The State of the Feud:

Examining feud and *fæhð* in early medieval English history and *Beowulf*

MA Thesis Philology

Charlotte van der Made

1470159

15 February 2019

Dr. M.H. Porck

Dr. K.A. Murchison

Leiden University, Department of English Language and Culture

Cover image: Cod. Pal. germ. 164, f. 11r.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Paul Hyams begins his article "Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England" with the bold statement that "every student of the Anglo-Saxons accepts the existence of feud as a feature of society before the Norman Conquest".[1] These feuds are characterised as being on an interpersonal level, for instance between individuals or family groups. Although the presence of a feud does not equate to constant ongoing violent conflict between the parties involved, feuds are understood to pave the way for acts of violence driven by the concept of *lex talionis*, or "an eye for an eye".[2] If a society were to act in accordance with this concept instead of attempting to resolve a feud peacefully, a so-called "feuding culture" could develop, where one act of vengeance would always beget another. The existence of such a feuding culture in early medieval England would suggest that the Anglo-Saxons lived in a time coloured by not only the brutality and warfare their society was founded on,[3] but also by constant animosity and acts of retributive violence.

Revenge-driven feuds of a similar unwavering nature come to the fore in *Beowulf*. Although the poem contains various attempts at peaceful conflict resolution, many of the feuds portrayed end up being the catalyst for vicious cycles of vengeance. Within the fictional world of *Beowulf*, the concept of exacting revenge is even glorified, a phenomenon that is best illustrated by the statement of the title character that "sēlre bið æġhwæm / þæt hē his frēond wrece þonne hē fela murne" [it is always better to avenge one's friend than to mourn much].[4] This sentiment fits in well with the other heroic ideals that the poem celebrates, such as loyalty and an ambition for fame.[5] Despite the fact that no consensus has ever been reached regarding a specific dating of *Beowulf*, the poem is treated by Hyams as being representative of Anglo-

---

[1] Paul Hyams, "Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001): 1.

[2] Exodus 21:24.

[3] R.I. Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.), 1-3.

[4] *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and John Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), ll. 1384b-1385.

[5] Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., "Old English Heroic Literature," in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 84.

Saxon history as a whole.[6] Such a reading of *Beowulf* makes acknowledging a feuding culture in Anglo-Saxon times all the more tempting, due to the central role the feud plays in the poem.

However, Hyams's confidence in the assumption that feuding was integral to the Anglo-Saxon lifestyle is not shared by everyone. John D. Niles, for instance, has cast doubt on the idea of the omnipresence of feuding within Anglo-Saxon society before, during, and after the Norman Conquest. Rather than considering the literary presence of feuding to be representative of actual practice in early medieval England, Niles believes that feuds served as stylised and unrealistic models of social conflict meant to encourage the Anglo-Saxons to distinguish "just" and "malignant" vengeance from within a fictional framework.[7] In his view, describing the situation in Anglo-Saxon times as a "feuding culture" does not do justice to the social and legal history of the period.

Another issue with the notion that feuds were an integral part of early medieval English society before the Norman Conquest is that the Anglo-Saxon period spans several centuries: from around the first half of the fifth century until the second half of the eleventh century,[8] when the Norman Conquest took place. Since culture and daily life were constantly in flux during this period, early medieval England deserves more than a blanket statement regarding the workings of its society and culture. Instead, the historical timeline should be more carefully considered in order to identify when and why any developments in the supposed feuding culture took place, and what these developments meant for the status quo.

In order to ascertain Hyams's assertion of the omnipresence of feuds, it is worth looking at where the foundations for it lie. Many signs that point to the existence of a feuding culture can be found in the Anglo-Saxon text corpus. Various chronicles and law codes deal with the topic of personal compensation in the form of revenge or monetary compensation. Additionally,

---

[6] Hyams, "Feud and the State," 4-5.

[7] John D. Niles, "The Myth of the Feud in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114 (2015): 167.

[8] Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, 1.

as mentioned before, the concept of the feud is an integral theme in *Beowulf*. In order to truly understand the manner in which feuding comes to the fore in these respective texts, this thesis will take care to examine the role of the feud per individual text rather than making a sweeping statement that applies to them all.

With this thesis, I aim to provide a better understanding of the presence and development of a "feuding culture" throughout the Anglo-Saxon era. I will base my analyses and conclusions on modern-day historical scholarship and early medieval English source texts alike. Furthermore, I will examine how feuds and the ways in which they are resolved are characterised in *Beowulf*, and compare this characterisation to the aforementioned historical period in the conclusion of this thesis. As the *Beowulf*-poet appears to be disapproving of the concept of the feud and the violence it brought about, in spite of the poem's characters approving of and even glorifying the feud, there is reason to believe the poem's intended audience was equally critical towards the feud. Consequently, the poet's attitude towards feuding may be linked to that of early medieval English kings.

The first chapter of this thesis will deal primarily with the historical attitude towards feuding and the ways in which a "feuding culture" was represented in legislation. Although the focus will be on the period between the late sixth century and the Norman Conquest in 1066, the way the Conquest affected this development will be taken into consideration as well in order to demonstrate that the new laws the Conquest brought did not significantly differ from the laws that preceded it. The second chapter will look at the way the various feuds between monsters and men in *Beowulf* are characterised, and show that the *Beowulf*-poet's attitude towards feuding may not match that of the characters he writes about in his poem. The third and final chapter will approach the feuds in Beowulf from a different angle and look at the various and almost always futile attempts at bringing feuds to a peaceful resolution. Analysing the representation of feuds in *Beowulf* within the poem's cultural-historical context will ultimately allow us to understand both past and poem better.

CHAPTER 1 - FEUDING IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

This chapter will examine the attitude towards feuding in early medieval England as well as the development of the role feuds played in its society in the period leading up to the Norman Conquest. As mentioned before, Paul Hyams believes feuding to have been a universally accepted feature of early medieval English society in this period. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the period Hyams mentions saw many changes in rulers and regulations alike. Furthermore, it is often difficult if not impossible to speak of "early medieval England" in general, as a unified England came about reasonably late, and we are dealing with a period spanning several centuries. For those reasons, we should be wary of making sweeping statements about what did and did not apply to early medieval English society as a whole. Instead, it would do well to examine whether the continual changes in authorities and legislation also brought about changes in attitude and the degree to which the term "feuding culture" was applicable to society.

To start with, this chapter will consider lexical evidence of feuding. A comparison of the denotations of the Modern English word *feud* and those of what is commonly considered to be its Old English equivalent will show that the people of early medieval England had different associations with feuding than we do today. Beginning with terminology will also allow for the establishment of a working definition of the modern term *feud*, so that it may be made clear what it entails in this thesis. This section will prove that our modern-day understanding of feuding is likely different to that of early medieval English society, due to the different role feuding played in the latter society. Secondly, this chapter will analyse two anecdotal examples found in historical evidence of the early medieval English period. The first of these, the anecdote of Imma as related by Bede, describes the story of a young man who disguises his identity after being captured in battle to prevent his affiliations with an ongoing feud from being revealed. The second of these is the famous annal of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This entry from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is believed by Hyams to be a

contemporary anecdotal example of the "feuding culture" in action.[9] Finally, this chapter will rely on a combination of early medieval English sources and modern-day sources based on historical research in order to create a general impression of early medieval English legislation and how it dealt with the presence of feuding. In doing so, this chapter will provide a more nuanced view of what Hyams considers a "feuding culture", and show that feuding was considered a problem in early medieval English society as evidenced by the continually expanding countermeasures against it.

