions against her. Judith is, of course, a serious candidate for rape at the beginning of that poem, but the incident never materializes, due to the drunkenness and subsequent beheading (by Judith herself) of the potential
molester. The disgust reserved for Holofernes and his
unsavory intentions is more than apparent in the poem, as is
the exultation when Judith prevents him from carrying them
out.
Chapter III
Fall and Redemption:
"Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood"

Introduction

In 596, Pope Gregory the Great dispatched a prior named Augustine to attempt a seemingly impossible task: the evangelization of Anglo-Saxon England. It was not a job which Augustine and the monks who accompanied him accepted eagerly; in the words of F. M. Stenton, "the monks recoiled from the thought of meeting a barbarous and infidel race whose language they did not know" (105). The entire enterprise ground to a halt somewhere in Gaul, when the monks, en route, begged Augustine to go back to Rome and have Gregory release them from their duty. Gregory assuaged their anxiety, however, and in 597 Augustine and his nervous companions finally set foot on pagan soil. Despite the general apprehension of the these missionaries, Christianity was the dominant religion of England by 663.

In this chapter I will examine how the seemingly incompatible concepts of Christianity and the warrior ethos surrounding the comitatus connect within the construct of two Anglo-Saxon poems: "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood." The corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry is full of "reinterpretations" of biblical and apocryphal stories, both
metaphorical ("The Phoenix"). Yet, what sets "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood" apart, in addition to their excellence as poetry, is that together they represent the two central events in the bible, the fall of man and the redemption. This analysis will show that the ideals of the comitatus literally structured the way that the Anglo-Saxons poetically interpreted Christianity.

Let us preface examination of the poems with a review of the papal effort to Christianize England. It is not only interesting but vital to know how the Church itself approached the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. The ethos of the comitatus was not regarded as a subversive element; in fact, it was incorporated into the process of conversion. From the outset, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons was approached with the greatest care and respect for the existing pagan value system. This was not out of choice perhaps, or any love of paganism, but because it was perceived that there was no other way to accomplish the goal. We should not be surprised, then, at how the Anglo-Saxons interpreted the biblical stories in terms of the value system that they understood best, that is, the values of the comitatus, and all that they entail.

Pope Gregory believed that the preacher should adapt the word of God to suit the understanding of the listener; he even wrote an elaborate guideline within his Cura Pastoralis on "How the Ruler (Preacher) Should Teach and
Admonish His Subjects by His Holy Life." It is in the short prologue to that chapter that the reader will discover Gregory's most pointed comments on the value of the adaptation of discourse to suit a particular audience:

the discourse of a teacher should be adapted to the character of the hearers, so as to be suited to the individual in his respective needs . . .

(Gregory 89)

What follows after that is essentially a catalogue of types of listeners, from poor to rich, from joyful to sad, and how to preach to each group. The doctrine, Gregory stresses, never changes; it is the discourse which changes.

Is it a wonder then, that Gregory would apply these same principles to the mission in England? Though he had never been to England, it is doubtless that Pope Gregory understood something of the concepts of Germanic lordship and thaneship. Most of Europe was occupied by those of Germanic stock at the time. In fact, a fascinating example of the variation in Gregory's own discourse, which illustrates this point, can be found in his letters to Augustine and his host, Ethelbert, included in Bede's History of the English Church and People. Ethelbert was the Pagan King of Kent, a man familiar with Christianity because of his Christian—and Frankish—wife. As he advises in the
Cura Pastoralis, Gregory moderates his tone to suit the understanding of the listener.

First let us look at the letter he writes to Augustine, which forms the basis for the comparison with his letter to Ethelbert. In the letter to Augustine, Gregory responds to the news that Augustine has performed miracles in the process of winning souls to God, and warns him to be wary of the sin of pride in his accomplishments:

For God's chosen do not all work miracles, yet the names of all are written in heaven. For those who are disciples of the truth should rejoice only in that good thing which they share with all men, and which they shall enjoy forever...in all the outward actions which by God's help you perform, strictly examine your inner dispositions. Clearly understand your own character, and much grace is in the nation for whose conversion God has given you the power to work miracles. And if you remember that you have ever offended our creator by word or action, let the memory of your sin crush any temptation to pride that may arise in your heart. And bear in mind that whatever powers to perform miracles you have received or shall receive from God are entrusted to you solely
for the salvation of your people.

(Bede 88-89)

Compare these words to the ones written to Ethelbert, in a letter also included in Bede's history, in which Gregory is encouraging Ethelbert to keep and spread faith among his people:

So it was that the devout Emperor Constantine in his day turned the Roman State from its ignorant worship of idols by his own submission to our mighty Lord and God Jesus Christ, and with his subjects accepted Him with all his heart. The result is that his glorious reputation excelled that of all of his predecessors, and he has outshone them in reputation as greatly as he has surpassed them in good works. Now, therefore, let Your Majesty make all speed to bring your subject princes and peoples the knowledge of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that your own merit and repute may excel that of all the former kings of your nation.

(Bede 89-90)

Augustine is a prior, and Ethelbert is a king, yet Gregory cunningly manipulates the concerns and beliefs of
these very different men in order to transmit his messages. Augustine, a Christian, should doubtless be wary of the sin of pride. It is part of the Christian ethic, especially of the Christian preacher, to be humble. Gregory is reminding him that he is only God's instrument, that the miracles are not Augustine's miracles, but God's. Gregory's tone here is that of a gentle yet paternally authoritative teacher, guiding his student in the right way.

Gregory refers to Ethelbert, however, as "Your Majesty," and recognizes him as the leader of "princes" and "subject peoples." Ethelbert (if he is a good king) is doubtless concerned with maintaining and increasing his power and glory, and exercising good lordship. Gregory states explicitly that Ethelbert's own conversion, and his diligence in converting others, will bring the king what he wants. In aligning Ethelbert with Constantine, another famous and powerful convert to Christianity, Gregory implies that Ethelbert, if he keeps the faith, will exceed all of the Anglo-Saxon kings before him.

As we can clearly see, the Anglo-Saxons were offered, and received, their faith through the stained glass of their germanic perceptions of lordship, and by extension, their perceptions of the comitatus. Two religious poems that they produced in that colored light is the subject of the remainder of my discussion.
"Genesis B"

We come then to "Genesis B" a poem taken not directly from the biblical account of the fall of man, but translated from an Old Saxon source, most probably a contemporary of Alfred the Great's.¹ The first and perhaps most striking feature of the poem, for anyone familiar with the conservative, patristic ideas of the biblical Genesis, is the poet's departure from an "orthodox" (wholly true to the events as described in the bible) representation of the fall of man. Yet, the goals of this poet did not seem to be a completely faithful account of Adam and Eve in the garden. As J. M. Evans states:

His departure from orthodox patristic views on the Fall reveals him to have been a man less interested in doctrinal niceties than in telling a vivid and moving story. (16)

To make the story of the fall "vivid and moving," the poet adapted the biblical material to the concerns and interests of his audience, an audience, as Evans points out "familiar with secular Germanic literature" (123). So, though ostensibly concerned with the story of the fall of the first man and woman, "Genesis B" fundamentally concerns the concept of lordship, and the duties of thanes.

That is a very basic assessment, and one that has been
elucidated by many a scholar before me; however, there is an
area that has been lacking in the criticism of "Genesis B."
The rhetoric that the devil's messenger uses to tempt Adam
and Eve deserves particular attention. That rhetoric is
informed by the wants and desires of each of his listeners,
and those wants and desires relate to the comitatus. It is
important, however, to first set the foundation by covering
the more basic and evident aspects of the comitatus, both
heavenly and demonic, as portrayed in the poem.

Let us first examine Satan's fall from grace, a fall
described very pointedly in terms of the treachery of a
thane against his lord:

ahof hine wið his herran, sohte hetespræce,
gylpword ongean, nolde gode þeowian.

(263-265)

He raised himself against his lord, and
sought defiant speech. He began boasting,
and did not want to serve God.

Clearly, we have seen words of boasting used before, within
Beowulf and elsewhere. Yet, an acceptable context of the
boast is the rivalry between fellow thanes. It is
traitorously inappropriate for a thane to make a boast
against his lord, since boasts exist in part to foster the
thane/lord bond.

The evil in using boasts in defiance of one's lord,
whether human or divine, can be underscored by contrasting
Satan's rebellion against God with Unferth's defiance of Beowulf. Even Unferth, who is certainly not the most admirable of characters within Heorot, makes use of the concept of the boast only in an attempt to make himself look better in the eyes of his lord. Unferth sits at the very feet of Hrothgar, and doubtless he sees Beowulf as a threat. So, Unferth criticizes Beowulf's youthful boast against Breca in their swimming contest as foolish ("dolgilpe" 509), and then states flatly that Breca was the victor, because he carried out his boast against him ("Beot eal wið pe/sunu Beanstane sóñe gelæste"—"The son of Beanstan truly performed his boast against you" 523b-525).

Though Unferth does not boast himself (he is too cowardly for that, for he knows he would not carry it out), he uses another's boast against Beowulf in an attempt to make the Geat look inept and foolish, and thus tries to preserve his own standing in Heorot and with his lord. Unferth is not admirable in his actions, but his motives are thoroughly consonant with the acceptable use of the boast; he uses it to set himself against and above another thane, another peer. Thus, though Unferth's disparagement of Beowulf is sly, cowardly, and self-serving, it is certainly not a traitorous act. He uses the boast to preserve his position at the feet of his lord, not to unseat him.

In contrast, Satan uses the boast to set himself not against and above another angel, but against and above God,
his lord. Satan is not unaware of his actions, nor do they signal a lack of understanding concerning the heavenly "comitatus," or the concept of the comitatus in general. Satan understands, but he simply refuses to properly acknowledge the lordship of God. In doing so, he marks himself to the Anglo-Saxon audience as the worst possible kind of traitor.

Satan so well understands the concept of the comitatus that he has sought to make himself a new lord, a rival to God himself. We see this clearly, because even in heaven, Satan had cultivated a group of followers loyal to him.\(^2\) How did Satan cultivate that loyalty? The way any Germanic lord did—with treasure. The most telling passage in the poem with regard to Satan's lordship over his fellow dissenting angels can be found on lines 409-413a, where Satan, bound and in hell after being cast out of heaven for his insolence, attempts to get volunteers to carry out his plan to tempt Adam and Eve:

\[
\begin{align*}
Gif \ ic \ ænegum \ þegne \ þeodenmadmas \\
geara \ forgeæfe, \ þenden \ we \ on \ þan \ godan \ rice \\
gesælige \ sæton \ and \ hæfdon \ ure \ setla \ geweald, \\
þonne \ he \ me \ na \ on \ leofran \ tid \ leanum \ ne \ meahte \\
mine \ gife \ gyldan \\
\end{align*}
\]

(409-413a)

If I formerly gave princely treasures to any follower, when in that good kingdom we
sat happy and had our place of power, then
not in any dearer time could he pay back my
gifts . . .

This passage illustrates two things: Satan was cultivating
a following and acting as a lord before he was thrown from
heaven, and Satan's lordship rested on the fundamental act
of giving gifts to his thanes, the way the lord of any
Anglo-Saxon comitatus would. And, as in the Anglo-Saxon
comitatus, the gifts are tokens of loyalty, pledges of
future service in time of need. Satan's request that his
gifts be repaid through service is nearly identical to
Wiglaf's urging of Beowulf's thanes during their lord's time
of need. In fact, the identical word for repay, "gyldan,"
is used in both instances.

In addition, Satan offers a reward for the thane who
will perform the deed, and this reward is, as well,
reminiscent of the reward a human lord would give to his
follower:3

Se þe þæt gelæsteð, him bið lean gearo
æfter to aldre, þæs we her inne magon
on þyssum fyre forð fremena gewinnan.
Sittan læte ic hine wið me sylfne, swa hwa swa
þæt secgan cymeð
on þæs hatan helle, þæt hie heofoncyniges
He who accomplishes that, for him is a reward afterwards forever ready, that hence we here inside this fire can win advantages. I would let him sit by me, he who thus comes to say in this hot hell, that they [Adam and Eve] in words and deeds have been unworthy of the king of heaven's advice.

Satan offers a position of honor, a seat close to him (much as Unferth sat close to Hrothgar), to the thane who can do his bidding and corrupt Adam and Eve. And he does indeed find such a thane to do his bidding. This thane becomes his "messenger" and travels in his stead (since Satan is bound and in chains) to attempt the corruption of Adam and Eve.

It is those scenes of temptation which I choose to focus upon during the remainder of my argument. The messenger's temptation of Adam and Eve is the most revealing aspect of the poem, since it is here that the poet most diverges from the biblical account. Obviously, the way that Satan elicited the service of the messenger was to appeal to him as his lord. But Satan's lordship does not extend into the Garden of Eden. Thus, Satan's messenger cannot appeal to Adam and Eve's loyalty to his master, because they have
none. Instead the messenger utilizes another, equally persuasive method. He attempts to corrupt the first man and woman by appealing to where their loyalties lie.

What is most curious is the radical difference between the messenger's temptation of Adam and his temptation of Eve. It will be shown that the difference in his rhetoric is wholly due to the different genders of those whom he tries to tempt, and that his "temptation" of each intimately relates to the differing roles of men and women with regard to the comitatus, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2. As we have seen, though the traditional poetic comitatus is a strictly male structure, women function in tandem with it, focusing on their own concerns, most notably concern for the welfare of their husbands and children. There is no greater example of this than in "Genesis B," and the varying rhetoric Satan's messenger uses in order to separately tempt Adam and Eve to "bit his > byrige" ("bite it and eat" 518).

The messenger initially tries to tempt Adam. The first words he uses, after the messenger identifies himself as coming from God, tell Adam that if he eats the fruit he will grow stronger and greater of will, and not want of any possession. "pin abal > craeft pin modsefa mara wurde" ("your strength and craft and your spirit would become greater" 500b-501) says the messenger, and "pe æniges sceattes ðearfe/ne wurde on worulde" ("you would not lack
any property in the world" 503b-504a). The messenger's appeal seems more akin to the desires of an thane/warrior than those of the first man.

This is precisely the reason why the temptation of Adam within "Genesis B" is so significant. Logically, a man like Adam would have no need for any of these things. Why would he need strength when there are no foes? And in paradise, possessions are immaterial. Adam already has access to everything God has created (with the exception of that one tree). Why, then, does the messenger speak of the "æniges sceattes ftearfe"? Because it is doubtful that the audience of "Genesis B" could have truly sympathized with the temptation unless the appeal to Adam was formulated in terms they found appealing as well. The vague and abstract nature of "knowledge" was doubtless far less tempting to a Germanic audience than the more elemental ideals of strength and desire of possessions.

The impact of the comitatus is far more than tangential in this regard, since the only place where a man's strength of body and of will (and their monetary rewards) find adequate and fulfilling expression in Anglo-Saxon poetry is within the warband itself. As we will see in the elegies, the strongest most determined man is nothing without a warrior band around him and a lord to lead him.