"Feud" and "Fæhð"

One of the bases of Hyams's assertion that the feud was a central aspect of Anglo-Saxon culture is the presence of the word *fæhð* in Old English texts. This word, Hyams says, is one "most scholars seem happy to translate as 'feud'".[10] Of course, such a happily accepted translation in itself means nothing yet, which Hyams seems to realise: he points out that the mere presence of a term does not guarantee "an institution"[11] applicable to the workings of an entire society. However, the risk of a hasty conclusion based on nothing but the existence of a term is not the only issue with Hyams's claim. As this section will demonstrate, Hyams's argument fails to take into account the vast difference between the modern-day meaning of *feud* and the denotation the Anglo-Saxons ascribed to *fæhð*. In order to demonstrate this problem with Hyams's claims about *fæhð*, it is necessary to first have a clear understanding of both terms. As such, I will start by considering both *feud* and *fæhð* in detail.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) provides four denotations for *feud*. Two of these denotations refer to a state of dissent between two parties, namely "active hatred or enmity, hostility, ill-will"[12] and "a state of bitter and lasting mutual hostility".[13] Another entry simply denotes *feud* as "a quarrel,

---

[9] Hyams, "Feud and the State," 6.

[10] *Ibid.*, 4.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "feud."

[13] *Ibid.*

contention, bickering",[14] which also appears to mainly express discontent between two parties. The remaining entry defines *feud* as "a state of perpetual hostility between two families, tribes, or individuals, marked by murderous assaults in revenge for some previous insult or injury".[15] This entry is the most expansive one out of the four, and adds a nuance of inherent violence to *feud* not shared by the other denotations. However, whereas no further details are provided for the other three entries, this last entry specifies that this denotation can more fully be referred to as a "deadly feud" or "vendetta".[16] The fact that this entry of *feud* is the only one to refer to other, more expansive terminology to more accurately match the denotation it provides suggests that while violent action can take place in a feud, its presence is not a requirement for a situation to be defined as one.

A similar interpretation of the term can be found in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, which defines modern English *feud* in context with Anglo-Saxon history. Here, feuds are described as "conditions of hostility between individuals or groups within the one community caused by wrongs done by one side to the other".[17] Similarly to three of the denotations provided in the OED, *feud* here does not necessarily entail continual retribution or violence between the parties involved. The only specifics added by this particular description are the facts that a feud can take place between individuals and groups alike, and that feuds come into existence through wrong-doings. Based on the above definitions, this paper will define modern English *feud* as denoting a state of mutual hostility between two parties caused by previous insult, with a potential, but not necessity, for violent action taking place.

From these conclusions about the modern English term *feud*, the first problem with Hyams's claim emerges: the meanings of *feud* and *fæhð* do not directly correspond to each other, as can be gleaned from the Toronto

---

[14] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "feud."

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Michael Lapidge, John Blair, and Simon Keynes, *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 182.

University's *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE). The problem does not lie in the denotations of *fæhð* as provided by the DOE, as these are quite vague and can be considered similar to those of *feud*: *fæhð* is glossed as "feud, state of feuding, enmity, hostility; hostile act".[18] Out of these denotations, "hostile act" is the only one that jumps out as being different to our modern-day *feud*. However, the DOE also provides quotations of various Old English texts in which *fæhð* can be found which suggest that the connotations of *fæhð* vastly differed from those of *feud*. In poetic texts, for instance, the word *fæhð* is often used in relation to cycles of retributive violence as a means of settling a score.[19] In legal texts, the word is used to specify situations that require lawful settlement, as later analysis in this chapter will expand on.[20]

In light of these considerations, equating *fæhð* to a "state of hostility" or even a "hostile act" appears an oversimplification. Instead, the contexts in which the word is used insinuate that *fæhð* also often has to do with a desire for settlement, whether it is a physical or lawful one. Additional evidence of a relationship between *fæhð* and legal settlement is the existence of the term *fæhðbot*. This term only appears in law codes, and is defined by the DOE as "compensation incurred as the result of a feud, compensation for manslaughter (committed against one's kin)".[21] The conclusion to draw here is that, although *feud* appears to be a decent translation for *fæhð* in some cases, "happily" equating the two terms is too rash: the Old English term's potential interpretations are lot more varied than those of *feud*, and are heavily dependent on the context in which the term appears. Blindly translating *fæhð* with *feud* as Hyams would happily have us do, then, will inevitably not always do justice to the implications of the term *fæhð*.

A second problem with Hyams's claim, and another reason why we should not be so quick to use *feud* and *fæhð* interchangeably, is that *fæhð* "has no modern English reflex".[22] In his article that criticises Hyams's claim, Niles

---

[18] *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, s.v. "fæhð."

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, s.v. "fæhð-bot."

[22] Niles, "The Myth of the Feud," 170.

explains that if a modern English reflex of *fæhð* would exist today, the word would be spelled either as *feath* or as *feeth*. Neither of these constructions can be found in modern sources. Although the Old English *fæhð* and Modern English *feud* share a common Germanic source,[23] the two words developed independently from one another. Old English *fæhð* was one of many words that ended up disappearing from use after the Norman Conquest.[24] According to the OED, the Modern English *feud* plausibly came into existence in a dialectical area somewhere in the north instead, and eventually spread throughout the language of the rest of the country from there.[25] While this etymological scenario does not necessarily mean that *feud* and *fæhð* are unable to share a meaning, it offers reason for reconsideration of equating the two terms, especially when keeping the aforementioned connotations of the two terms in mind.

One final thing to note in favour of the argument that the presence of the word *fæhð* in Old English texts cannot be taken as irrefutable evidence of an existent feuding culture is the fact that the term predominantly appears in poetry. Moreover, out of the sixty occurrences *fæhð* the DOE lists, the vast majority of instances of *fæhð* are found in *Beowulf*.[26] Thus, although it is impossible to make definite claims about everyday Old English, there is no evidence that the word *fæhð* played a significant role in daily vocabulary, and it may have instead been limited in use even within a poetic context.

In short, the denotation, connotations, and origins of *fæhð* cannot be equated with the ones of our modern-day term *feud*. Additionally, as above analysis has shown, whereas the modern English term is part of the everyday lexicon, the Old English one was likely an independently developed term mainly used in contemporary poetry. Based on these two facts, it is debatable whether the Anglo-Saxons had an equivalent understanding to ours of the implications of a feud. If we want to use a modern-day understanding of a term as a framework for analysing history, we must also make sure to keep the

---

[23] Niles, "The Myth of the Feud," 169.

[24] *Ibid.*, 170.

[25] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "feud."

[26] *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, s.v. "fæhð."

contemporary understanding of the terminology and its implications in mind. If we fail to do so, we risk damaging the historical credibility of an analysis by glossing over conflicting information found within our sources.

Story of Imma

The first of the two historical anecdotes this chapter will examine is one found in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[27] Bede tells us that, in the year 679, a young Northumbrian man named Imma was struck down in battle and taken captive by the Mercians. Afraid to admit he had fought in the battle as a member of king Ælfwine's *militia*, Imma told his captors that he was a poor, married peasant, who had only come to the battlefield to supply the army with provisions. Imma was then allowed to recover. Over time, his captors became suspicious of his identity, and promised no harm would befall him if he would admit to who he was. When Imma revealed his true identity, a nobleman among his captors told him "now you deserve to die, because all my brothers and relations were killed in that fight; yet I will not put you to death, that I may not break my promise".[28] Instead, Imma was sold into slavery.

Two points of interest relevant to the concept of *fæhð* arise from this summary. The first of these is the fact that Imma felt the need to conceal his true identity rather than admitting he belonged to the Northumbrian *militia*. According to Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, an explanation for this hesitancy lies in what the term *militia* meant in the writing of Bede: instead of just referring to a member of military service, "*militia* was used for the retinue of noble warriors that accompanied a king of queen".[29] In other words, Imma may have had more affiliations with the Northumbrian nobility than the average soldier. Although it is unclear which element to Imma's lie in particular, if any, safeguarded him, it is evident that he meant to put "as much distance as possible between himself and what he really was"[30] in order to minimise the risk of exposing his association with the feud.

---

[27] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, IV.xxii.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, "Social Structures," in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500-c.1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell), 111.

[30] Charles-Edwards, "Social Structures," 113.

The second point of interest, namely the Mercian nobleman's reaction to Imma's reveal, sheds some light on the latter's decision to hide his true identity and on its relevance to *fæhð*. We can conclude from what the Mercian nobleman says to Imma that, through nothing more than his identity, Imma somehow is considered to be involved in a feud which should be avenged. As Edwards points out, it is unfortunately not possible to pinpoint exactly which part of Imma's true identity is the root cause of this responsibility, much in the same way that it is unclear which part of his lie acted as protection.[31] What the actions of Imma and the noblemen do tell us, however, is that there was a mutual awareness between the two men of the *fæhð* and the related burden of responsibility for vengeance. In turn, the existence of this account shows that feuding is likely to have played a role in the society of the late seventh and early eighth century.

Annal 755: Cynewulf and Cyneheard

The second anecdote, among the most famous historical accounts interpreted as an example of early medieval English feuds, is the one found in Annal 755 of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard. The annal describes a number of events that are assumed to have taken place between 757 and 786.[32] Two of these events contain examples of acts of violence motivated by a desire for vengeance. According to Hyams, the narrative of these events is a "most convincing" historical example of feuding, and a depiction of "a string of patent feud killings".[33] Niles, however, describes the episode as concerning "an in-house dynastic struggle, not intergroup feuding in the absence of central authority", arguing instead that the anecdote is "feud-like" at best.[34] In order to clarify to what degree the concept of the feud is applicable to the the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, this section will now go on to reassess Annal 755 from an angle that considers

---

[31] Charles-Edwards, "Social Structures," 113.

[32] Stephen D. White, "Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: The Story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard," *Viator* 20 (1989): 1. White lists various sources which support the claim that these events started to unfold in 757 (and not in 755, as the annal's entry number suggests).

[33] Hyams, "Feud and the State," 6.

[34] Niles, "The Myth of the Feud," 195.

the aforementioned definition and implications of the feud in Anglo-Saxon England.

The first event containing an example of retributive violence is described at the beginning of the annal. The entry starts off by describing how "her Cynewulf benam Sigebryht his rices" [in this year Cynewulf deprived king Sigebryht of his kingdom];[35] as a punishment for Sigebryht's "unrihtum dædum" [unrighteous deeds], Cynewulf and his *witan* dethroned Sigebryht, leaving only Hampshire in his rule. Sigebryht continued to rule over Hampshire until "he ofslog þone aldormon þe him lengest wunode" [he slew the aldorman who had longest remained with him], after which Cynewulf drove him into the forest of Andred. Here, Sygebryht was stabbed to death by a herdsman, who "wræc þone aldormon Cumbran" [avenged the aldorman Cumbra]. Although no relation between the herdsman and alderman has been established, the fact that the act is specifically described as vengeance for Cumbra suggests that, similarly to the Mercians in the story of Imma, the herdsman felt responsible for the avenging of a feud.

The second example takes place after roughly thirty-one years. In this year, Cynewulf drove Sygebryht's brother Cyneheard out of his kingdom. Cyneheard learns that Cynewulf is visiting a woman at Merantûn, and uses this information to lead a following towards him in order to kill him. After Cynewulf is killed, Cyneheard offers Cynewulf's retainers "feoh ond feorh" [money and life], but this offer is not accepted. Instead, the retainers attack Cyneheard and his men, and all lose their lives in "what was evidently a hopeless attempt to avenge Cynewulf".[36] The fact that Cyneheard's offer was not accepted suggests that Cynewulf's retainers were still loyal to the latter,[37] and attempted to avenge their king out of a sense of duty towards their lord and the feud.

---

[35] All following quotations are from Benjamin Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities Volume 1: Original Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Library Collection - Rolls, 2012): 82-87. All following translations are from Benjamin Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities Volume 2: Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Library Collection - Rolls, 2012): 42-44.

[36] White, "Kinship and Lordship," 3. Summary of this section based on that of White as well, to avoid misinterpretation of the annal's ambiguous pronouns.

[37] Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., "The Germanic Context of "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" Revisited," *Neophilologus* 81 (1997): 461.

The commitment towards avenging a feud as displayed in the events above, but also in the story of Imma and Annal 755 in general, may in part be explained by the heroic ideals of loyalty. This can be illustrated in context with the events described above with the statement of Cynewulf's retainers "þæt him nænig mæg leofra nære þonne hiera hlaford" [that to them no kinsman was dearer than their lord].[38] This sentiment reflects certain ideals from the "heroic ethos" that was part of Anglo-Saxon culture, namely those of loyalty to the lord, the obligation of mutual protection, and the subsequent keeping of honour.[39] Refusing to avenge one's lord or kin would mean going against this ethos and in turn damage one's honour.

In light of the above, we are able to discern a more nuanced view of the Annal than the ones provided by Hyams and Niles. While Niles is correct in assessing the narrative as one relating a dynastic struggle, the Annal can certainly still be viewed as an example of feuding in early medieval England. This claim can be evidenced first of all by the fact that the aldorman Cumbra is said to have been avenged by a herdsman. As this herdsman does not appear to have any personal involvement in the conflict, it is reasonable to assume he acted out of a sense of duty associated with feuding in Anglo-Saxon times. Similarly, Cynewulf's retainers performed their heroic duty of avenging their lord, in spite of their attempt being "hopeless": although they were likely aware that their attempted vengeance would be in vain, the retainers chose to honour their responsibility for avenging the feud.