Of course, it must be mentioned as well with regard to the temptation of Adam that Satan's messenger does not just
simply promise Adam rewards if the fruit is eaten; he also attempts to make Adam believe that God wishes him to eat it. "Swa þu læstan scealt þat on þis land hider/his bodan bringað" ("thus you must do that which his messengers bring hither into this land" 509-510b) and "Læste þu georne/his ambyhto" ("eagerly perform his commands" 516b-517a) orders Satan's messenger. The true danger of this messenger's temptation is that he tries to make Adam believe that he would be fulfilling God's will if he eats. When we see Adam as akin to a good thane, the poem begins to fall into place. The messenger's appeal to Adam in this manner then becomes not simply curious but necessary. After all, what is more tempting to a good thane than strength, courage, possessions, and the opportunity to serve his lord?

But Eve's predicament is quite different, and in the messenger's address to her, he modulates his rhetoric accordingly. Physical strength and possessions are not the main concerns of women. Women like Wealhtheow were more concerned with the needs of the family: maintaining hospitality, insuring proper succession, and preserving the power of their "lords," their husbands. After failing to get Adam to eat of the fruit, Satan's messenger deftly (and this time successfully) cajoles Eve by appealing to her concerns.
Perhaps "threaten" is a better word than cajole. Satan's messenger immediately goes for the jugular, as he threatens Eve's future children:

Wende hine wraðmod þær he þat wif geseah
on eorðrice Æuan stondan
sceone gesceapene, cwæð þat sceðena mæst
eallum heora eaforum æfter siðan
wurde on worulde

(547-551)

Angrily he turned to where he saw that wife standing on the kingdom of earth. He said that her children would bear the worst of injuries afterwards in the world.

As we have seen in reference to the actions of Wealhtheow and even Grendel's mother, the welfare of a child sparks great concern and fear in a woman. Wealhtheow wishes that the status of her children as Hrothgar's successors remain secure. Doubtless Eve wishes the same thing for her future children; the messenger's threat is so potent that it is effective even though she is as yet childless.10

Yet, Satan's messenger threatens Eve not only with harm to her future offspring, but with harm to Adam as well. After generalized threats to Eve against the both of them if they do not comply with his demand, Satan's messenger makes a pointed reference to Adam's previous refusal of the fruit.
The messenger makes it clear to Eve that Adam has offended him, and thus has offended God, but he promises that Adam will suffer no consequences for that refusal if Eve herself now complies with the messenger's wishes and gets Adam to eat the apple:

Gif þu þæt angin fremest, IDESa seo betste,
forhele ic incrum herran þæt me hearmes swa fela
Adam gespræc, eargra worda.

(578-580)

if you carry out that undertaking, best wives, I will hide from your lord that Adam spoke to me so much affliction, words of evil.

Satan's messenger implies that if she does not eat the fruit, and convince Adam to do so as well, Adam will suffer for it. In the end, the messenger's ploy is effective, and Eve eats.11

The persuasive powers of Satan's messenger, with regard to the interests of those listening to the poem, rest in his ability to modulate his message to the concerns and fears of his two respective listeners, and those concerns and fears are directly consonant with the ethos of the traditionally male comitatus, and the female's position in tandem with it. The ideal of the comitatus structures "Genesis B," from Satan's status as a thane traitorous to God and a gift-giving lord of Hell, to Adam and Eve's particular
gender-influenced wants and fears, and their desire to be faithful to their lord.

If that is not enough, consider then Adam's final remonstrance of his wife, when they realize that they have sinned, disobeyed their lord, and must be driven from Eden:

"Gif ic waldendes willan cuðe,
hwæt ic his to hearmsceare habban sceolde,
ne gesawe þu no sniomor, þeah me on sæ wadan
hete heofones god heonone nu þa,
on flod faran, nære he firnum þæs deop
merestream þæs micel, þæt his o min mod getweode,
ac ic to þam grunde genge, gif ic godes meahte
willan gewyrcean. Nis me on worulde niod
mæiges þegnscipes, nu ic mines þeodnes hafa
hyldo forworhte, þæt ic he habban ne mæg.
(828-837)
If I knew the ruler's desire,
what punishment I must have from him,
if you had only seen more quickly,
though now from here the God of heaven
should command me to travel on the sea,
to journey on the waves, the waves would
not be so deep, the sea-stream so mighty,
that my mind ever would doubt him. But
I would go to the sea-ground, if I could
accomplish God's desire. For me there
is not a desire for any thaneship in the world, now that I have forfeited my prince's favor, now that I cannot have it.

With this speech Adam is making a statement about how far he would go and how much he would do to do the will of his lord. Yet, the theme of exile also surfaces as well. Exiles, as we will see in the next chapter, are bereft of their comitatus and often are consigned to travel on the sea. Further, the exile has often lost his lord through his (the thane's) own failure (merely surviving a lord can sometimes be deemed as failure, which is why Byrhtnoth's men fight to the death in "The Battle of Maldon"). Adam is not only saying that he would go on the sea if commanded to; he is implying that perhaps he should go, and be exiled, because he has failed to fulfill the commandment of God. Not only does Adam, like any good thane, wish to follow the commandment of his lord, but when he has failed in that commandment, his guilt propels him to think of exile.

"Genesis B" illustrates beautifully how the pre-Christian ideal of loyalty to a human lord and protector is transmuted into loyalty to God. This concept of God as a Germanic-style "lord" was not merely a whimsical notion but a belief which the Anglo-Saxons held very strongly. As John P. Hermann points out:

Old Englishmen believed in the historical reality behind the story of the war in
heaven; the use of notions derived from the comitatus ethic that is associated with the Germanic alliterative metric and its formulaic compositional technique seemed to be an effective way to dramatize this primeval strife. (28)

Thus, the ideals of the comitatus do more than merely inform the value system inherent in "Genesis B." They create it. This is not to say that the poem is not religious, only that its religiosity is structured by an ethos which was present and thrived for years before Augustine of Canterbury was even born. And since we know that the poem itself dates from the tenth century, we also know that the ethos of the comitatus was vibrant enough to be comprehended and revered three hundred years after he died.

"The Dream of the Rood"

Yet, perhaps the examination of "Genesis B" is not a great enough test. The idea of an all-powerful spiritual dryhten may not have been all that difficult for the Anglo-Saxons to accept, since they understood the value of a temporal dryhten all too well. But what happens when that spiritual lord, in Anglo-Saxon terms, fails? How do the Anglo-Saxons go about explaining and interpreting Calvary? If the Anglo-Saxons structured Christian thought around
their already existing Germanic ideals, the story of key interest would not be one which portrays God as an all-powerful victor. It is the reinterpretation of the crucifixion\textsuperscript{12} which will be the test, because the crucifixion is the least likely of any of the aspects of the Christian God's existence which the Anglo-Saxons would have sympathized with.

The thought of allowing enemies to nail one to a cross without making even the slightest effort to fight back must have, at its barest essence, been totally abhorrent to the Anglo-Saxons. What kind of mighty lord would allow this? Yet, the Anglo-Saxons did not choose to ignore the death of Christ; far from it; indeed, it is exquisitely celebrated in "The Dream of the Rood."

"The Dream of the Rood" is the earliest example of the "dream vision" (which encompasses other medieval works such as \textit{Piers Plowman} and "Pearl").\textsuperscript{13} In "The Dream of the Rood," the narrator tells of his "swefna cyst" ("best of dreams" \textsuperscript{1}), that of a cross, the cross which Christ himself was crucified on. The cross begins to speak, taking over the narrative, describing its own origin in a forest and then, in detail, the actual crucifixion and the occurrences afterwards.\textsuperscript{14}

The story of the crucifixion is transformed, however, and Christ himself transformed, from a symbol of suffering and anguish into a symbol of triumph.\textsuperscript{15} There are probably
not many who would question this point. Carol Jean Wolf has argued from this perspective, pointing out that the crucifixion itself is a "heroic conflict" (204) in which "the Redeemer exhibits the heroic attitudes of resolution and boldness" (206). So I am certainly not alone in my assessment of the poem as a synthesis of the Germanic and Christian value systems.

My examination of "The Dream of the Rood," however, contains an analysis of one particular aspect which has often been overlooked—that of the cross itself and its depiction as a weapon, specifically as the sword of Christ. Before we can move into that territory, though, we must first deal with the basics: Christ's status as a hero and the Cross' and the dreamer's status as his thane.

Within "The Dream of the Rood," Jesus embodies the ideal qualities of a hero and lord, and the dreamer and the cross are presented as akin to thanes of God, much as Adam and Eve were presented as his thanes. Thus, the three central characters in this poem are presented in terms of the comitatus, and Anglo-Saxon ideals of lordship and thaneship.

The cross, who is the most complex and difficult character in the poem, must be analyzed from three different perspectives: as Christ's thane, as Christ's destroyer, and as that with which Christ conquers. All three elements are tied firmly to the relationships inherent in the comitatus.
To bring this out, the following argument will move in two stages. First, through an examination of the terminology used to describe Christ, as well as his employment of the cross as a weapon, it will be shown that Christ's actions are in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon concept of the heroic ideal. Next, the cross and its dual status as both the thane and the destroyer of Christ will be discussed, and how necessary is a full understanding of the comitatus in order to appreciate the dichotomy.

The central scene in "The Dream of the Rood" relevant to my argument is, of course, the crucifixion. Yet, before I examine it, it seems appropriate to offer the example of a crucifixion scene (from the Douay-Rheims bible) as presented in one of the four Gospels, for only then can we see how truly extrapolatory the Anglo-Saxon version is:

33 And they came to the place that is called Golgotha, which is, the place of Cavalry.

34 And they gave him wine to drink, mingled with gall. And when he had tasted, he would not drink.

35 And after they had crucified him, they divided his garments, casting lots;

(Matthew 27:33-35)

Compare that biblical account of the crucifixion of Christ with the rood's description:
I saw the Lord of mankind rushing with
great zeal that he would climb up on me.
There I did not dare, over the word of
the Lord, to bend or burst when I saw
the surfaces of the earth trembling. I
was able to fell all enemies, but I
stood fast. The young warrior unclothed
himself—that was almighty God—strong and
firm-minded. He mounted on the high
gallows, courageous in the sight of many,
because he would redeem mankind.

Obviously, the gospel account of the crucifixion and the
Germanic "reinterpretation" differ greatly. In fact, the
gospel account focuses more on the crucifiers than the
crucified. Indeed, that description of the crucifixion
focus mostly on their actions, not the actions of Jesus.
Though of course Jesus' suffering and death is supposed to redeem mankind, in the bible he is not specifically the "agent" of any of the activity. He is described as a willing but passive recipient of the hostile intent of others.

In "The Dream of the Rood," however, Jesus "efstan elne micle" ("rushes with great zeal") to climb up on the cross. He is "strang and stib-mod" (strong and firm-minded), as he strips himself, then mounts and grasps the cross boldly and resolutely. Here Christ is far more a warrior at battle than a man being led to his own slaughter. This particular crux has not escaped the attention of critics. Expounding upon the nature of Christ-as-Germanic-hero is an area which many critics have attended to. Therefore, it seems apropos to focus this argument on one particular aspect of the hero-Christ which has often been neglected—that of the cross itself and its depiction as a weapon, specifically Christ's sword. How does the cross manifest itself as a weapon in "The Dream of the Rood?" Some interesting parallels can be noted between the rood/sword and descriptions of other swords, particularly the sword which Beowulf finds at the bottom of the mere when he fights Grendel's mother.

The words used to describe the rood are either identical or akin to the words used to describe a war sword. The rood is "se sigebeam" ("victory beam") on lines 13 and
127 (the opening and closing passages of the poem) and "mid since gegierwed" ("adorned with treasure") on line 23. Compare these words to the ones used to describe the sword used by Beowulf to kill Grendel's mother; that sword is a "sigeeadig bil" ("victory blessed sword"), and is "since fage" ("jewel shining" 1557, 1615).

The most stellar evidence, however, for the cross-as-sword identification comes on lines 37-38 in "The Dream of the Rood," when the cross speaks of its ability in battle. It is here that the cross states "Ealle ic meahte/feondas gefiellan"—"I was able to cut down (infinitive form, emphasis mine) all of the enemies." Gefiellan (also seen as "fiellan" and "feallan"—the meanings being similar) is a verb closely connected with warfare and killing. It is found most in poems like "The Battle of Maldon" (in which it is used no less than eight times), where opposing sides are literally slaughtering each other left and right. Of course it is redundant to state that these people were being slaughtered, for the most part, by swords.

One of the functions of the rood, then, is to serve as Christ's sword. Literally, the cross not only resembles a sword in appearance, but it functions as a sword as well. The representation of the rood as a sword meshes with Christ's spiritual mission; the cross is the "weapon" by which Christ achieves the redemption of mankind. By describing the cross as a sword, the poet of "The Dream of
the Rood" is able to transform Christ into a warrior, actively embracing the instrument of his own death, which is also the instrument, in Christian terms, of mankind's redemption.20

This Anglo-Saxonized Christ has been nurtured on the hero-ideal, which is in turn nurtured by the comitatus. Yet, unquestionably the Christ of "The Dream of the Rood" is a unique case; unlike temporal heroes, Christ does not short-sightedly seek to achieve goals which will enrich his glory and fame but cause harm to the comitatus itself (as Beowulf did when he insisted on fighting the dragon, and fighting him alone). Christ's comitatus, which is comprised of all of mankind, will be fortified by his sacrifice.

Yet, Christ is more than just a hero within "The Dream of the Rood," and thus his connection with the ethos of the comitatus runs deeper than that. He is also a lord, the Lord, in fact, and his status as a deity does not preclude him from having many characteristics of a temporal lord, as Lee asserts:

the young hælæð [Hero, Warrior, Man]
is the figure of the heroic Dryhten
par excellence, strong, resolute, and
eager for battle. (178)

Appropriately enough, Christ also has a hall and thanes. According to the dreamer's perception of it, heaven itself is a hall, with God presiding over it as Hrothgar
presided over Heorot. In heaven "Dryhtnes folc/geseted
to symble ("The Lord's folk are seated at the feast"
140b-141a). The rejoicing and merrymaking in heaven are
reminiscent of the rejoicing in a mead-hall. The dreamer
wants to be set there, where he can dwell in bliss and
glory.

Christ indeed has thanes as well. The people who
recover the cross, after it has been buried in the pit, are,
by the description of the cross itself, "Dryhtnes pegnas"
("thanes of the Lord" 75). Yet, the foremost thane of
all—and in this stroke resides much of the poem's brilliance
and originality—is the rood himself.

The rood acts as Christ's thane in many respects.
Firstly, he wishes to protect Christ from the enemies who
would harm him. Secondly, when it is apparent that Christ
does not wish interference, the rood is bound by his will,
and obeys. Lastly, when Christ has died, the rood mourns
the loss as deeply as a human thane would grieve the loss of
a temporal lord.