Early medieval English justice: late sixth to eighth century

The two anecdotes examined above show that feuding, and in turn the violent avenging of kinsmen, were historical fact around the late seventh and early eighth century. Examining how this retributive violence is portrayed in various early medieval English legal documents will show that there was an awareness among authority of the presence of violent feuding even before this period, as well as a desire for regulating it. Before examining these documents, it has to be addressed that the extent to which these law codes

[38] Thorpe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 43.

[39] Bremmer, "Old English Heroic Literature," 76-78.

were put to practice is uncertain:[40] although legislation was put to paper by various kings, we cannot be sure that it was meant to be actively enforced. Hyams addresses this issue in his piece on feuding, explaining that Anglo-Saxon law codes are found to be more significant "as indicators of an ideology of royal governance"[41] than as representative of actual practice.

According to James Campbell et al.'s *The Anglo-Saxons*, the law codes available to us signal that the early English justice system was essentially founded on the principle of blood-feud. Such a justice system meant that a wronged party was always entitled to some form of vengeance or compensation. This system then would discourage crime due to the threat of potential counteraction and simultaneously encourage the settlement of an existing dispute.[42] Describing this justice system as one based on the principle of blood-feuds seems contradictory at first glance, as this system attempts to prevent rather than encourage this type of feud from developing. However, as the following analysis will show, the bulk of laws found in the Anglo-Saxon corpus were, much like the principle of the blood-feud, often based on the desire for compensation,.

Some of the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws were composed around the start of the seventh century and can be credited to Æthelberht, whose legislation reflected that of the Roman continent. Æthelberht's laws were later expanded upon by Hlothhere and Wihtred.[43] Many of these laws are concerned with the compensation of wrongs, but rather than enabling a system of blood-feud based on violent retrbution, these compensations are almost always monetary in nature.[44] Compensation could be paid to either the wronged party, their kin, or a party functioning as kin as a means of settlement. Specifically, the forms of monetary compensation referenced in these law codes are the so-called *bōt* and *wergild*.

---

[40] James Campbell, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 98.

[41] Hyams, "Feud and the State," 10.

[42] Campbell et al., *The Anglo-Saxons*, 98.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Compromising Laws Enacted under the Anglo-Saxon Kings from Aethelbirht to Cnut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-43.

The term *bōt* generally refers to the making of amends, whether these restorations are material or figurative.[45] In the context of the law codes, this term referred to a monetary compensation that had to be paid to the victim or his kin. Usually, the law specified the number of shillings that had to be paid as a *bōt*, which varied depending on the crime. In the laws of king Æthelberht, for instance, we find a list of *bōt* to be paid after inflicting various injuries: if you expose someone's bone, three shillings compensation would have to be paid. If, however, you were to break someone's skull, ten shillings compensation would be required, so as to match the higher severity of the crime.[46]

Similar to *bōt*, *wergild* was another form of monetary compensation paid to the victim or his kin. Whereas *bōt* was determined by the severity of the crime, the amount of *wergild* to be paid depended on the social status of the wronged party. This system of monetary compensation already appears in the early law codes of Æthelberht of Kent, Hlothhere, and Wihtred. The specifics of *wergild* were expanded upon in later law codes, such as that of Ine of Wessex(r. 688-725).[47] In Ine's laws, three "ranks" of free people can be identified, all with their own respective value varying between 200, 600, and 1200 shillings.[48] The system of *wergild* survives in later ninth- and tenth-century law codes as well,[49] signifying its importance in early English legislation.

Not all forms of legal compensation were monetary. While many of Ine's laws are indeed concerned with monetary settlement, a few laws have been recorded that prescribe maiming or capital punishment for crimes considered to be particularly severe. Thieves in particular were convicted harshly: among Ine's laws, there are those that specify that it is acceptable to kill a thief caught in the act, that theft may be punished by death, and that thieves risk the

---

[45] *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, s.v. "bōt."

[46] Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 13-14.

[47] F.L. Attenborough, "The Laws of Ine and Alfred," in *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34.

[48] Campbell et al., *The Anglo-Saxons*, 99.

[49] Such as those of Edward the Elder and Æthelstan, found in Attenborough, *The Laws of Earliest English Kings*, 114-169.

removal of their hand or foot. One law here is of particular interest, as it speaks of *fæhð*: "Se þe ðeof gefehð, he ah x scill., 7 se cyning ðone ðeof; 7 þa mægas him swerian aðas unfæhða" [He who captures a thief shall have 10 shillings. The thief shall be given up to the king, and his kinsmen shall swear that they will carry on no vendetta against him].[50] In this law, a thief's kinsmen are expected to swear an oath of *unfæhða*: being without a *fæhð* to avenge, essentially preventing the further development of a feud. Bringing about a culprit's death in such a legal manner meant that there was no need for further acts of vengeance, as the wronged party would receive justice and the wrong-doer and his kinsmen had no legal basis for demanding compensation.

The above examination of the law codes shows that, even with a brief overview, we can identify the survival of a system where crimes could be legally rectified through either payment, physical or capital punishment, or in rare cases through retaliation in an act of self-preservation.[51] The paying of *bōt* or *wergild* would act as a restoration of honour and settlement of a dispute, which in turn meant to take away any incentive for the wronged party to take matters into their own, potentially violent hands.[52] While these laws still take the personal involvement of culprit and victim into account and thus do acknowledge the desire for a personal settlement, they discourage the development of violence and feuding by offering alternative means of settlement.

Early medieval English justice: ninth to early eleventh century

This element of personal involvement gradually lessened as the laws developed over time. Instead, rulers and authorities acted as a "middle man" increasingly often, and a feud could be considered settled if a culprit recompensed through payment or the receiving of punishment. Some of the earliest legislation in which this change from personal to authorial

---

[50] Attenborough, "Laws of Ine and Alfred," 44-45.

[51] Such as in the aforementioned laws regarding thievery.

[52] Campbell et al., *The Anglo-Saxons*, 99.

involvement becomes evident is that issued by King Alfred, whose laws followed up those of Ine.[53] Two legal codes of Alfred are extant.[54]

The first of these, the so-called *domboc* [Doom Book], is a collection of written laws compiled from already-extant laws of his predecessors. Like those of Ine, Alfred's laws made certain crimes punishable by death.[55] Alfred elaborated on the laws of his predecessors by personally involving himself in some of them, as can be illustrated by one law that decrees that if one were to injure a widow or step-child, Alfred would with his sword slay the culprit.[56] The fact that Alfred himself would avenge the done wrong meant that the feud was settled on legal grounds, and that the kin of the victim had no reason to continue bearing a grudge as the personal element had been taken out of the equation. Similarly, the above examination of the legislation of Ine has already shown that the kin of the culprit was to consider themselves *unfæhða* as well.