The rood states a number of times, explicitly and
implicitly, that it wished to defend Christ from his
crucifiers. "Ealla ic meahte/feondas gefiellan" ("I was
able to cut down all enemies" 37b-38a) the rood says. He
did not harm the enemies, not because he did not want to or
was incapable, but because he did not dare to. He did not
dare to because Christ's word prevented him from doing so.
To fell the enemies, to harm any of them or to bow to the ground, would be to act "ofer Dryhtnes word" ("over the word of the lord" 35b), to do something that his lord had commanded him not to do. In his wish to protect and serve Christ by killing Christ's enemies, and his obedience to Christ's word, the rood's motivation and behavior is identical to that of a human thane with a human lord to serve.22 The rood's loyal thaneship persists even after Christ has died. First, the cross mourns his lord bitterly. The rood is "mid sorgum gedrefed" ("afflicted with sorrow" 59a), and, once Christ has been laid to rest, the cross (along with the other crosses left alone on the hill) weeps.

Yet, we cannot fully comprehend the terrible agony of the cross unless we view his predicament as filtered through the expectations of the comitatus, that is, the expectations of every good thane. The cross, a thane of Christ, is literally the killer of his own lord. On line 66 the cross even refers to himself as "banan," or slayer. It is the duty of every thane to protect and obey his lord. Yet, if the rood had protected Christ, he would have been disobedient. So the rood did not disobey the word of his lord, yet that word forced him into becoming the instrument by which his lord was killed.

It is through an understanding of the thane/lord bond which is the basis for the comitatus that we come to appreciate the dual nature of the rood, and the glory and
torment which subsist in him equally and in turn. The vacillation of the rood between being drenched in blood and covered in jewels is not a mere reflection of Christ's physical struggle and his glorious victory, or, as Huppé explains, "the mysterious duality of the passion where anguish and triumph are united" (78). It is not simply a reflection of the dualistic nature of Christ. The wounds and the jewels are also representative of the rood's dualistic relationship with his lord. In pain, injured and bleeding, the cross is the instrument of his lord's death, a reminder that as a thane he failed in his duty to protect him. Shining and adorned with treasure, he is the obedient thane who despite his wish to help his lord, refused to disobey Christ's orders, and thus became his greatest servant. The rood becomes Christ's weapon in that he is the instrument of the world's salvation.\footnote{23}

Conclusion

One would expect to find the ideals of the comitatus valorized and reflected in the heroic, secular literature of the Anglo-Saxons. Yet, into the heart of the most biblical and Christian stories, the fall of man and his ultimate redemption, the Anglo-Saxons still breathed the ethos of the warrior band, poetically expressing the temptation and salvation of mankind in terms they could most identify with.
and understand. Where the idea of the Germanic comitatus does not exist, they impose it. We must take this understanding into the discussion of the elegies when we see what happens to those who desire the comitatus but are denied it.
Notes

1. There is some diversity of critical opinion as to which Old Saxon text is the source for "Genesis B." For extended discussions of the questions of source and dating, see Timmer's introduction to his edition of the poem (43-50), and Irving (1959).

2. Thomas Hill sees "Genesis B" in exegetical terms, believing that the fall of the angels is an example of "Promethean overreaching" and that man's fall is a "subversion of hierarchy."

3. Woolf (1968) devotes attention to the devil as a "morpes brytta" (giver of torment or murder) rather than a "sinces brytta" (giver of treasure), and contrasts his almost exultant mood in "Genesis B" with his status as exile in most of the other poems in which he appears.

4. In his 1967 essay, "The Self-Deception of Temptation: Boethian Psychology in 'Genesis B'," Alain Renoir has extrapolated most notably on the nature of Satan's comitatus, and Satan's motivation. He argues that Satan's comitatus is "a pathetic parody of its model" (54), which is of course the comitatus of heaven. When Satan offers a seat near him to the one who can accomplish his mission, that action is the offering of a share in the deepest pit of hell, in contrast with the Lord's offer to Satan of a share of heaven.

5. The sign for "and" (7) as used in the poem will be represented henceforth with the right carat.

6. Evans also explicitly ties the "Genesis B" poet's alteration and elongation of the story of the fall of man to the expectations of an audience familiar with the Germanic epic. According to Evans, that audience would expect to be told why the devil tempted man, why Eve believed him, why she tempted her husband, and why he succumbed, yet these are the points which Genesis has left in obscurity. (119)

7. Renoir, (1967) too, notices the peculiarity of the messenger's offer amidst the fulfillment of Eden. Renoir, however, believes that the messenger's rhetoric belies his own desire for the heaven that he has lost. According to Renoir, the questions do not apply to Adam; they are
reflective of what the messenger wants.

8. Ehrhart de-emphasizes the role of the comitatus, believing that Adam and Eve are more akin to "disciples listening to the wrong teacher" (435).

9. Vickrey and Woolf (1963) diverge from the general critical opinion that (because Adam and Eve seem to by trying to obey their lord) the poem exonerates Adam and Eve for the fall.

10. Belanoff points out that "Satan appeals to her maternal instinct to protect her children" (824), but Belanoff does not (as it is not within the scope of her thesis) explore this issue in depth. Klink also briefly notes Eve's concern for her future children.

11. Cherewatuk aligns the physical posture of Adam and Eve with their moral posture—when they are obedient to God they stand upright; when they fall prey to Satan (as Eve does here), their posture becomes twisted.

12. For a reading of "The Dream of the Rood" in context with other medieval poems of the crucifixion, see Burrow.

13. "The Dream of the Rood" is one of the few Anglo-Saxon poems that we can assign a general date to; at least part of it must have been composed by 750, since a fragment of the poem survives, in runic characters, on the early eighth-century Ruthwell cross in Dumfreisshire, Scotland. For general and varied information on the Ruthwell cross, see Shapiro and Mercer. For a study of the symbol of the cross as a sign of personal devotion, cosmological symbol, and tool for pilgrimage (in the context of Anglo-Saxon England), see McEntire. For descriptive and pictorial information on both the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses, see Farrell.

14. For a study of the rood as a prosopopoetic device, see Schlauch.

15. For a reading of "The Dream of the Rood" as having "distinct affinities with the book of Job" (87), see Bolton (1980).

16. For further discussion of the Christ as a hero approaching battle, see also Macrae-Gibson and Dubbs.

17. Leiter sees the stripping of Christ and the adorning of the Cross metaphorically, as showing that "it is necessary to strip off the old man Adam and ritualistically adorn oneself with the Cross in order to release the new man Jesus Christ from his enthrallment in the dark prison of the human heart" (107).
18. For a thorough catalogue of heroic phrases used in "The Dream of the Rood," see Diamond.

19. Though the physical resemblance between a cross and a sword is not necessary to understanding Christ's relationship to the rood as such, still it is interesting to point out that a cross does resemble an inverted sword, the point thrust into the ground and the shoulder-span of the cross forming the hilt.

20. In "Doctrinal Influences on 'The Dream of the Rood'," Rosemary Woolf asserts that the poem represents an Anglo-Saxon attempt at coming to grips with a medieval area of dispute: the dualistic nature of Christ, that of victor and sufferer, represented by the young hero who ascends the cross and the cross itself (the view that the Cross serves as a Christ surrogate is not employed only by her—see Patten). Yet, another motive seems far more logical. Instead of concerning himself with an intense and widespread medieval debate on a theological issue such as the dualistic nature of Christ, the poet of "The Dream of the Rood," rooted in an understanding of the comitatus and the heroic ideal, instead recreated and transformed Christ's "defeat" into a glorious victory.

21. The characterization of heaven as a mead-hall, inhabited by God and his angelic comitatus, is by no means unique to "The Dream of the Rood" or to "Genesis B." See also "Genesis A" 15-18, and "Christ and Satan" 236-241.

22. There are those who might question that the rood's obedience automatically classifies him as a good thane; after all, Beowulf's thanes were being perfectly obedient when they stayed out of the fight with the dragon. Yet, their true motivation was not obedience, but their own self-serving cowardice (much as Beowulf's motive was a self-serving desire for glory). The cross truly wishes to fight for his lord, yet Christ's will (which is altruistic and not egocentric) restrains him.

23. Canuteson believes that the cross personifies the church (as the bride of Christ), since it "exhibits a feminine submission" (294). Yet, Canuteson mistakenly identifies the rood's inaction as passivity. Can the torment of the rood as he struggles with his duty to protect his lord and obey the word of his lord truly be defined as passive?
Chapter IV
The Pattern of the Void:
The Vanished Comitatus in the Elegies

Introduction

Alan Renoir (1981) postulates that the lesson of the Anglo-Saxon elegies is that "there is absolutely no future for us in this world" (71). Yet, the elegaic speakers of the Exeter Book are consistently identified not in terms of their prospective heavenly existence (indeed, some elegies do not even make mention of God or heaven), but in terms of what they have lost, namely lord, protector, hearth companions, and secondarily, the other trappings of an earthly life. The main goal of this chapter is to prove that the thematic unity which binds the elegies is the loss of the comitatus, and that this loss cannot be expiated even by a stated desire for the transcendence of heaven.

The Old English elegies (namely "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," "The Riming Poem," "Deor," "Wulf and Eadwacer," "The Wife's Lament," "Resignation," "The Husband's Message," and "The Ruin") are fundamental in any assessment of the comitatus in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Paradoxically, it is within the framework of these poems, where the comitatus is conspicuously absent or even negated, that we can ascertain
much of its true importance. Indeed, the emotional turmoil expressed by the speakers over the loss of the comitatus is the prime elegaic conflict.¹ Perhaps Renoir is right. Perhaps there is no future in this world for the elegaic speakers. Yet, this world is what they desire.

Before we proceed any further we should ask "What is an elegy?" Anyone familiar with Anglo-Saxon scholarship knows that the Old English elegy as a genre has been notoriously resistant to definition. In 1942, Timmer asserted that the Anglo-Saxon elegy was characterized by "the personal loss of the lord, the exile, the transitoriness of life, the comparison of former luck to present ill luck", yet even he believed only "The Wife's Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer" were pure elegies. Despite the difficulty of categorization, few if any critics would deny that most of the elegies share in common the theme of exile: that is, a state of being in which the speaker is deprived of a home, lord, and comitatus. On the other hand, whether that deprivation should be construed as literal, metaphorical, spiritual, or any combination of the three is entirely open to dispute. Timmer's component of personal loss must also be stressed here, since the elegies seem to give specific vent to the almost confessionally desolate experiences of the individual.

Criticism on the poems continues to be fraught with endless refinements and sub-categories as to genre. Is "The
Wanderer" a consolatio, or a planctus? Perhaps the wanderer himself is an Anglo-Saxon seer (wuðbora).² Warning against the reductiveness of such a scheme, Greenfield urges, in *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, that critics "stop trying to impose our perspectives of generic commonality upon them" (281), and separates the poems into only two groups: those which deal with human misfortunes as "concomitants of temporal existence," and those which deal with "patterns of concord and discord in the relations between men and women" (291).

This is a logical division, and one which I will follow to some extent myself. However, I wish to organize my discussion of the elegies around questions of speaker and dramatic context. This perspective will offer a fuller perception of the ethos of the comitatus in relation to the elegies. Poems like "The Seafarer," "The Wife's Lament," and "Deor" all are all generally felt to be elegaic, yet their speakers do not share the same perspective or environment. And though each speaker is elegaically "deprived," there are diverse reasons for his or her respective deprivation. The seafarer, in the poem named after him, seemingly has cast himself out of his comitatus in search of a more transcendent existence. The wife in "The Wife's Lament" has been thrust into exile involuntarily as a secondary effect of the exile of her husband. Deor, a scop, is displaced in his lord's affections when a better
singer is found. Assessing the poems in terms of speaker and dramatic context allows us to perceive not only the similarities in those speakers and their contexts, but the differences. For though the elegies share many characteristics, they are not carbon copies of one another. The common bond is the longing for the comitatus, which structures the misery of every speaker.

Most of the elegaic speakers are men, cut off from the structure of a traditional comitatus, yet the comitatus can be found even in the elegies spoken by or immediately concerning women, who are deprived of their own husband/lord. A discussion of the elegies which concern inter-gender relationships should come first, for when we move to the elegies where the presence of women is less immediate, we will have added insight into how the exile of the male impacts upon the sphere of the female. My analysis will then move to a concluding assessment of "The Seafarer," the most difficult of the elegies to interpret in terms of my thesis, since it is precisely the earthly values of the comitatus that the seafarer himself seriously claims to repudiate.³

The "patterns of concord" and "patterns of discord" (as Greenfield calls them) between men and women are defined and shaped, I believe, through either the unity or the disruption of the comitatus. In other words, if all is well
in the comitatus, all can be well between man and woman. Otherwise harmony is impossible.

"The Wife's Lament"

The issues of speaker and dramatic context come into sharp relief when we focus on any of the elegies, and "The Wife's Lament," though not the most difficult to interpret in those respects, still presents the reader with many thorny problems. The poem is decidedly obscure on many accounts. Is the wife's husband responsible for sending her away, or is her suffering merely a by-product of his exile? Are the closing lines a curse against the one responsible for her suffering (whether that be the husband or the unnamed kinsman), or a gnomic passage which denotes her transcendence of her immediate situation and comments upon the fate of exiles everywhere? Indeed, some critics have gone so far as to speculate that the wife herself is not human, or is even, in fact, dead. Illustrative of this critical trend is the argument set forth by Bambas, who argues that the speaker of this elegy is not a woman at all but a man, mourning the loss of not a lord-and-husband but merely a lord. Bambas' argument, however, requires that we reinterpret the feminine inflected endings of such words as "geomorre," "minre," and "sylfre" in terms of a masculine speaker, a demand which begins to stretch credulity.
Despite all of these imaginative speculations, the most natural and unforced reading takes the speaker of "The Wife's Lament" to be an actual physical woman, not a man or ghost or goddess. The poem may offer the possibilities of those alternate interpretations, but there is no evidence to prove any of them. When faced with a plethora of diversely variant positions, it is most reasonable to accept the one that does not impose too many extraneous assumptions. In this case, it also happens to be the common ground of most critical interpretations.

Many critics, agreeing that the speaker is a woman, seek to find precise ways of explaining her predicament, the exact "who-what-where" of her desolate state. I would myself like to suggest a very simple alternative, which does not necessarily obviate the need for such interpretations, but rather sets those interpretations in a different framework. We must view the wife's situation in the elegaic context of the loss of the comitatus,\textsuperscript{10} for it is only within that context that any interpretation seems to make sense. The wife's misery is two-fold: she has lost her own lord (to whom she was, figuratively speaking, a thane), which thus makes her an exile,\textsuperscript{11} and she mourns his suffering over his similar deprivation. I wish to show that the speaker of "The Wife's Lament" suffers as a result of losing her comitatus, even though as a woman she could never have been a traditional member of that group.
The first step here will be to illustrate the wife's status within the poem as a "thane" to her lord, who is also her husband. As I have tried to show in a previous chapter, the "comitatus" of the female in Anglo-Saxon society did not revolve around a lord and his hall, but rather around the kinship group and the family unit. However, the terms of expression concerning this kinship group were similar to the terms used to describe the workings of the traditional comitatus. As the thane had his lord, the wife had her husband, also described as her "lord." Let us examine in detail how this relationship manifests within "The Wife's Lament".  