This change from personal to legal compensation did not mean that the old systems were replaced entirely in the *domboc*. Plenty of Alfred's laws mimic older ones and still call on the payment of *bōt* and *wergild*, and interestingly, some of the laws continue to encourage vengeance. This becomes especially apparent in the case of one law where Alfred seemed to take the concept of "an eye for an eye" to heart, as it decrees if one is to thrust out another's eye, they are indeed literally to give their own for it. Similarly, the law demands a tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, and wound for wound.[57] This law demonstrates that although the *domboc* shows us a move towards a system where violence and vengeance are discouraged, these concepts were not yet completely eliminated from the law.

The second of Alfred's legal codes is the written treaty between him and

---

[53] Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 44.

[54] Paul Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction in Viking England," in *Cultures and Contact*, ed. Dawn Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 46.

[55] Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 47-53.

[56] *Ibid.*, 52-53.

[57] *Ibid.*, 48-49.

the Danish leader Guthrum, written sometime between 880 and 890.[58] Like the law codes, the treaty described various methods to settle disputes in which the English and Danish people were considered of equal *wergild* value.[59] In addition, the document detailed the boundaries that divided the respective territories of Alfred and Guthrum. What distinguishes this document and other *friðgewritu* [written peace settlements] like it from the law codes that had appeared thus far is the fact that it was intended to settle and ensure peace between two specific groups of people, in this case the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians.[60] The existence of such peace agreements would in theory have enable *fæhð* to be legally discouraged even between groups not originally bound by the same law.

The later law codes of King Edmund, composed likely around 942,[61] expand further on the concept of *unfæhða* as found in the laws of Ine and on the personal involvement of the king as introduced by King Alfred. This phenomenon can be illustrated by Edmund's laws relating to homicide: these laws decree that in the occasion where a wronged party's kin abandons him, the kin is consequently to be considered *unfæhða*. If the *unfæhða* kin or anyone else not acknowledged as part of the feud were to take vengeance after all, they would be legally considered an enemy of the king and their own friends, and would have to forfeit their possessions.[62] This additional element of punishing those who choose to participate in a feud they are not legally involved in with being declared enemies of the authority and of their own friends would act as further discouragement from getting involved in feuding.

All the law codes described above concern those written before the Norman Conquest, the period in which Paul Hyams believes a "feuding culture" is present. As examination of these laws have shown, what we now call "feuding" was considered a problem in this period, with legislation actively trying to counter this problem. The first two law codes from after the

---

[58] Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty," 46.

[59] *Ibid.*, 44.

[60] Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty," 44-45.

[61] Robertson, *Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry 1,* 3.

[62] Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 249.

Norman Conquest and simultaneously the last codes issued in the name of an Anglo-Saxon king are those of Cnut.[63] Analysis of these laws by Pauline Stafford demonstrates that they drew heavily on pre-existent laws, among others those of Æthelred and Edgar,[64] suggesting that the Norman Conquest was no immediate cause for drastic change concerning the approach to feuding. Instead, it is more likely that Cnut's laws simply continued to expand on those of his predecessors, making the existence of a "feuding culture" before the Norman Conquest one that would have slowly diminished over time rather than disappeared the moment the Conquest took place.

Conclusion

The primary question this chapter dealt with was that of whether we could speak of the presence of a "feuding culture" in early medieval England. As the first section of this chapter has demonstrated, the Anglo-Saxons did not have a term to describe feuding equal to ours. Instead, the presence of a feud was left implicit, with the term *fæhð* referring to legal matters rather than a presence of mutual hostility. Based on this more precise understanding of what the term "feud" entails in an early medieval English context, analysis of the story of Imma and Annal 755 has shown that feuding and the violent revenge inherent to it in this time period took place even after initial developments in legislation attempted to settle these matters with money rather than brutality. However, these early law codes continued to include and further specify appropriate compensation methods for wrong-doings, suggesting that the desire for personal rectification as illustrated by the two historical anecdotes was acknowledged and respected.

It was not until later developments in legislation that interpersonal conflict increasingly became discouraged. Instead of keeping settlements between the parties involved, the king started acting as a middle man and exacting punishment considered appropriate for the crime. Increasingly specific systems of *bōt* and *wergild* meant a culprit of a crime was enabled to buy his

---

[63] Pauline Stafford, "The laws of Cnut and the history of Anglo-Saxon royal promises," *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981): 173.

[64] *Ibid.*, 174-175

acquittal, allowing a feud to be settled rather than continuing due to constant unlawful retributive action. Later punishments to be exacted by the king took out the personal element of a feud entirely. Moreover, documents such as peace treaties were written to encourage and ensure peace between specified groups of people that were likely to clash and were otherwise not bound by the same law. These laws were incorporated in the codes that followed the Norman Conquest, suggesting that they were still deemed relevant to the society following the Conquest.

Based on all of the above, we can conclude that to speak of a "feuding culture" at work in the entire period leading up to the Norman Conquest is possible, though also misleading. While historical evidence suggests that violent feuding indeed took place, the development of the law codes shows that this feuding was considered a problem even in early Anglo-Saxon times. As we can see feuding and interpersonal conflict and vengeance becoming increasingly regulated and discouraged as laws developed over time, it is reasonable to assume that the presence of feuding decreased over time as well. Therefore, while we can speak of a "feuding culture" at work, we must also remember that it was one that entailed countermeasures against the feud and thus very likely diminished over time. However, we must not forget that, despite the discouragement of it in legal codes, *fæhð* was a popular term and principle to include in poetic works at the time. As the lexical research early on in this chapter has shown, the term was often used in *Beowulf* especially. Since this frequent appearance of the term suggests that *fæhð* is assigned an important role within the poem, the following chapter of this thesis will turn to *fæhð* in *Beowulf*.

CHAPTER 2 - *FÆHÐE OND FYRENE* IN *BEOWULF*

The first chapter of this thesis has shown that the principle of the feud, and the mutual retribution that came with it, was an acknowledged issue in early medieval English society. Additionally, preceding analysis has demonstrated that our modern-day understanding of the term *feud* does not flawlessly correspond to the Old English term *fæhð*. Whereas the first chapter mainly focused on the role of the feud in historical documents, this next chapter will shift the focus towards *fæhð* as it comes to the fore in *Beowulf*. As briefly alluded to earlier in this thesis, both the narrative and language use of *Beowulf* are rich in elements that can be associated with *fæhð*. Plenty of conflicts are at play in the poem, many of which come with acts of revenge on both sides. Moreover, the poet makes use of what we may describe as a feuding vocabulary: situations are often specified to be the product of *fæhð*, and the poet occasionally speaks of *wræc* [revenge], *wrecan* [avenge], and *yrre* [in the poem's context: wrathfulness]. The aim of this chapter will be to examine the role *fæhð* played in *Beowulf*, and argue that the *Beowulf*-poet represented this type of conflict in a manner that suggests he was critical of it.

To support this view, this chapter will analyse two types of conflict that occur in the poem: those between monsters and men, and those that take place within just mankind. Throughout the poem, both types of conflicts are presented as feuds for which no settlement can be reached, as this chapter will show. More specifically, examining the poem's feuds between man and monster will illustrate that the *Beowulf*-poet made use of a feuding vocabulary even in situations where creatures not bound to human law and ideology were involved. In turn, these feuds can be used to illustrate Beowulf's positive opinion of *fæhð*. The second type of conflict, those that take place between parties involving only humans, will then be examined to contrast Beowulf's approval of *fæhð* with the *Beowulf*-poet's apparent criticism of it. From the structure and semantic choices that surround these feuds, combined with the perpetual nature almost all the conflicts have in the poem, it becomes apparent that the *Beowulf*-poet may have meant for his audience to do what his

eponymous hero did not: to view feud-related vengeance as something to eschew rather than pursue.

The Grendelkin feud

The first feud the poet introduces to his audience is the one concerning the Grendelkin and mankind. Just over a hundred lines into the poem, Grendel is introduced and described as being "forscrifen" [condemned][65] to be at strife with mankind. The poem insinuates that this condemnation originates from Grendel's descent from the biblical Cain: in lines 105-115 of the poem, it is described how Cain was driven away from mankind after slaying his brother Abel, after which he brought antagonistic "untȳdras" [evil offspring] into the world. Of this offspring it is said that they "wið Gode wunnon / lange þrāge" [strove with God for a long time]. In turn, the conflict between Grendel and mankind appears to be long-lasting to the point of perpetuity.

This phenomenon is first illustrated through the description of Grendel's repeated attacks on the Danes. The poem tells us in line 137 that Grendel "wæs tō fæst" [was too fixated] on "fæhðe ond fyrene" [*fæhð* and evil deeds] to feel any type of remorse or aversion towards his actions. David Day notes that the appearance of this latter construction is "significant", for its appearance contextualised with the repetition of the attacks emphasises the perpetual nature of *fæhð*.[66] In line with this perpetuity, it is made clear that Grendel has no wish for any type of peaceful resolution: through their ballads, the Danes tell their people how Grendel "sibbe ne wolde / wið manna hwone mæġenes Deniġa / feorhbealo feorran, fēa þingian" [did not want peace with any man of the Danish people, to cease his deadly attacks, to settle with monetary payment].[67] Although it can be gleaned from these lines that settlement through payment would have been possible, Grendel's disinclination to do so contributes to the continuation of *fæhð*.

---

[65] *Beowulf*, l. 106b. All quotations from Beowulf are from *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008). All translations are my own, assisted by the glossary in *Klaeber's Beowulf*.

[66] David Day, "*Hwanan sio fæhð aras*: Defining the Feud in *Beowulf*," *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999): 79.

[67] *Beowulf*, ll. 154b-156.

Secondly, to further complicate the possibility of settlement, Grendel's death would not mark the end of *fæhð*. It was known to the Danes that "wrecend þā ġȳt / lifde æfter lāþum" [an avenger still lived after the the hostilities]:[68] Grendel's mother would want to avenge her son, as is expressed here by the description of her as a *wrecend* and in later lines made especially clear when she "ġegān wolde / sorhfulne sīð, sunu dēoð wrecan" [wished to go on a sorrowful journey to avenge her son's death].[69] In addition to these characterisations, Andy Orchard notes a verbal parallel in the description of Grendel's mother's attacks. When Æschere is killed as retribution for Grendel's death, the poet observes in line 1303b that "cearo wæs geniwod" [sorrow was renewed], a construction that is echoed in line 1322b in Hrothgar's reaction that "sorh is geniwod" [sorrow is renewed].[70] This verbal parallel appearing twice on account of the Danes emphasises their involvement in the conflict, for although they are not condemned to participate in it like the Grendelkin are, they are evidently just as affected by it.

This sorrow of the Danes is a third reason provided for the impossibility of resolving the *fæhð*. Due to their inability to move past their feelings of sorrow and resentment, the Danes are also in part responsible for the continuation of the hostilities. In discussing this phenomenon, the poem tells us "wæs þæt ġewin tō strang, / lāð ond longsum"[71] [that strife was too strong, despicable and enduring], a sentiment and construction that is almost exactly repeated just under forty lines onwards in a description of Hrothgar: "ne mihte snotor hæleð / wēan onwendan; wæs þæt ġewin tō swȳð, / lād ond longsum"[72] [the wise hero was not able to turn away woe; that strife was too strong, despicable and enduring]. By appearing twice in relatively short succession, this construction underlines the Danes' inability to process *fæhð* on their own. As

---

[68] *Beowulf*, ll. 1259b-1260a.

[69] *Beowulf*, ll. 1276b-1277.

[70] Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 194

[71] *Beowulf*, ll. 133b-134a.

[72] *Beowulf*, ll. 190b-192a.

neither party involved in this conflict appears open to any sort of peaceful resolution, exacting lethal vengeance appears to be the only option left.

For this purpose, Beowulf arrives. From a speech he holds to Hrothgar, it becomes clear that Beowulf was considered to be the right person for the task at hand as he had slain monsters in his youth:

> ðā iċ of searwum cwōm
> fāh from fēondum, þær iċ fife ġeband,
> ȳðde eotena cyn, ond on ȳdum slōg
> niceras nihtes, nearoþearfe drēah,
> wræc Wedera nið — wēan āhsodon —
> forgrand gramum; ond nū wið Grendel sceal,
> wið þām āglǣċan āna ġehēġan
> ðinġ wið þyrse.[73]

[when I returned from battle stained by the blood of enemies, I bound five there, destroyed ogrish kin, and amidst the waves slew water-monsters at night; I experienced severe distress, avenged injury done to the Wederas — they sought misery — and now against Grendel, against that formidable adversary, I shall go alone to settle the affair with the demon.]

The word choice in Beowulf's speech is interesting, for it clearly makes use of a feuding vocabulary whilst discussing conflict between man and monster. The trouble with Grendel, in regards to which Beowulf mentions "settlement", is effectively juxtaposed here with his past battles with sea-monsters: Beowulf says that the slaying of these monsters avenged done injuries, as one would do in a feud. The inclusion of such feuding vocabulary in Beowulf's speech further accentuates the poem's framing of the human-monster conflicts, and the deaths that result from them, as being products of *fæhð*.

Considering these conflicts from a feuding angle also offers us insight in Beowulf's sentiments towards vengeance and participation in *fæhð*. From his words and actions, it can be gleaned that Beowulf values upholding the apparent moral expectation of avenging one's kin above various other matters, including his own life. This latter priority becomes evident before Beowulf is bound against Grendel and remarks the following: "iċ ġefremman sceal / eorliċ ellen, oþðe endedæġ /on þisse meoduhealle mīnne ġebīdan" [I must

[73] *Beowulf*, ll. 419b-426a.

perform this heroic act of courage, or await my final day in this mead-hall].[74] Dying, it seems, is more desirable to Beowulf than failing to avenge the Danes.