The language at several points within the poem suggests that the wife's relationship to her husband within "The Wife's Lament" is indeed akin to the relationship of a thane to a lord. For example, the wife names her husband as her lord more than once, calling him "min hlaford" (6, 15) and "min leodfruma" (8), and referring to his exile as "fromsil? frean" ("the journey of my lord" 33). Their relationship echoes the thane/lord bond in other ways as well. The wife and her husband have made pledges of devotion to one another (21-23a), for example, and the wife leaves her home because "Het mec hlaford min" ("my lord commanded me" 15). These pledges of devotion, and the obedience of the wife to her husband, are very significant; even if the wife did not name her husband specifically as her lord, we would be able to
assume such a connection in light of the way she describes their relationship.

It is in the terms of both the notion and the ramifications of exile, however, that the full correlation is developed. In other elegies we clearly see how the deprivation of a lord through death or exile causes the thane to become an outcast. Since the "lord" of an Anglo-Saxon wife was her husband, his state of exile leaves her in a similar predicament. She, too, is without a lord. The woman in "The Wife's Lament" wanders leaderless, her own exile brought upon her by the outcast state of her husband.

The outcast state of her husband, though, is not the major concern of this poem. It is the state of the wife which demands our attention, and that state is expressed in the paradigmatic terms of the traditional male exile. The wife's predicament is illustrated by this passage:

Frynd sind on eorðan,
loefe lifgende, leger weardiaþ,
þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
under actreo geond pas eorðscrafu.
þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg,
þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsipas,
earfopa fela; forþon ic æfre ne mæg
þære modceare minre gerestan,
ne ealles þæs longapes pe mec on þissum life begeat.
Friends are on the earth, valued living friends. They have beds. Yet I at dawn travel alone under the oak tree through this cave-dwelling. I must sit there through the long summer day, where I can weep my exile, my many difficulties, because I cannot ever soothe my mind-care, nor all those longings which I have received in this life.

The wife's plight, as designated in this passage, falls neatly into what Greenfield (1955) calls "four aspects or concomitants of the exile state" (354), aspects which apply to all exiles in one way or another: status, deprivation, state of mind, and movement into exile. The wife is, regarding her status, an exile. She specifically mourns her "wræcsipa" (5b). Though Gordon interprets this word to mean "misery," Hall's definition, in A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, lists "exile" and "journey of exile" definitions as well ("journey of exile" seems most logical, since "wræcsiðas" combines "wræcca" and "sīþ"). In addition to this particular instance, the word "wræcsiða" is used on line 5 as well. The wife also pointedly describes herself as a "wineleas wræcca" on line 10.

In addition to (or as a result of) her status as an exile, the wife is also very obviously deprived. Of course, she is deprived first and foremost of her husband, but she is also deprived of her friends, and the simple pleasures
which her friends enjoy, specifically a bed to sleep in as opposed to a cave. This state of deprivation, of being in an unfriendly landscape without simple comforts of civilized existence (specifically warmth and shelter) is characteristic throughout the elegies, and the wife's situation is no different:

\[
\begin{align*}
sindon \ & \ dena \ \ dimme, \quad duna \ \ uphea, \\
bitre \ & \ burgtunas, \quad brerum \ \ beweaxne, \\
wic \ & \ wynna \ \ leas.
\end{align*}
\]

(30-32b)

the valleys are dark, the moors high, the grim cities wound with brambles, the houses joyless.

The wife's existence in her own landscape is just as dismal as in the cases of any male exile, such as the wanderer, or the seafarer, or her own husband. The natural world is not kind to her.

As for her state of mind, she herself complains of her mournful state, and her inability to assuage her "modceare" ("mindcare" 51a). Lastly, concerning Greenfield's fourth element, an explanation of her movement into exile can be found in my previous interpretation of the word "wraecsipas" ("exile journey") and the wife's earlier statement that she has "feran gewat" ("set out" 9).

The implied husband in this poem has been exiled because of an intrigue within the comitatus (his kinsman
conspired against them "purh dyrne gepoht" ("through secret thought" 12a), and has gone "heonon of leodum/ofer ypa gelac" ("hence from his people, over the binding of the waves" 6b-7a). This is a common topos within the elegies. "The Wife's Lament", however, illustrates the echo effects of exile on a wife who is deprived of her own lord and comitatus, which consists not of the men at the mead-hall but of a husband, friends, and her dwelling (his home) away from that hall. She herself becomes an exile, and her experiences in that state are equally unpleasant. In terms of "The Wife's Lament," we can see that the exile of a thane, and the resulting loss of his comitatus, has a profound effect not only on the thane himself but on those around him. As Rissanen has shown, the wife's experience is reflected through her adherence to the traditional exilic paradigms of behavior. Yet, though her tribulations are given expression through the formulaic concepts of male exile (which implies the loss of the comitatus), this expression is slightly refocused to reflect the female experience in regard to that exile. The refocusing centers around her relationship with her husband, not a "traditional" lord.

From the preceding discussion two points should be clear: first, that the wife is indeed the paradigmatic exile, and second, that this status is caused not by anything of her own doing but by the exile of her husband.
She must bear the thought of his exile as well, along with the knowledge that his status is the cause of her own. The question I wish to address here is what, in the end, does the wife's special perspective imply about the importance of the comitatus?

"The Wife's Lament" defines the vital importance of the traditional comitatus in a very basic way: the need for a man to have a hall and a lord is not specific unto himself, or his personal needs and wants, but it impacts dramatically on the stability of his home life as well. The wife could not function in her sphere, with her "comitatus"—which consists of her lord and her friends and companions—if he was not permitted to function in his. Viewed in this light, "The Wife's Lament" reflects back again onto the situation of the traditional male exile; even in cases where there is little mention of a wife or a companion, we can assume the situation of "The Wife's Lament" as another subtext of the exile's misery—any exile who has a wife has a wife who must most likely suffer the consequences along with him (or rather apart from him). Once a thane is deprived of his comitatus, everything breaks down.

The resounding confirmation of the inherent necessity and value of the comitatus found in poems like "The Wife's Lament" and "The Husband's Message" will be important to keep in mind once we begin to analyze "The Wanderer" and
"The Seafarer," where the speaker's understanding and need for the comitatus becomes more problematic.

"The Husband's Message"

"The Wife's Lament" alerts us to the misery and deprivation that is possible for a wife when her husband becomes an exile. Thus, even though the wife in "The Husband's Message" never speaks (in fact her very existence is only implied), we must infer that she too suffers as a result of her husband's exile. We cannot know for sure if she suffers to the same degree as the wife in "The Wife's Lament," since the poem is not from her perspective; we must make our inferences from the fact that the "eald gebeot" ("old threat" 48a) which drove the husband away was against the both of them, not just against him.

The similarities of the two poems are obvious: both deal with couples separated as a result of the husband's exile. In fact, many critics have postulated that "The Husband's Message" is a response to "The Wife's Lament."13 "The Husband's Message," however, is decidedly more optimistic in tone.14 In "The Husband's Message," the wife is presented with the possibility of being reunited with her husband, the promise of an end to their exile, and the reforging of the bonds of their personal "comitatus" within the more traditional comitatus in which the husband has
found a new home. In tandem with that, the messenger who speaks directly to the wife is presented as a thane of the wife's husband. My goal in discussing this elegy will be to analyze how the prospective ends to the exiles of the husband and his wife, seen through the promises which the husband makes to the wife via his thane/messenger, bear on the importance of the comitatus.

The "husband's message" in this poem, relayed not firsthand but by a messenger, calls the implied wife within the poem to join her husband in the far land where he has found new success in spite of his previous exile. The difficulty in interpreting "The Husband's Message," and the vortex around which much scholarly criticism revolves, concerns not the situation described above (since most critics are agreed on that), but the identity of the speaker, who is, unlike the other elegaic speakers, only a messenger and not an intimately involved party to the situation. Is the speaker/messenger a human or the actual tangible message itself? The damaged state of the manuscript only complicates the situation.

The persona of the messenger, though inherently of interest, is not vital to my argument concerning "The Husband's Message," since in either case, the relationship of the message/messenger to it/his lord only intensifies the central importance of the comitatus in relation to this poem. The speaker's status as a thane of the lord who sent
the message is obvious, whether we consider the speaker as human or non human. The structure of the comitatus is implicit in the relationship of the messenger (whether human or no) to the husband, since the messenger describes him as "mec mondryhten" ("my manlord" 7) and "mines frean" ("my lord" 9), and does his friendly lord's bidding.

Nonetheless, I believe the intensity of the expression of the comitatus ethic within the poem is reinforced more strongly if we see the message itself as the "speaker" (of course if that is so we must assume that the recipient reads the message; the wood cannot truly "speak"). There is a good deal of solid and circumstantial evidence to support this view. If we consider the message as "speaker," we must also consider that this ethic is strong enough to permeate not only human relationships, but also the relationships of humans to items that are inhuman, or not alive at all. Even a mere piece of wood can do service to his "lord."

It is not unusual at all, if we examine other examples of Anglo-Saxon poetry, for an inanimate object to perform service to a human lord. Neither is it unusual to find the bond between thane and lord, fundamental to the comitatus, given explicit expression within that human/non-human relationship. The riddles provide the best example of this. In riddle 20, a sword speaks as if it were a thane, saying it is "frean minum leof" ("beloved to my lord" 2a). In
riddle 21, we see the lord/thane relationship again between the human and the inanimate, when a plow describes its driver on line 15b as "þæt bīp hlaford min" ("he who is my lord").

Thus, if we do assume that the speaker of "The Husband's Message" is the message itself, it certainly would not be the first time that we find aspects of the human comitatus superimposed and incorporated into dealings with non-human subjects. The personification of inanimate objects, and giving those objects voice, is a common occurrence in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

There is also another factor involved which bears directly on the speaker of "The Husband's Message." Often within the context of the riddles, as well as in a poem like "The Dream of the Rood," the speaker/object begins with or includes an account of its creation. The rood initiates its account of the crucifixion by describing how it was "ahewen holtes on ende/astyred of sefne minum" ("hewn down from the edge of the forest, removed from my trunk" 29a-30a). In riddle 26, a book speaks not only of the paper-making process, but describes how men bound it and "gierede mec mid goldum" ("covered me with gold" 13). The first few lines of "The Husband's Message," obscure as a result of damage to the manuscript, still offer a clue which could influence us to think that the speaker is indeed the inanimate message instead of a human. These lines describe the lineage of the
speaker, who "treocyn (ic) tudre aweox" ("I grew up as a tree" 2). The similarity to the opening lines of the rood's speech, which also speaks of its original status as a tree, cannot be ignored.

The central drama of "The Husband's Message," however, concerns not the identity of the messenger, but the relationship between the wife and the husband, separated by his exile. The messenger is only a third party to the experiences of the husband and the wife, even though it is only through his/its eyes that we can interpret their relationship. The representation of the wife within the poem as a thane (much as the wife in "The Wife's Lament" is represented), however, is a complicating factor. In terms of this elegy's reflection on the notion of the comitatus, the dramatic interchange between the husband and the wife is more difficult because everything is filtered through the messenger.

Even though they are represented by a third party, however, the relationship between the wife and the husband as described in this poem once again outlines not only the importance of the traditional male comitatus, but of the female in relation to it. The ultimate "dramatic context" within this poem, then, is not the immediate context of the speaker, but the context implied by his message.

As in "The Wife's Lament," once again lovers are separated by the husband's exile, an exile which takes both
husbands over the sea. In "The Husband's Message," the man is driven by "fæhbo" ("feud" 19), and must "faran on flotweg" ("travel on the floodway" 42). Each husband also is afflicted with the miseries of exile. In "The Wife's Lament," the exiled husband must

... siteð
under stanhlipe  storme behrimed,
wine werigmod,  wætre beflowen
on dreorsele.

(47b-50a)
sit under the stony cliff,
my weary minded friend, covered with
storm frost; water flows around the
dreary hall.

"The Husband's Message" is not as precise in its description of the misery of exile; it focuses more upon the happy termination of that state. However, the husband in "The Husband's Message" has endured the hardship of exile, and we know this because "se man hafað/wean oferwunnen" ("the man has overcome trouble" 43b-44a).

As in "The Wife's Lament," the domino effect of the exile of the husband upon the wife is also of paramount importance. His exile affects her with equal strength; though the wife implicit in "The Husband's Message" is never seen, her suffering must be taken for granted. The husband, however, has overcome his miseries. Implied in the message
of the husband is an invitation for her to overcome her woe as well, and transcend the harmful "gebeot" by joining him.

Yet, the dramatic contexts of "The Wife's Lament" and "The Husband's Message" differ in very fundamental respects. The woman in "The Wife's Lament" lives in desolation. Her lord is exiled and there seems no hope for her, or for him. Within the framework of that poem, the importance of the comitatus is found in the reaction to its absence. In "The Husband's Message," however, we are faced with the implications of its renewed presence. The husband has once again placed himself within the bosom of the comitatus. He is, in fact, a lord with many "secgum ond gesiðum" ("men and retainers" 34a). Within this poem, it is not loss and exile which define the importance of the comitatus, but the promises to the wife of her life to come as part (not apart) of that structure. We see what can happen when a woman and man become exiles no longer.

Much as Wealhtheow aided Hrothgar in Heorot within the epic-heroic context of Beowulf, the wife in "The Husband's Message" is promised that she too will participate in the ring-giving ceremony, which itself cements the bonds of the comitatus. The manuscript is a bit corrupt here, but not enough to obscure the overall meaning:

```
Ne mæg him worulde willa gelimpan
mara on gemyndum, þæs þe he me sægde,
þonne inc geunne alwaldend god
```
Nor can to him in the world a wish occur more in his mind, than that which he has said to me, that the Almighty God grant you two together that you will afterwards be able (to give) beaten rings to warriors and retainers.

The new lord's home, too, fulfills the ideal of the comitatus; he is a ring-giver, with heroes waiting on him, and he seems to lack for nothing:

nis him wilna gad,
ne meara ne maðma ne meododreama,
æges ofer eorþan eorlgestreona,

He does not lack in any of his desires, not horses, nor treasure, nor mead-joys, nor anything of precious things over the earth.

The feud that has driven the husband away from his wife is no longer of as much importance; he is now a lord himself in a new land, and he desires his wife to come when the cuckoo calls, for he lives to see her.
Though the husband's central concern within the poem is to be reunited with his wife, we cannot simply read "The Husband's Message" as the plaintive call of a man for his beloved. Certainly that element cannot be ignored, but the first necessity, before the husband can even begin to think of regaining his wife, is the re-establishment of the ties of the comitatus. The dramatic context of this poem is the relationship of a man and a woman, and the prospect of an end to their separation and exile. The dramatic "subcontext" of this poem is the importance that the structure of the comitatus has in alleviating their distress. Without the first and most basic element for happiness, the comitatus, both are lost, both "exiles."

"Wulf and Eadwacer"

"Of this I can make no sense," said Benjamin Thorpe in 1842. "This" is "Wulf and Eadwacer," the most obscure of any of the elegies. It was, for a time, even mistaken as the first riddle, due to its placement in the Exeter Book before the first group of riddles. The identities of Wulf and Eadwacer, and their relationship to the speaker, have been a continuing puzzle for critics, and there seems to be no hard and fast consensus, save for the assumption that there is one speaker, a female.
This is, however, nearly the only aspect of the poem which does not seem the subject of critical debate. Why is the speaker on an island? Who is Wulf and what is his relation to her people, or the bloodthirsty men? What, too, is the speaker's status with relation to her people and the bloodthirsty men? Is she a captive? Is she an exile? Who are Wulf and Eadwacer, and what are their respective relationships to the speaker of the poem? Are they the same person, perhaps? Is the "beaducafa" ("battle-bold one," 11) either or neither of them? Is there a child involved, and if so, whose is it? Does the sorrow of the speaker stem from a frustrated romantic relationship, or a frustrated maternal one? And just who else does the "us" refer to in the refrain?

Concerning "Wulf and Eadwacer," there is virtually no common ground from which to proceed critically. Unlike "The Wife's Lament" and "The Husband's Message," the complete and utter ambiguity of this poem demands a thoroughgoing analysis of textual problems and matters of literal and narrative sense as a preface to interpretation. There can be no coherent observations about the comitatus until we can come up with a feasible dramatic context with which to make them.

Since the poem is only nineteen lines long, perhaps it would be wise for the purposes of this discussion to present
it in its entirety, followed by my translation, and then move from there.

Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;
willæp hy hine apecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.

Ungelic is us.
Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.

5 Fæst is þæt englond, fenne biworþen.
Sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige;
willæ ðry hine apecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.

Ungelice is us.
Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode;

10 ponne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt
ponne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwærpre eac laþ.
Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine
seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,
murnende mod, nales meteliste.

Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earne hwelp bireð wulf to wuda.
Þæt mon eæþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
uncer giedd geador.

To my people, it is as if one gave them a gift.
They will feed him, if he comes to them wanting.

How different it is for us.
Wulf is on one island, I am on another.
That island is fortified, surrounded by marshes. Bloodthirsty men are on that island. They will kill him, if he comes to them wanting. How different it is for us.

With hope I endured the far travels of my Wulf, when the weather was rainy and I sat weeping. When the battle-bold one embraced me in his arms, it was pleasure to an extent, yet to me it was also pain.

Wulf, oh my Wulf! My hope for you, the seldomness of your comings, have made me weak, mournful of mind, and not wanting of food. Do you hear, guardian of my happiness? A wolf will bear our wretched cub to the forest. That one easily tears apart what was never joined together,

Our song together.

The first question one might pose of my translation is why I choose to interpret "afrecgan," occurring on both ll. 2 and 7, as "feed" and "kill" respectively. The word can be used in both senses, but why should it be used in both senses within one poem? The rationale for the differential rendering of the same word is contextual. Due to the difficulty of translating "lac" (gift? sacrifice? offering?), it would be wise to rationalize the second
stanza first, concerning why the men on "marshy island" want to kill Wulf. Then the interpretation of the first stanza becomes plainer.

The men on the fortified island, the narrator tells us, are "bloodthirsty." The dominant impression we get from the narrator's description of them is that they are killers, inhabiting their boggy stronghold of an island, just waiting for trespassers to venture in. In that context, it would seem to be twisting sense to interpret their designs on Wulf as anything less than violent. Bloodthirsty as they are, they most surely want to murder him.

If indeed we interpret "apecgan" of 1. 7 to mean "kill," then the intent of the narrator's people becomes somewhat clearer. Since the narrator's people are not openly described as hostile, as the men on the other island are, again, it would seem to be twisting sense to translate "lac" as "sacrifice," instead of its more common use: "gift."

So, we have presented to us, in the first lines of "Wulf and Eadwacer," a narrator describing the possible reactions of two separate peoples to the coming of a man named Wulf. Who is the "us," then, that she refers to? This is a complicated question. Many think that the "us" refers to the narrator and another man, named Eadwacer (hence the title). I would assert that it refers exclusively to the narrator and Wulf, and that it must
because Wulf, Eadwacer, and the "beaducafa" are all different terms referring to the same person.

Most scholars continue to assume that both "Wulf" and "Eadwacer" must be proper names. Yet, the evidence for this position proves to be less solid than it may seem. There is not sufficient reason to assume the existence of two "lovers" in the poem. We must recall, firstly, that "Wulf and Eadwacer" is a title imposed upon the text. The poems as they appear in the manuscript of the Exeter Book are untitled; they are distinguished from one another merely by capitalization. Most importantly, there is no capitalization within the poems themselves. In addition, the interpretive advantages of identifying Wulf and Eadwacer as one and the same are manifold. Gone is the battle over who the "beaducafa" is (unless one is of the mind that there are three men in the poem), and the paternity of the "earne hwelp" is solved as well.

Still, interpretive ease is not in itself a good enough reason to believe that they are the same person. But we need only examine the meaning of the word "eadwacer" to facilitate a reading which is both clear and reasonable. Divided into "ead" and "wacer," that word means "happiness guardian." Wulf is indeed the guardian of the speaker's happiness. When she specifically addresses Wulf, she speaks of him as bringing her both hope and sadness (13-15). In my view, "Wulf" is a proper noun, and "Eadwacer" a kenning for
that noun. This interpretation makes perfect sense when we consider the relationship that the speaker maintains with him, a relationship which brings her hope and pleasure, but also tests her endurance and causes her pain.

If Wulf and Eadwacer are the same person, then Wulf (for the purpose of clarity I will continue to refer this man, described so many ways, as "Wulf") must also be the "battle-bold man," and that interpretation fits as well. Intrinsic to this assertion is the fact that the Anglo-Saxons had a notorious penchant for kennings and variation. When we consider that fact, and the evidence in the meanings of the words themselves, is it necessary to distinguish "Wulf," "Eadwacer," and "beaducafa" as separate entities? Could they not all be "variations" on the same theme, much as, in a different context, "John," "beloved," and "tall, dark, and handsome one" could all refer to the same person? Through this usage of variation, the duality of the narrator's relationship with Wulf, a relationship which brings her pleasure and pain, is perfectly represented. The pleasure was in his presence and the sexual act itself, and the pain was in his leaving, and also, logically, in the birthing of his child.

Once we assume that Wulf and Eadwacer are the same man, the referent for "us" becomes transparently clear. The "us" is, of course, the speaker and Wulf. The speaker does address Wulf, but she is not addressing him personally. He
is, after all, on another island. Therefore her call to him ("Wulf, min Wulf") is a cry of pain in her loneliness, not an actual attempt at conversation. The same can be said for her "Ungelic is us." The speaker, alone, is essentially saying "how different our lives are." The whole of "Wulf and Eadwacer" can be seen, in fact, as a kind of rhetorical dialogue, the speaker in essence "talking to herself" about her situation, as do many of the other speakers of the elegies, whose immediate pain has, within the context of their poems, no possible audience.

The major obstacles to the identification of Wulf with Eadwacer arises in the last lines. Why does the speaker, after referring to Wulf (Eadwacer) in the second person, suddenly begin speaking of him in the third person again? Does not the change in person signal that there are two men, not one? The answer to this question reveals, at the end of the poem, its richest complexity.

"Pæt mon" of line 18 is not "that man," but "that one," and that one is not Wulf the man but an actual wolf. It is not the human "Wulf" who will bear off to the woods the "earne hwelp,"26 but a canine wolf. The child is their "song together" which will be "torn apart." The verb "toslitan" aids in this interpretation. With its connotations of wounding, rending, and tearing, and not merely "separating," it is a word quite appropriate for use in describing the actions of a wolf upon its prey. The
speaker's child is in actual danger of being consumed. Part of the poem's obscurity stems from the fact that it often uses one word to mean different things (as in the case with "apecgan"), and different words to mean one thing (as in the case with "Wulf," "bearducafa," and "eadwacer"). If "apecgan" can have both the sense of feeding and killing, why cannot "Wulf" refer to a wolf as well as a man?

If we accept, however, that the speaker's child may be carried off by a real wolf, and not Wulf, we still have to deal with the ambiguity of the final lines. The wolf is described then as tearing up "what was never joined together," "our song together." Those descriptions can fit the child if we see the child not only in a literal sense, but as a symbol of the relationship between Wulf and the speaker (and what could be more symbolic?). The child is the evidence of their "song together," their relationship, and that evidence is literally torn to pieces by an animal. How appropriate, since the human Wulf tears that bond through his periodic abandonment of the narrator.

But how can we see the child as something that was "never joined together?" This reading makes sense when we consider that the parents were never married. That assumption is inherently logical, owing to the tenuous and fragmented nature of the meetings between Wulf and the speaker. In addition to that, the speaker never once, as does the speaker of "The Wife's Lament," refer to Wulf (or
anyone, for that matter) as her lord, or refer to a pledge between them. Thus, the child, as stated before, is representative of the "song together" of the speaker and Wulf, but it cannot be properly joined together because its parents have not been. The bastard child, like the song (which is representative of their relationship), was never put together right because its parents never were either.

So, now we have a clearer picture of who Wulf is, and the narrator's relationship with him. But what about her relationship with her people? Even though she never once states plainly that she is an exile, or mourns her status as such, I think that fact is plain. In the first stanza, the narrator does say "to my people," as if she were a part of them, yet twice after that she refers to "her people" as "they," which distances them from her and her situation. She is not of the "we," not anymore anyway. Yet, this is not the most significant evidence to indicate that she is an exile.

I think it is her sorrow and isolation which is key. Wulf is on one island and she is on another. Her "island" is, like the "eorðscræfe" of the wife in "The Wife's Lament," the symbol of her separation, not only from Wulf but from her people as well. It is the place where she weeps and mourns her loneliness, as the wife does in her cave of earth.
The question of why the wife is exiled, and who enforced it upon her (Wulf? her people?) is perhaps the most boggling. If her people look kindly upon Wulf, then why is she alone away from both them and him? Perhaps that question cannot be answered fully, but the illicit nature of the relationship between Wulf and the speaker is our clearest clue. The particulars involved can probably never be sorted out.

We must come at last, then, to the purpose behind the interpretation of the speaker's dramatic context: how can this poem, seemingly devoid of even any references to the comitatus, tell us anything about it? We see first and most obviously how the relationship between Wulf and the speaker is different than that of the speaker of "The Wife's Lament" and her husband. Though both suffer terribly from being deprived of their men, there is no expression, implicit or explicit, of a thane/lord relationship between the speaker of "Wulf and Eadwacer" and Wulf, while there are elements of that relationship evident in "The Wife's Lament." How does "Wulf and Eadwacer" apply, then? How can "Wulf and Eadwacer" have anything to say about the comitatus?

I would assert that it has as much or more to impart about the importance of the comitatus than even "The Wife's Lament." "Wulf and Eadwacer" is perhaps the most dismal of the elegies. This is due not merely to an elegaic deprivation of the comitatus, but a complete breakdown of
that social structure. The fate of the speaker and her child in "Wulf and Eadwacer" is terrifying because there is no "comitatus" for her. She is exiled from her people and she has no husband. The speaker of "Wulf and Eadwacer" is not even provided with the cold comfort of allegiance to her exiled "lord." In "The Wife's Lament," the speaker is separated from her husband/lord by his exile. In "Wulf and Eadwacer," the speaker's relationship with Wulf is not a "real" relationship at all. They are not truly joined to one another.

Whatever Wulf's status, whether he is himself an exile or a marauding rival tribesman (and all these speculations are open to debate), the "comitatus" of a husband and wife relationship does not exist between Wulf and the speaker. Even in "The Wife's Lament" there might be a seed of hope, a reunion perhaps, like the prospective reunion in "The Husband's Message." The bond of marriage between these husbands and wives makes that possible. That is not the case, however, with the speaker of "Wulf and Eadwacer."

The most chilling proof that the comitatus structure has completely broken down is the narrator's complicity in the death of her child. It seems evident that the speaker herself, frustrated and angry with Wulf, despondent at the lack of any kind of future for her offspring, leaves the child out to be consumed, or is negligent in protecting it.
This becomes clear when we examine the textual nuances within the last lines of the poem.

First we must notice that the speaker's forecast of the demise of her child is in the future tense—a wolf will bear their "earne hwelp" to the woods. How does this point to her guilt? This "forecast" may indicate her guilt in that she not only forsees the threat but postulates a definite and violent outcome to it. She seems sure that the child will be eaten. This evidence may seem tenuous, but it is only the first indication of the speaker's complicity, and not the strongest one.

It is the overtone of "Gehyrest pu, eadwacer?" that is most ominous. There is a note of threat, and perhaps of vengeance in "Do you hear me, guardian of my happiness?" We must recall that these lines come directly after the speaker's description of her intense suffering and feelings of powerlessness because of Wulf's continued absence. Thus, the "murder" of their child, a child which the narrator never expresses affection for, a child which she in fact calls "wretched" and animalizes with her usage of the term "cub," becomes not only her way of punishing him, but of getting his attention. Medea would have called it just.

The speaker of "The Wife's Lament" is indeed miserable, as is the speaker of "Wulf and Eadwacer." Yet, the plight of the latter is undeniably worse. She cannot mourn the loss of her lord because she has no lord, only a lover who
arrives and leaves at whim, and who seems to bear no responsibility for her. She herself then denies the responsibility that a mother has to a child. Completely bereft of any ties to the comitatus, the narrator of "Wulf and Eadwacer" is the most wretched of any elegaic speakers. There is no hope for her.

"Deor"

"Deor," like "Wulf and Eadwacer," is a monologue. This speaker, or rather singer, since Deor is a scop, has lost his position as court poet to the Heodonigas, and the favor of his lord, to a "song-crafty man" Heorrenda. Supplanted, and in order to console himself for that loss, Deor tells of the misfortunes of famous Germanic heroes and personages, each tale of their woe followed with the refrain "pæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!" ("that passed over, this so may").

The problems of interpreting "Deor" are manifold, not because we do not know who is speaking, but because of the relative difficulty in ascertaining what "pæs" and "þisses" refer to, and the obscurity of some of the legendary and historical references. Attempting to refute all previous scholars in these respects or formulating a new and foolproof theory is probably an impossible task. Yet, there is evidence in the text to support this simple assertion:
in each refrain (with the exception of the last), the "paes" Deor refers to is the misfortune of the preceding legendary or historical character(s), and the "pisses" represents his state over the loss of his lord.