Another one of Beowulf's statements that illustrates his idealisation of *fæhð* appears after Grendel's mother takes revenge for her son's death by killing Hrothgar's companion Æschere. Beowulf assures Hrothgar he should not spend too much time lamenting Æschere's death, saying instead that "sēlre bið æġhwæm / þæt hē his freond wrece þonne hē fela murne" [it is always better to avenge one's friend than to mourn much].[75] Stanley J. Kahrl notes that "we should not necessarily take this maximic assertion of the heroic code as representing the point the point of view of the poet as well",[76] and the aim of this section, too, is to emphasise this expression as being representative of Beowulf's sentiments alone. Beowulf then lives up to his statement when he takes up on his promise to avenge Æschere: as he grabs Grendel's mother by the shoulder in their fight, he is described as "nalas for fæhðe mearn" [not in the least regretting the *fæhð*].[77] The fact that Beowulf would rather exact vengeance than face mourning and regret *fæhð*, combined with his preference to death over defeat, illustrates that Beowulf idealised avenging a feud above anything else.

The dragon episode

The second monster feud, namely the conflict with the dragon, can also be used to illustrate the phenomena introduced above, starting with the emphasis of the role of *fæhð* in a monster conflict. The events that led to the dragon's anger and the subsequent fight can be briefly summarised as follows: after three hundred years of guarding a cave filled with treasure, the dragon wakes up one day to find one of his treasures stolen from him. In response, he flies out on the nights that follow and causes destruction with his flames. Beowulf, who is now old and king of the Geats, is alerted to the dragon's devastation.

---

[74] *Beowulf*, ll. 636b-639.

[75] *Beowulf*, l. 1384b-1385.

[76] Stanley J. Kahrl, "Feuds in *Beowulf*: A Tragic Necessity?," *Modern Philology* 69 (1972): 193.

[77] *Beowulf*, l.1537b.

He learns that his own hall was not spared by the flames, and decides the dragon has to be killed.[78] Although there are obvious instances of immediate reaction to done wrongs, arguably coming from a desire for vengeance, nothing in the narrative is suggestive of a longer-standing enmity between the dragon and the Geatish people.

The first time the situation is described with words that alert us to the presence of a feud is when the dragon awakes: the poem tells us "wrōht wæs ġenīwad" [strife was renewed],[79] a construction reminiscent of those used to describe the Grendelkin feud. While no scholarly consensus has been reached about whether this half-line refers to the reawakening of an already-existent conflict (that may or may not concern the treasure) or instead refers to the uprising of a new one,[80] it does invite the audience to view the events to come as the product of ongoing strife. Other feuding vocabulary is used to describe the conflict as well: of the dragon is said that "wolde se lāða līġe forġyldan" [he wished to repay the hostilities with fire].[81] By adding the element of repayment to the present *wrōht*, the poet further encourages his audience to view the situation from a feuding angle. Additionally, in preparation of the dragon fight, Beowulf is said to have "wræce leornode" [learned vengeance],[82] and learned "hwanan sīo fæhð aras" [where this *fæhð* arose from].[83] In these half-lines, the poet once again continually makes use of a vocabulary where interpreting the conflict of a feud becomes the logical thing to do.

At this point in the analyses of the monster conflicts, it may not come as a surprise that Beowulf's decision to head to battle with the dragon was motivated by a desire for avenging this feud. Just as he did before fighting Grendel, Beowulf holds a speech from which his motivations and ideology

---

[78] ll. 2278-2350. Summary partially referenced from Kenneth Sisam's, found in Kenneth Sisam, "Beowulf's fight with the Dragon," *The Review of English Studies* 9 (1958): 134-135.

[79] *Beowulf*, l. 2287b.

[80] *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 240.

[81] *Beowulf*, l. 2305.

[82] *Beowulf*, l. 2336b.

[83] *Beowulf*, l. 2403b.

becomes clear. In the first part of this speech, Beowulf speaks of a situation in his youth by which he means to illustrate how tragic it is for one to be unable to avenge a feud: when Beowulf was seven years old, his king Hrethel of the Geats lost his oldest son Herebeald after the latter was killed by Hrethel's other son Hæþcyn. Due to the fact that Hrethel's sons were both his and each other's kin, the king was unable to gain justice for the killing, leaving him at an impasse that eventually leads to him dying of sorrow.[84]

Beowulf then follows up this sad part of his speech with details about the Swedish-Geatish conflict, which will be examined in the next section. For now, what matters is that from this part of his speech, Beowulf's ulterior motivation to fight the dragon is made evident: he concludes he shall "fǣhðe sēċan / mærðu fremman, ġif meċ se mānsceaða / of eorðsele ūt ġesēċeð" [seek *fæhð* to perform glorious things if that criminal ravager wishes to greet me from his earth-hall].[85] Apparently, his desire for *mærð* is the biggest motivator for Beowulf's decision. The fact that Beowulf chooses to contrast the apparent misery of not being able to avenge a feud with his clear statement that he is to take revenge against the beast to acquire renown further accentuates his idealisation of vengeance.

One last speech to consider in illustrating the phenomenon of Beowulf equating retribution to honour is the one Wiglaf gives to his fellow retainers after the latter group had abandoned Beowulf. In praising Beowulf, Wiglaf states that the former was enabled to avenge himself by God: "hwæðre him God ūðe / sigora waldend, þæt hē hyne sylfne ġe / āna mid ecge, þā him wæs elnes þearf" [yet God, the victorious ruler, granted him that he, the one with the sword, avenged himself when for him was need of valour].[86] The fact that a character other than Beowulf express the latter's actions in a positive light, in addition to the divine aid Beowulf is said to have received, consolidates the poem's representation of Beowulf as being just as eager for vengeance as for glory, as the two concepts are implied to be related.

---

[84] *Beowulf*, ll. 2428-2471.

[85] *Beowulf*, ll. 2513b-2515.

[86] *Beowulf*, ll. 2874b-2876.

From monsters to men

From analysing the language use that frames the monster conflicts, and the dialogue of the poem's characters, two things become clear. Firstly, the *Beowulf*-poet emphasises the fact that an interminable feud was at play through a continuous use of terms relating to vengeance, strife, and settlement. These terms are often found contextualised with the poem's characters expressing a desire for settlement of any kind. Making use of these terms even when discussing conflicts in which creatures not bound by human law and ideology were involved allowed the poet to underline the importance of *fæhð*. Secondly, Beowulf himself appears to idealise the participation in *fæhð* through avenging wrongdoings that originated from it, likely out of a desire for glory. His speeches before taking on Grendel and the dragon allow us to identify this attitude as one he has had since fighting sea-monsters in his youth up until his death in old age, and his remarks express that he values this ideology above potential dangers, the act of mourning, and even his own life. To show that the *Beowulf*-poet did not share his eponymous hero's positive sentiments, this chapter will now turn to the *Beowulf*-feuds that concern no monsters, and instead feature men on both sides of a conflict.

synn ond sacu*: The Geatish conflicts*

Beowulf contains many allusions to a variety of tribes and ancestries, and glimpses of strife between them are just as plentiful. Often times, the Geats are involved on one side of these "feuds". The following section will analyse these Geatish disputes and demonstrate the tragedy and vicious cycle of bloodshed underlying them, as will become clear with analysis of the speech of the unnamed Messenger, whose duty it is to tell the Geats of Beowulf's death. As the poet pays particular attention to the Swedish-Geatish conflict, it is with this feud this analysis starts.