Construing every "paes" and "pisses" in terms of Deor's relation to and interpretation of the state of his audience, Mandel argues that "paes ofereode" in the last refrain is a reference to "the good fortune of Heorrenda" (8). The "pisses swa mæg" immediately following would then refer to the audience's good fortune (similar to Heorrenda's), or the audiences bad fortune (similar to Deor's). Mandel does take pains to explain every definite article and how it pertains to the poet, the poet's audience, and the legendary misfortunes as well, but in doing so he depersonalizes the poem and contorts its basic emotional sense.

I will explain: as the poem progresses, we are lulled into a sigh of relief with each "paes ofereode," a relief which increases with every stanza, and every misfortune, simply because we expect that it is coming. It becomes easier to hear of Geat's grieving over Mæphilde or the despair of the thanes of Eormanric after we have heard Deor speak of the "passing over" of the miseries of Weland and Beaduhild. We come to expect the same amelioration for the sufferings of Geat and Eormanric's thanes as well, and are equally rewarded with the refrain.
Yet, when Deor speaks of himself, he introduces the bond between himself and his lord. This is the one situation Deor describes that he (and we) would wish to continue. Yet, Deor states that he was only scop to the Heodoningas "hwile" ("for a while, 36), and the refrain "Pās ofereode" ("that passed over") is coming around again. Instead of causing us to feel consolation or relief, this last "Pās ofereode" underscores the loss of all that Deor holds dear.

It is here that the full meaning of the "pisses swa māg," used throughout the poem and until this point perhaps a bit obscured, suddenly becomes poignantly clear; the "this so may" refers to Deor and his lordless state and always has. The poem becomes especially touching because we can see here that Deor was doing more than just passing a stoic verdict on the miseries of others and then commenting on the situation of his audience. Deor, relatively lowly in reputation compared to his famous examples, was using the passing of their misfortune to console his own. We see that though Deor is in a state of exile and deprivation, he hopes and indeed believes that his fate will change like the changing fates of the others in his song.31

This quasi-Boethian undercurrent has caused many critics to align "Deor" with The Consolation of Philosophy.32 Indeed, Bolton (1971-72) characterizes "Deor" as "a poem wholly and orthodoxly Boethian" (227).
Yet, to be characterized as truly "Boethian," "Deor" would have to not simply give poetical vent to the "wheel of fortune" metaphor, but truly embrace Boethius' value system. Boethius, by the end of The Consolation of Philosophy, has abandoned his hold on his earthly values. Deor has not. He still desires a "holdne hlaford" ("gracious lord" 39) to whom he can be dear, and who will once again bring him into the bosom of the comitatus. Boethius, after discussing his plight with Lady Philosophy, discards the workings of fortune completely. Deor still has faith that the wheel will turn around for him again. How can such a poem be truly Boethian?

It must be noted also that within the context of the poem, Deor does not seem as mournful of mind as other elegaical speakers might be in such a situation. Unlike the seafarer, Deor does not seem to want to repudiate the values of the comitatus in favor of a more transcendent view of existence. There is no pull in Deor between the eternal presence of God and the transient values of the comitatus. Neither does Deor tread the godless, utterly desolate path of the wife in "The Wife's Lament." Why?

It is Deor's perception of God, and what God represents, that permits him to keep his earthly values in perspective without succumbing to the depth of misery found in a poem like "The Wife's Lament," or the spiritual tug of war evident in "The Seafarer." Deor's faith in God does not
put him at odds with his desire for earthly life and the comitatus; in fact, as we shall see, Deor's faith facilitates his stoicism.

Deor believes that God himself, not merely an arbitrary notion of "fortune," is the author of transitory existence. It is that belief which enables Deor to accept the fluctuations in the fates of himself and others. It is God who "wendēp geneahhe" ("changes frequently" 32b) the fates of men, dealing grace for some men and woe for others. Yet, amid all this, it is vital we note that all of those choices are made by a God whom Deor describes as "wlītig" ("wise" 32). Deor sees the wisdom of God and his actions, even though often they do not please him.

Thus, Deor is more stoic than the speakers of "The Wife's Lament" and "The Seafarer" because his perception of God allows him to be. The idea of God as intrinsic to and not alien from the transitory world allows Deor some peace that is denied the seafarer and the wife, because Deor believes that someday his turn will come around again, and that his turn of fate is in God's hands. Deor never feels the need to deny his desire for a lord and for earthly life, nor is he cast afloat as an exile without any spiritual comfort.

In the end it should be clear that Deor's main woe, and the source of the elegaic strain in the poem, is the loss of his temporal lord. It is his memories of the bond between
himself and his lord, and hope of the day when it may resume, that are the culminatory emotions. The bond that he shared with his "eorla hleo" ("protector of men" 41) has passed away, yet we are left with the hope that his exile may pass away as well. It is here that we find the "consolation" in the poem, within Deor's tenacity and will to survive and transcend not the need for the earthly structure of the comitatus, but the situation in which he is bereft of it.

"The Ruin"

Though Greenfield believes "The Husband's Message" to be "The least elegaic of the elegies," I would assert that title belongs to "The Ruin,"33 for there seems to be, in Hume's (1976) words, "an absence of personal grief"34 in the poem. The narrator indeed seems to be somewhat removed compared with the other elegaic speakers. We get no account of his life, his suffering or his lack thereof. The poem seems more akin to formal description than to an outpouring of emotion.35

The speaker of "The Ruin" stands near a desolate and long abandoned city, a city "scorene, gedrorene,/ældo undereotone" ("cut down, fallen, eaten underneath by age" 5b-6a). "The Wanderer," as we shall see, is a dirge combining the sorrow of personal circumstance and the sorrow
of knowing that earthly existence is transitory. "The Ruin" is merely about the latter. Thus, the sense of loss is not as acute, but it is pronounced nonetheless.

It is obvious that "The Ruin" does not have the desolate confessional quality of "The Wife's Lament" or "The Wanderer," yet there is an expression of grief in the poem. The grief of the speaker of "The Ruin" is not sprung from keen and immediate suffering; the narrator of this poem has feelings more akin to longing and nostalgia. Greenfield (1986) seems to support this, for though he believes that the narrator "presents his picture disinterestedly," Greenfield himself admits that, in contrast to the images of the decaying present found within "The Ruin," "a more sweeping syntactic movement conveys the reconstructed glories of the past" (282).

In the end, the dominant image that remains is the ruin as a symbol of mutability, a sign that the grandeur and joy of an earthly existence within the warband is merely transitory. The proud men "glædmod and goldbryht" ("bright with gold and glad of heart" 33a) are no more. Yet, as we move into a discussion of the elegies where the transitory nature of existence, as well as immediate suffering, is the common theme, it is wise to keep in mind the mood of "The Ruin." That mood is one of undeniable longing for what has passed away, a "passionate regret" as R. K. Gordon (84) aptly terms it:
The place has fallen, broken to the hills, where many men, bright with gold and glad of heart, adorned in splendor, magnificent and flushed with wine, before shone with war-gear. They looked upon treasure, on silver, on curious gems, on riches, on wealth, on precious stone, on that bright castle of the broad kingdom.

The images of the gold-bright men, magnificent, wealthy and happy within their "beorhtan burg" is contrasted with the images of ruin and decay. The lament for the glory of earthly existence, the glory of the comitatus, now dead and fallen away, is plain. Yet, the speaker's main reason for mourning cannot be found merely in the rubble of the great city he stands by, but in the disappearance of those who once cared for it. He mourns the loss of the comitatus, of which the bright city and the bright gold were merely
emblems, much as the rubble of the city is emblematic of the demise of that warrior band. In the first chapter, we saw how treasure and possessions are valued not in terms of their barter worth, but in terms of what they symbolize within the reciprocal system of societal bonds that is the comitatus. The poem's contrast is built upon the juxtaposition of the architectural disrepair of the ruin and the living comitatus which once inhabited it. Thus, in the end, the speaker is not lamenting the ruin of a wall, but the ruin of the warband.

This mood will be of specific relevance as we approach poems like "The Seafarer," for if an elegaic speaker seems to repudiate the trappings of earthly existence, seems to prefer "eternal" gains, yet speaks of the earthly existence with nostalgia and "passionate regret," how seriously can we take his repudiations? The ruin, as Irving (1957) asserts, represents "man's heroic and doomed effort to hold things together, to hold self together, to resist change and death" (156). The speakers of "Resignation" and "The Seafarer" seemingly cast off their involvement with the world, yet I would suggest that it is they who are most desperate for it.

"Resignation"

Much of the critical debate which rages around "Resignation" centers on the question of whether or not it
is a unified text. Most agree that the "Resignation" poet uses, in Dobbie's (1936) words, "different types of poetic material" (lx1), yet there are varying opinions as to whether that difference signals the existence of two poems. I do not wish to use this forum to prove one case or the other; I state here that it seems preponderantly evident that "Resignation" is in fact comprised of two texts and not one.

Even if there were not major stylistic and thematic differences in the two "halves" of the poem, the evidence presented by Bliss and Frantzén37 concerning the condition of the manuscript seems to me to be irrefutable.38 I will concur with Bliss and Franzén39 in that "Resignation" (which I will henceforth refer to as "Resignation B") begins on line 70 and make my analysis based on lines 70-117.40

Now, then, to the issues of speaker and dramatic context. What we might first notice about the speaker of "Resignation B" is that he never talks of a temporal lord, or hearth companions, or a "gift-seat," or ring-giving, or any of the fundamental elements of the comitatus. Just how, then, can it be claimed that he is alienated from that group?

I would suggest that the comitatus exists within this poem, if not explicitly, then certainly by implication. Firstly, the words "anhoga" ("solitary one" 89) and "wineleas wræcca" ("friendless exile" 91), used
self-descriptively by the speaker of "Resignation B," are used at various times throughout the elegies to describe exiles deprived of their comitatus. And though the speaker never specifically refers to "sele-dreamas," he does speak of being deprived of "leodwynna" ("joys of the people or nation" 90).

Secondly, the circumstantial setting of the poem also suggests the comitatus. The friendless speaker tells of wanting to set out on an ocean journey, sorrowing at heart over the state of his life on land. The situation presented is similar to that of the wanderer and the seafarer, poems in which the speaker's connections to the comitatus are presented more explicitly.

The analysis of "Resignation B" will be two-fold: my aim is to show that the speaker of this poem desires the earthly joys of the comitatus, and thus the remedy for his distress is not, despite the speaker's insistence, in the hands of God. To prove this assertion, it is necessary to show that the narrator of this poem is blatantly unreliable; we cannot rely on him to tell us what he really wants, or even that he himself understands what those wants are. As we shall see, the concept of the "unreliable narrator" is evident in "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" as well, albeit in a more subtle manner.

The opening lines of the poem are a key in reading the narrator as unreliable:
hwaþpre ic me ealles þæs ellen wylle
habban ond hlyhhan ond me hyhtan to,
frætwian me on ferëweg ond fundian
sylf to þam sipe þe ic asettan sceal,
gæst gearwian, ond me þæt eal for gode þolian
bliþe mode, nu ic gebunden eom
fæste in minum ferþe.

(1-7a)

nevertheless I will have courage about
everything, and rejoice, and trust in myself,
prepare myself for travel, and hasten myself
to that journey that I must make, prepare my
soul, and, in a blithe mood, suffer all that
for God, now that I am bound fast in my spirit.

The speaker of this poem claims a number of things about
himself in these lines, none of which are borne out in the
remainder of the poem. Throughout "Resignation B," the
speaker does not exhibit courage, nor rejoice or seem in a
"blithe mood." In fact, in the last lines of the poem, he
is still describing himself as "bittre abolgen" ("bitterly
tormented"), and the very last word of the poem is "þolige"
("suffer"). The speaker does not trust in himself, or
hasten to the journey. If we are to interpret the term
"binding of his spirit" as an expression of the speaker's
resolution, then we must see that resolution as unfulfilled.
The speaker of "Resignation B," then, cannot be trusted to reveal his true motivations and desires. This does not seem to be a result of any attempt at dishonesty; indeed the speaker wants to believe that what he says is true. Yet, despite his best intentions, his belief in God brings him neither cheer nor self-reliance. Thus, I would conclude that the true remedy for his misery is not within his "meahtig mundbora" ("mighty protector" 109), for the speaker's belief in God does not seem to give him any relief from his suffering. The true remedy is in the companionship of the comitatus. The existence of an unreliable narrator in "Resignation B" opens up the path for the existence of one in other elegies perhaps, an idea which will be explored in the analysis of "The Seafarer."

A speaker's expressed wish for and belief in a transcendent God evident in these poems cannot override the desire for the comitatus, only make the respective narrators of the poems claim that it does. The speaker of each poem turns to God not because he devalues the ideals of the comitatus, but because a warrior's life within the comitatus is a transient one. "Deor" took some comfort in the transience of existence, and thought that his luck and life might soon change because all things under God undergo change, but the remaining speakers find the idea of the mutability of existence almost unbearable, and thus they attempt to excise from their lives what they most treasure,
because they cannot have it forever. Thus, ultimately these speakers do not repudiate the comitatus, only the fact that the comitatus does not last.

"The Wanderer"

According to Stanley (1955), "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" "best embody contempt of the world." These two elegaic speakers, Stanley asserts, endure their miseries "in preference to vanities and false joys" (464). Quite so, one might argue, especially since both narrators themselves seem to disavow a desire for the things of the world. Yet, as with "Resignation B," I do not think that we can take the apparent repudiation of the "earthly joys" at face value. We are dealing, as with "Resignation B," with unreliable narrators, narrators who are perhaps themselves not aware of their true feelings.

Although an apparent rejection of the ethos of the comitatus can be seen in both "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer" provides a better starting point since the repudiation of the values of the comitatus within that poem is more muted. And since there continues to be debate among critics as to deciphering the number of speakers and who is speaking where within "The Wanderer," perhaps that repudiation will become slightly less obscured once we determine the answers to the textual problems.
These textual problems have been the most heated issue of controversy regarding "The Wanderer." In 1943, Huppe asserted that the outline of the poem consisted in "two contrasting and complementary pagan monologues, framed and bound together by the expository Christian introduction, conclusion, and 'bridge passage'" (529). He was taken to task by Greenfield (1951) and others, and the general critical consensus as it stands today asserts that "The Wanderer" is not a dialogue but a monologue. The infamous linking passage (62b-72b) is now seen not as a gnomic bridge between two speakers, but an intrinsic part of the wanderer's speech, signaling the beginning of his change from an "eardstapa" to one "snottom on mode." Many tangled theories have indeed sprung up, but it seems that the easiest and most logical solution is to assume the existence of one speaker, plus the poet-author who not only sings the words of the wanderer to his audience, but offers the editorial commentary in the form of the gnomic passages at the beginning and end of the poem.

Coming from that perspective, this discussion will analyze the poem as an elegaic example of blatant nostalgia for the comitatus. Yet, the purpose of "The Wanderer" within the framework of my overall thesis will not be to simply explicate the evidence of that nostalgia; the critique of "The Wanderer" will be used as a springboard for discussion of "The Seafarer," a more complex poem in terms
of its expressed sentiments about the comitatus. It is not enough to assert that the wanderer longs for and desires the comitatus; the terms of the expression of that longing that must be explicated. How does the wanderer describe life on land? Does the depiction reveal inherently positive or negative feelings? These insights will impact on forthcoming conclusions concerning the seafarer, who claims undeniably to repudiate his earthly, transient existence. Yet, the seafarer's preoccupation with his lost life on land mirrors the wanderer's experience, and is depicted in similar terms. If their characterizations of transitory existence are parallel, then despite the seafarer's repudiations, his yearning for the lost comitatus must be just as strong as the wanderer's.

The wanderer's speech must be analyzed first, speaking as "eardstapa" and then as one "snottor in mode." The first half of the poem deals with the immediacy of one wanderer's exile, and his specific suffering as a result of his loss of the comitatus. In the second half of the poem (58 and beyond), the perspective broadens, and the wanderer begins to philosophize about the transitory nature of existence itself. As Greenfield (1986, 282) points out, the poem seems to divide itself into the exile theme (first half), the ruin theme, and the "ubi sunt" motif (second half). In each case, the misery experienced by the wanderer is caused by a lack of the comitatus.
Let us deal then with the first half, and the immediate situation of the wanderer. He is at sea, an exile, steeped in his own sorrow and lamenting his grief at his isolation. In this section of the poem, the wanderer's sorrow is caused by his immediate separation from his comitatus, specifically his "gold-wine" ("gold-friend" 22). He does not have a lord to whom he can reveal his "mod-sefan" ("inmost thoughts" 10). Neither can he sit at the "gief-stoles" ("gift seat" 44) and receive treasure. He is also deprived of the companionship of the "sele-secgas" ("hall warriors" 34), so deprived that the sea-birds remind him of his kinsmen.

Though the loss of his life on land is his main misery, his existence on the sea compounds his suffering. He is not roaming the ocean at a good time of year, being troubled by "hreosan hrim and snaw hægle gemenged" ("falling frost and snow intermingled" 48). As we have seen in "The Wife's Lament," the unfamiliar and unfriendly climate exteriorizes the gloomy thoughts of the exile. The wanderer's atmosphere reflects his state of mind.

In the second half of the poem the focus shifts from the wanderer's own circumstances to considerations of the transitory nature of existence. After a passage in which the wanderer advises on how a man must live his life (65a-72b), he ruminates on how man himself and all his works fall to waste. Yet, his examples focus on the decay of people and elements associated with the comitatus:
The wine halls fall to ruin; the leaders lie dead, bereft of joy. The warrior band all perished, proud by the wall. Some were taken by battle, born forth away. A bird bore off a certain one over the high seas; the hoary wolf shared a number with death; a sad-faced man buried one in an earth pit.

I think in the end that if we are to ask ourselves what the wanderer truly values, then we must examine what he perceives as loss. This passage is illustrative of the wanderer's desire for the lost comitatus, for in it the wanderer poignantly describes the ruin of a mead-hall, the death of lords, and (most extensively), the deaths of those in the warrior band.

Thomas C. Rumble (1958) believes the poem expresses a Christian theme. I would not argue that there are Christian elements in the poem, even in the speech spoken by the
wanderer (in which he acknowledges the "ielda scieppend," or "creator of men," on l. 85), but the Christian elements are vastly overshadowed by the wanderer's painful yearning for the lost comitatus.

The "ubi sunt" passage is especially revealing in this respect. The wanderer is not seeking God; again he looks for the lost hall, and all of the trappings involved with the comitatus:

"Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mappumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?

(92-93)
What has become of the horse? What has become of the treasure-giver? What has become of the banquet seats? Where are the hall-joys?

The treasure giver, the banquet seats, and all of the hall joys associated with them have fallen away, but it is those treasures that he is looking for, those treasures he rhetorically asks of, not the treasures of heaven. Though he acknowledges the existence of God, that knowledge does not supersede his desire for a life in which God is, if not unnecessary, at least ancillary.

Yet, the wanderer's questioning is not merely a rhetorical device used to emphasize the transcendence of God
in a transient world. That juxtaposition is not presented until the gnomic passage which closes the poem, editorially spoken about, but not by, the wanderer. The wanderer himself truly mourns for the lord, the hall, the gifts, the comitatus he has lost. This is especially evident in the interjective he uses to comment on the lost comitatus:

Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
Eala peodnes þrym!

(94-95)
Alas the bright cup! Alas the mailed warrior!
Alas the prince's glory!
Hall defines "Eala" as "alas," "oh," or "lo." Perhaps "alas" gives the best sense within the poem of a mourning for things past, but even if we substituted "oh" or "lo," the emotion of the wanderer's interjection would hardly be muted.

In the last section of the wanderer's speech, the crux of his suffering becomes evident: the transitory nature of existence has deprived and continues to deprive people of the pleasures of the earth. The pleasures of the earth fade:

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,
her bið mon læne, her bið maeg læne,
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð!

(108-110)
Here property is fleeting, here a friend
is fleeting, here man is fleeting, here
woman is fleeting, all this earth foundation
becomes idle!
For the wanderer, the pleasures of the earth reside in the
lord, the hall, and the "sele-secgas."

The very last lines of the poem, however, seem to
reveal a new sentiment: the security of God as opposed to
the transitory existence on earth. The lines have been the
cause of much dispute among critics:

Wel bið þambe him are seceð,
frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo
fästnungen stondeð.

(114b-115)
It will be well for him who seeks mercy
for himself, comfort from the father in
heaven, where all our security fast stands.

It is most logical to assume that this passage is gnomic,
and should not be attributed to the wanderer himself. Yet,
even if we do not assign these lines to the wanderer, the
Christian overtones of this, the final section of the poem,
cannot be ignored. What are we to make of it?

I wish to use it as a link with the discussion of "The
Seafarer," for the sentiments found in these last lines of
"The Wanderer" mirror those in "The Seafarer." Whether we
attribute the last lines to the wanderer or not is almost
immaterial; the poem itself believes them. How can these
lines be reconciled with the rest of the poem?

The Christian advice offered at the end of "The Wanderer" is just that, advice. These lines are a gentle exhortation to forgo the involvement in the cares of the world and focus on God, "where our security fast stands." This in itself seems to support the idea of the passage as gnomic; it exists in opposition to the sentiments in the rest of the poem. The wanderer is not seeking comfort from the "Fæder on heofonum;" instead he is wallowing in misery because the hall and the earthly lord and retainers cannot exist forever. It might be well for the wanderer indeed if he could take comfort from God, but he cannot. He is tied too much to the comitatus and its loss. It is that loss which is of paramount importance to him, and no God can offer him solace. The wanderer's misery over the transitory nature of the comitatus does not signal his devaluation of it; the wanderer's misery reinforces the idea that the lord and the hall are everything to him.

"The Seafarer"

The lord and the hall are paramount to the seafarer as well, though he attempts to convince himself that they are not. Christian ideals seem to suffuse entirely through the seafarer's monologue, including an apparent repudiation of the structure of the comitatus itself in favor of the
joys of heaven. Roy F. Leslie (1986) asserts, in fact, that the purpose of the seafarer's exile is "a renunciation of the temporal world for the salvation of his soul." Leslie's assessment is certainly understandable, especially in light of the seafarer's declaration:

\[
\text{Forpon me hatran sind} \\
\text{dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,} \\
\text{lāne on londe. Ic gelyfe no} \\
\text{þat him eorðwelan ece stondæ.} \\
\text{Simle þeora sum þinga gehwylce,} \\
\text{ær his tid aga, to tweon weorðeð;} \\
\text{adl oppe yldo oppe ecghete} \\
\text{fægum fromweardum feorh oðringeð.} \\
\text{(64b-71)}
\]

Therefore for me more attractive are the joys of the lord than this dead life, transitory on land. I do not believe that earthly wealth will eternally stand. Each one of three things becomes forever doubtful before the last day; disease or age or edge-hate wrests away life from the one fated to die, passing away.

In light of this clear textual evidence, it is best not to argue that the seafarer does not wish to renounce the world. The seafarer does indeed apparently want to reject
the earthly pleasures of the comitatus in order to fulfill a more "Christian" destiny. Yet, internal evidence within the poem itself suggests that the seafarer's desire to find inspiration in the "Dryhtnes dreamas" ("joys of the Lord" 65) is subverted by his almost instinctual need for the earthly joys of the hall. The seafarer does reflect Christian values, and that much is plain. Yet, the bonds of the comitatus, the earthly life that the seafarer claims to repudiate, is indeed the life that he most desires and mourns for.

That would seem to be a difficult statement to prove, and indeed, "The Seafarer" is the most difficult poem of all the elegies to reconcile with my overall thesis. Therefore at this point an overview of aims with regard to this poem is necessary. I will show that the seafarer sets out to escape the passing away of what he really longs for. In regard to Dorothy Whitelock's argument (1968), the seafarer would not be a perigrinus, or spiritual pilgrim, but rather an anti-perigrinus.

The seafarer wants to believe Christianity is the "answer" because he understands that the heavenly kingdom is immutable. His own rhetoric, however, reveals that even he believes heaven is only a substitution for what he really longs for. The fact that earthly riches will not abide forever does not mean that the seafarer does not want them; he chooses the transcendent nature of God because the
mutability of the world is for him an impossible distress. Thus, the seafarer's "turning" towards God and away from the trappings of earthly life cannot indicate that the seafarer no longer wishes for his life on land, or that he regards as worthless the values of the comitatus. For the seafarer, God is the last refuge from a world that is passing away. The seafarer is attracted to the eternal because he cannot endure losing what is temporal.

With regard to this assessment, I would like to analyze both "The Seafarer" and the seafarer, beginning with how and in what terms this elegaical speaker identifies himself. The seafarer, in spite of his own self-professed search for a sense of "being" which will transcend aspects of earthly life, constantly sees and portrays his own state in terms of the negation of that earthly life. Here he defines himself (in apposition to the prosperous man on land) not in terms of heaven, but in terms of his lost comitatus:

Ðæt se mon ne wat
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hu ic earmcearin iscealdne sæ
winter wunade wræccan lastum,
winemægum bidroren,
bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.
Ðær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,
iscaldne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song
dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleðor
ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,  
mæw singende fore medodrince.  

(12b–22)

that the man does not 
know, he who is on earth most prosperous,  
how I, miserable, dwelt in the winter on  
the ice-cold sea, hung with icicles, deprived  
of kinsmen, in the tracks of an exile. The  
hail showers flew. There I heard nothing  
but the roaring sea, the ice-cold wave. At  
times the song of the swan was my entertainment,  
the gannet's laughter and curlew-sound instead  
of the laughter of men, the gull singing  
instead of mead-drink.⁴⁶

As in the wanderer's case, the seafarer has only birds to  
keep him company in his exile. The laughter and singing of  
birds, as with the wanderer, are no substitute for the  
laughter and singing of men, and mead-drink.

The seafarer claims that his heart bids him to make  
trial of the ocean, but the prospect of an ocean voyage, as  
described by the seafarer himself, does not seem all that  
appealing:

Ne bip him to hearpan hyge ne to hringbege,  
ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht,
The harp is not in his mind, nor the receiving of gold, nor the joy of a wife, nor the worldly joy, nor anything else except the binding of the waves, but he who sets a course on the sea ever has longing.

The life of the man at sea is a life of longing. Longing for what? The harp, the receiving of gold, the joy of a wife, the worldly joys associated with the comitatus. The seafarer, as Greenfield (1954) states, casts "envious and wistful glances at the fortunate on earth" (17), and expresses "hesitancy and trepidation" (18) for the journey.

Still, the seafarer professes that the joys of the world are not as appealing to him as the joys of heaven. But we must remember that the seafarer turns to these joys of heaven only when he fully realizes that the joys of the earth do not last:

Gedroren is þeos duguþ eal, dreamas sind gewitene, wuniaþ þa wacran ond þas woruld healdaþ, brucaþ purh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged, eorþan indryhto ealdaþ ond searaþ, swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.

(86-90)
The tried retainers all are fallen; the joys are departed. The inferior dwell in and hold the world, (they have) gained the use of it by toil. Glory is brought low; earth's nobility grows old and withers, as now each man does throughout middle-earth.

These lines are especially relevant when we remember the mood of "The Ruin," its narrator bemoaning the passing of glory and the earth falling into the hands of "inferiors." That mood is here matched and nearly identical. The seafarer feels the same "passionate regret" as the narrator of the ruin. That passionate regret signals his real desire, which is the earthly joy of the comitatus that he appears to have disavowed in favor of "eternal gains."

Yet, it would be oversimplifying to state that the seafarer does not at all desire those eternal gains. He does. But he desires them only as an alternative to earthly joy. Horgan believes that "The Seafarer" serves to indict the Germanic value system. Yet, like "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer" does not indict Germanic values so much as mourn that they are transitory. It is not the values themselves which are lacking, it is that the earthly existence cannot endure forever. Paradoxically then, this "indictment" by the seafarer turns into an affirmation. The seafarer, in "protesting too much," belies his own repudiations.
Conclusion

It is often true that we cannot determine the actual effect that a person, or a place, or even an institution has had upon our lives until we suddenly become bereft of them. Thus, we cannot hope to understand the impact of the comitatus in the poetry where it is present until we understand the consequences of its absence. From the sorrow of a wife alone, bereft of her exiled husband, to the pain of a seafarer who cannot cast off his longing for life on land no matter how he tries, the elegies offer a glimpse into that void. The unanimity which connects the elegies is the deprivation of the comitatus, and that loss that cannot be assuaged.
Notes

1. I will be relying implicitly or explicitly throughout this essay on Greenfield's (1955) discussion of the formulaic expression of exile.

2. For a discussion of "The Wanderer" as consolatio, see Diekstra (1971), as planctus, see Woolf (1975). Hollowell asserts that the wanderer is a wuðbora.

3. Indeed, Woolf (1975) believes the seafarer to be "serious to the point of overt homiletic didacticism" (204).

4. For a discussion of the husband as directly responsible for sending the wife away, see Greenfield (1953).

5. See Greenfield (1953) for an assessment of the curse as directed at the husband, and R. K. Gordon's preface to the poem for a reading directing the curse at the offending kinsman.

6. Douglas Short, for one, supports the view that lines 42a-45a are gnomic.

7. Theories that the wife is not human can be found in Doane and Swanton. Doane believes that the speaker of "The Wife's Lament" is a minor diety bemoaning the conversion to Christianity by her chief; Swanton asserts that the poem serves as a metaphor of a desire for the reunion of Christ and his church. Lench argues that the wife is speaking from beyond the grave; in a similar vein, Johnson believes that "The Wife's Lament" is a death-song which the poet adapted from analogues in eddic chants. For a specific attempt at refuting all these types of theories, see Harris, who offers "a viable alternative to the grave" (208).

   For a review of the variant meanings and associations of "eorðscraf," see Wentersdorf (1981), 498-503. He seems to refute Lench's (and others') interpretation by asserting that there is "a considerable body of evidence-historical, archaeological, and literary-documenting the human use of caves" (503) as dwelling places and not necessarily tombs.

8. Bambas is supported by Stevens (1968), who believes that "the traditional interpretation of the so-called 'Wife's Lament' as a woman's monologue is plainly questionable" (90).

9. Lucas specifically attempts to refute the claims that the narrator of "The Wife's Lament" is a man. She not only deals with the grammatical inflections but suggests that the poem is feminine "in mood and tone" (297).
10. Renoir (1975) presents a valuable view towards criticizing "The Wife's Lament" in terms of another context: i.e. the presentation of the situation of women in other Old English poems and also in Eddas.

11. Ellis examines the situation of the wife in relation to the wanderer's, concluding that "her exile differs from the wanderer's more in degree than in kind, for she has lost the hearth rather than the hall—a more poignant loss for its implication of the loss at the very core of her life" (228).

12. See also Leslie's analysis in Three Old English Elegies.

13. R. K. Gordon and Leslie (1961) are two specific critics who reason that the two elegies could be related. Dobbie (1936) believes that the connection is possible "with some exercise of the imagination" (p. lvii).

14. Renoir (1981) asserts that the female recipient of the message needs convincing, and believes that this is enough for us to predict a pessimistic outcome as to a prospective reunion. According to Renoir, either she does not want to go, or her people will not let her go. He views "The Husband's Message" as more elegaic, and not less so (as argued by Greenfield 1986, 294) than seemingly more dismal elegies.

15. Orton argues that the messenger is wood. So do Gordon and Dobbie (1936), who believes that the message is "conveyed by a rune-stave" (p. lix). Leslie (1961) and Greenfield (1963) assert that there is a human messenger. Earl Anderson would solve the problem of who is speaking by assigning the first twelve lines to a human messenger and lines 13-54 to a rune-stave.

16. Earl Anderson points out that "The Husband's Message" and "The Dream of the Rood" are "somewhat similar, "an assertion stemming from his belief that each poem "begins with a prologue spoken by a human messenger, followed by an extended example of prosopopoeia in which the speaker is a rune-stave" (246).

17. Margaret E. Goldsmith (1975) sees the poem as an obscure allegory, the message/pen as the holy writ which commands the addressee to a higher spiritual existence.

18. See James Anderson for a modern resurrection of this theory.

19. The only "consensus" of sorts is a very basic and limited one, a general agreement by most scholars with the opinion advanced by Henry Bradley in 1888, that Wulf is the
speaker's lover, and Eadwacer her tyrant husband. See Baker for a more modern treatment of this view.

20. Sedgefield and Osborn believe that the speaker is a female animal, specifically a wolf.

21. Baker asserts the existence of two males: Wulf, the speaker's outlaw husband, and Eadwacer, who makes love to her on the island. Jensen interprets "eadwacer" as another name for Wulf. He is her guardian, so to speak.

22. Fanagan specifically asserts that Eadwacer is the "beaducafa."

23. Frese (1983) for example believes that the speaker of "Wulf and Eadwacer" is mourning her child.

24. See Jensen for a fuller extrapolation of this argument.

25. To quote Greenfield's (1986, 127-28) definition of variation:

"Variation, then, may be defined as a double or multiple statement of the same idea within a clause or in contiguous clauses (and sentences), each restatement suggesting through its choice of words either a general or more specific quality, or a different attribute, of that concept"

See also Brodeur (1959, 39-70) and Robinson.

26. Greenfield (1986) asserts that the "wretched cub" is not a literal child but a representation of their love, which will be "torn apart."

27. "Wulf and Eadwacer" is not the only poem to utilize the image of a child being borne off by a wolf. "The Fortunes of Men" also contains such an incident:

Sumum þæt geongeð on geoguðfeore
þæt se endestæf earfeðmæcgum
wealíc weorþeð. Sceal hine wulf etan,
har hæþstapa; hinsiþ ponne
modor bimurneð. Ne bið swylc monnes geweald!

(10-14)
To one youngster it happens that the end comes to him in youth, woeful hardship to men. The wolf must eat him, the hoary heath-stepper; then the mother mourns his death. That is not in the control of man!
28. I am certainly not alone in my assertion that the speaker and Wulf are not married (see note 23). Spamer in particular believes that "the last two lines of the poem are an allusion to the marriage ceremony" (143). Spamer, however, believes that there are two men, and that the speaker addresses Eadwacer, attempting to "nullify" their ceremony.

29. See Malone (1966) for a full discussion of their identities and historical backgrounds.

30. Bloomfield (1964) solves the problem of the last line by asserting that its mystery is due to the poem's status as, or suggesting, a charm.

31. To challenge Mandel again, I would assert that mention of the usurper of Deor's position just before the refrain is merely explicatory; it is not intended to shift our perspective (in terms of the "pms") from Deor's happy situation to his unhappy situation. It simply tells how that unhappy situation came about.

32. See Markland, Kiernan (1978) and Whitbread for discussion of the possible Boethian influence.

33. Dobbie (1936) suggests that the author of "The Ruin" "may well have had no particular city in mind as the subject of this poem" (lxv), though most critics believe the ruin to be Bath. For an alternate reading see Keenan who suggests that the city might in fact be Babylon.

34. Hume believes this can be explained by the fact that the ruin is a city, and thus "large and impersonal" (353).

35. Indeed, as Dobbie (1936) points out, it is "the oldest example of formal description in English literature (lxiv)."

36. See especially Stanley (1955) and Irving (1957).

37. Bliss and Frantzen assert that "the evidence against the integrity of "Resignation" is overwhelming; the condition of the manuscript suggests that at least a leaf is missing between 11. 69 and 70 of the printed text, and in style, syntax and theme the first sixty-nine lines of the text are distinct from the remaining forty-nine" (395).

38. This has not stopped people from trying, however. Nelson tries to establish the unity of the text by interpreting 11. 1-69 as an expression of "spiritual progress" and the remaining section as "an expression of the desire to face death" (145).
39. For a similar agreement, see Greenfield 1986, 288.

40. Dobbie (1936) suggests that the poem be split at l. 88.

41. Two quick examples: "anhaga" is the third word of "The Wanderer;" the speaker of "The Wife's Lament" describes herself as a "wineleas wæcca" on line 10 of that poem.

42. Though Bliss and Frantzen prove that "Resignation B" is indeed separate from "Resignation A," they number the first line of "Resignation B" at 70. I think beginning with 1 is more logical, even though we do not know how much of the beginning has been lost.

43. See Cross (1961) for a discussion of the poem's relationship to epideictic oratory.

44. The monologue theory is now espoused even by critics such as John C. Pope, who had originally asserted that "The Wanderer" was a dialogue (see Pope 1968 and 1974). See also Greenfield (1986, 283-284).

45. As anyone familiar with the history of scholarship on this poem knows, there is a recurring debate over the number of speakers. The critical consensus concludes that there is but one seafarer, not two, an assertion with which I agree. It is not my intent in this forum to attempt to prove this. Therefore I recommend heartily the arguments of Pope (1974) in this respect.

46. Sarah Lynn Higley engagingly asserts that "the hardships described in 'The Seafarer,' while wretched, are almost boasted of, not lamented" (33). Higley believes that the seafarer has contempt for life on land not necessarily because he favors heaven, but because he has contempt for the man who cannot understand what he has been through.
Conclusion

Recently, a student came into my office to discuss an upcoming paper, which was to be on Beowulf. He wanted to talk about the ethics of lordship, and what he felt was the inherent nihilism of a value system that demanded that its leaders be bloodthirsty killers, ravagers of other tribes and people. Yet the student didn't wholly condemn the Anglo-Saxons; in fact he was somewhat apologetic of them. "They just weren't interested in morality," he explained, citing the actions of Scyld in the opening lines of the poem, who is praised for terrorizing and demanding tribute from enemy troops.

Such is, I think, a basic response of many initiates to Anglo-Saxon literature. They sense an unpalatable air of excessive violence and misogyny in the poetry, offensive to their contemporary sensibilities, which are of course conditioned by the relative safety and ease of modern existence. These sensibilities assert that violence is immoral, along with anything other than full and demonstrable equality between the sexes. How sad, they seem to say, that this preliterate culture of the Anglo-Saxons, grand and splendid in its own coarse way, was imprisoned in a self-perpetuating dungeon of its own inferior scruples.

I do not advocate violence, and I am quite happy to be living in the twentieth century, but anyone who approaches
Anglo-Saxon literature unable to at least sympathize with its world view dooms him or herself to at best a rudimentary understanding of the poems. That world view was, contrary to my student's beliefs, absolutely structured by its own very demanding system of morality. Part of my purpose was to offer an analysis of Anglo-Saxon poetry which approached it on its own terms, attempting to evaluate the poetry from the standpoint of their belief system and not ours.

That belief system was centered around the warrior band. Perhaps there are those who feel that the presence of the comitatus within the poetry is too obvious to merit close scrutiny beyond a "rudimentary" understanding of the principles which govern the warband. Yet the first chapter of this dissertation, which many might call a "basic" introduction to the principles of the comitatus, runs more than seventy pages. The varied and complex structure of the comitatus, as expressed in its purest form (such as within "The Battle of Maldon"), is a rich source of study. How much richer can our analysis of other poems, poems like "Andreas" or "The Phoenix" become when we interpret them with an understanding of the mindset which produced them? When we study the comitatus, we are studying the paradigms of behavior which structured the thoughts of an entire people, paradigms which were so powerful that they persisted over hundreds of years.
Thus, despite the plethora of scholarship on Anglo-Saxon literature which deals either directly or parenthetically with the comitatus, I would suggest that the poems are still a vast ocean of unexplored territory in that regard. This study has dealt exclusively with the Anglo-Saxons' poetic interpretation of the comitatus, yet after drawing on Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," the remainder of my analysis only covers some ten poems. There is still much more to say.

Yet those ten poems, I feel, reveal in microcosm the force of the ethos of the comitatus within the poetry, and that is the reason I have chosen them. That organizational pattern is also, I think, what in part distinguishes this dissertation from the other scholarly work being done at present.

Doubtless much of the material concerning the comitatus in chapter 1 is not even under dispute. The assertions in my discussions of the properties of the mead-hall, feasts, and good and bad thanes, for example, would probably not be challenged by anyone. Thus much of the chapter is purely informational. Yet I use that non-assailable information as a basis from which to discuss the "failing" lord (which to my knowledge has never been categorized as such), Grendel's status as an "anti-thane," and the paradox inherent in the Anglo-Saxon heroic code.
Chapter 2 mirrors its predecessor in that much of its material is informational, such as my discussion of the notion of a "peace-pledge." Yet as with chapter 1, built upon that information are several examples which contribute to matters of ongoing importance to Anglo-Saxonists, such as Wealhtheow's "power" over the thanes in Heorot. In addition, the analysis of Grendel's mother as a perversion of a queenly hostess has not been attempted before.

Building upon the analyses found in the first two chapters, chapters 3 and 4 each attempt to carve out a niche of unexplored territory. Chapter 3 discusses elements of both "Genesis B" and "The Dream of the Rood" which have not been comprehensively covered. My aim in including "Genesis B" is to indicate how the respective genders of Adam and Eve structure the rhetoric of Satan's messenger. The analysis of "The Dream of the Rood" not only covers "Christ-as-Lord" and "rood-as-thane" but ventures into the issue of the cross as Christ's weapon.

Chapter 4 forms the culminating analysis, drawing as it does on concepts found in all three previous chapters. The plight of the seafarer cannot be realized until we understand the value system inherent in the comitatus, the loss of which he is mourning. The lament of the wife can be underestimated until we perceive the role that an aristocratic Anglo-Saxon woman plays when she is not an exile. Deor's present misfortune can be meaningless unless
the value of what he has lost is understood. Underlying all of the elegies is the notion that the joys of the hall, and life itself, are fleeting and precious.

Indeed, the most poignant aspect of Anglo-Saxon poetic expression resides in the perception of existence as transitory, cherished and yet lamented because of its short duration. In the ethos of the comitatus, expressed in poems like Beowulf, there are many messages, many ways in which the poems attempt not only to describe human responses but to structure them. Defining and understanding these codes should be of paramount importance to anyone who hopes to understand the poetry. This is the fundamental first step when approaching any Anglo-Saxon verse.


Bessinger, Jess B., and Robert P. Creed, eds. *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in*


-------------. "'Maldon' and the Óláfsdrápa: An Historical Caveat." In Stevens and Mandel: 237-252.


Chadwick, H. Munro. The Heroic Age. Cambridge, 1912.


Classen, E., and F. E. Harmer, eds. An Anglo-Saxon


Diamond, Robert F. "Heroic Diction in 'The Dream of the Rood'." In Wallace and Ross: 3-7.


Fanagan, John M. "'Wulf and Eadwacer': A Solution to the Critics' Riddle." Neophilologus 60 (1976): 130-137.


Garmonsway, G. N. "Anglo-Saxon Heroic Attitudes." In Bessinger and Creed: 139-146.


-----------------------. "'The Wife's Lament' Reconsidered."


-----------------------. "The Old English Elegies." In Stanley (1966): 142-175.


Johnson, William C., Jr. "'The Wife's Lament' as Death-Song." In M. Green, 69-81.


Klinck, Anne L. "Female Characterization in Old English Poetry and the Growth of Psychological Realism."


--------------------------. "'The Wanderer': Theme and Structure." In Stevens and Mandel: 139-162.


Magennis, Hugh. "The Beowulf Poet and his Druncne


Murphy, Michael. "Vows, Boasts and Taunts, and the Role of


Nelson, Marie. "On 'Resignation'." In M. Green: 133-147.


--------. "'Wulf and Eadwacer: A Noninterpretation." In *Bessinger and Creed*: 147-163.


Rosier, James L. "Design For Treachery: The Unferth


"The Date of Beowulf: Some Doubts and No Conclusions." In Chase (1981): 197-211.


-------------. "The Situation of the Narrator in the Old English 'Wife's Lament'." *Speculum* 56 (1981): 492-516.


-------------. "The Interpretation of 'The Seafarer'." In Fox and Dickins, 261-272.


-------------. "Doctrinal Influences on 'The Dream of the


VITA

Leslie Stratynner was born in New York City, and spent most of her formative years in Albany, New York. She received both a B. A. and an M. A. in English from The State University of New York at Albany, before moving to Louisiana to pursue her Doctorate. Currently an Assistant Professor of English at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York, Ms. Stratynner teaches courses in Anglo-Saxon, Medieval, and Ancient Literatures.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Leslie Stratyner

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Forged Ties: The Comitatus and Anglo-Saxon Poetry

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

September 20, 1991