The first allusion to reasons for animosity between the Swedes and the Geats is provided in the description of Beowulf's ascension to the Geatish throne in lines 2367-2390. This account tells us how king Hygelac was succeeded by his son Heardred, who did not have his mother's confidence that he would be strong enough to defend the throne from outsiders: she would

rather have Beowulf succeed Hygelac. Hygd's concerns turned out to be founded when Heardred chose to harbour two Swedish rebels. These rebels were nephews of the Swedish king Onela, who then killed Heardred in retaliation for the latter's act. After Heardred's death, Beowulf ascended to the throne in absence of another heir. Beowulf's path to kingship, it seems, is stained with marks of *fæhð*: although he initially refused the crown, the revenge-killing of Heardred at the hands of the Swedish king placed Beowulf on the throne regardless.

Although the above summary suffices in addressing the role of *fæhð* in Beowulf's ascension to the kingship, it does not do justice to the decisions made by the poet in describing the matter. Neglecting to consider the poet's choice of language and structure in this section becomes problematic when considering the characterisation of Onela. In the past, R.W. Chambers[87] and Adrien Bonjour[88] have interpreted this account as serving to characterise the Swedish king as hated and evil, in contrast to which Beowulf's good qualities are accentuated. However, the *Beowulf*-poet does not describe Onela with any negative terminology. On the contrary, the king is referred to as "þone sēlestan sæcyninga" [the greatest of sea-kings],[89] and possibly again as a "gōd cyning" in the ambiguous half-line 2390b.[90] Moreover, the audience is to be critical of Onela's rebellious nephews: the two are described as *wræcmæcgas*, a term which both within and outside of *Beowulf* is used in anything but a positive context.[91] Chambers's and Bonjour's negative assessment of Onela, then, is one based on viewing the king through a Geatish lens. The *Beowulf*-poet does not use any terms that give his audience reason to think of Onela as a bad king, and instead, praises him for upholding rulership ideals such as gift-

---

[87] R.W. Chambers, Beowulf*: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 5. Accessed through Project Gutenberg.

[88] Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), 31-32

[89] *Beowulf*, l.2382.

[90] This ambiguity is addressed in *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 244.

[91] R.T. Farrell, *Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1972), 6.

giving[92] and for enabling Beowulf to take the throne through his decision to answer the rebellion by killing Heardred.[93]

This reconsideration of the representation of Onela illustrates how the *Beowulf*-poet did not condemn his poem's characters for partaking in matters of feuding and vengeance. The poet's praise of Onela is indicative of the poet recognising the qualities that were considered representative for good kingship: although the Swedish king is an enemy of the poem's eponymous hero, the audience is not to consider him a villain in the way Chambers and Bonjour would have it. Instead of criticising those who engage in vengeance, it is the perpetuity and tragedy that underlines any vendetta the poet wishes to emphasise, as further analysis in this chapter will show.

More details about the complicated Swedish-Geatish conflict arise in the earlier-mentioned second part of Beowulf's speech that precedes his fight with the dragon. From Beowulf's words, it becomes apparent that Hrethel's death was cause for the Swedes to attack, leading to the death of Hæþcyn. In turn, the Swedish king Ongenðeow is killed in an act of revenge: Beowulf relates how he heard that "mæġ ōðerne / billes ecgum on bonan stælan" [one kinsman for another took vengeance on the slayer with sword's edge].[94] Klaeber interprets this ambiguous passage as the "one kinsman" referring to Hygelac, avenging the slain kinsman Hæþcyn by killing Ongenðeow.[95] Orchard addresses the irony in this string of events: Hæþcyn, who is responsible for the death of his one brother, is now avenged by his other brother.[96] However, even though Hygelac appears to be credited for this act of vengeance, it is not at his hands Ongenðeow dies; instead, it is the Geatish warrior Eofor whose "hond ġemunde / fæhðo ġenōge" [hand remembered enough *fæhð*][97] as he delivers the killing blow to the Swedish king. It is after Beowulf's death when the implications of these events are clarified. Before

---

[92] *Beowulf*, l. 2383.

[93] *Beowulf*, l. 2389.

[94] *Beowulf*, ll. 2483b-2484.

[95] *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 248.

[96] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 230.

[97] *Beowulf*, l. 2488b-2489.

examining these, however, this chapter will briefly address another Geatish conflict, as the Swedes were not the only people the Geats were at strife with.

Two other peoples that had reason for animosity towards the Geats are the Frisians and the Franks. In his time as king, Hygelac "wēan āhsode / fæhðe tō frysum" [sought misery; *fæhð* with the Frisians],[98] eventually leading to his demise. Hygelac's body and the treasure upon it then apparently came into possession of the Franks;[99] however, we later learn that Beowulf was present at the battle and avenged his king through the slaying of the Frankish champion Dæghrefne.[100] Klaeber asserts that it is likely that Beowulf then also recovered the treasure,[101] which indeed seems to be the case in light of the treasure returning to Geatish hands and Beowulf's boasting that "nalles hē ðā frætwe Frēscyninge / brēostweorðunge bringan mōste" [in no way was he [Dæghrefne] able to bring back the treasure, breast-ornaments, to the Frisian king].[102] Piecing together the accounts of Hygelac's battle with the Frisians and Franks shows us that the latter folks not only had reason for hostility towards the Geatish people as a whole, but towards Beowulf as an individual as well.

The condemnation of the Geats that resulted from the conflicts described above becomes evident in the speech of the Messenger. In his speech, which spans lines 2900-3027, the Messenger reminisces on the details of past battles, and predicts that the Franks, the Frisians, and the Swedes will come to attack the Geats now that Beowulf lies dead. In spite of the fact that the Messenger belongs to the Geats, his description of these battles appears to condemn the involvement of his people in these conflicts.[103] The Messenger leaves no doubt as to the fact he laments the imminent vengeance that will follow as he says "þæt ys sīo fæhðo ond se fēondscipe / wælnīð wera, ðæs ðe iċ wēn hafo" [that is the *fæhð* and enmity, slaughter-hate of men, for which I have

---

[98] *Beowulf*, ll. 1206b-1207a.

[99] *Beowulf*, ll. 1210-1211.

[100] *Beowulf*, ll. 2490-2502.

[101] *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 195.

[102] *Beowulf*, ll. 2503-2504.

[103] Thomas A. Carnicelli, "The Function of the Messenger in *Beowulf*," Studies in *Philology* 72 (1975): 248.

woe].[104] Now that the poem nears its end, *fæhð* is once again described in a negative light instead of as a means towards honour, and seems to spell the doom of the Geatish people in the time that spans beyond the scope of *Beowulf*.

R.T. Farrell takes a different view to this speech and claims that it is likely to serve as a "mood-piece" to emphasise the tragedy of Beowulf's death rather than intending to make any realistic sense. He argues that if the Franks and Frisians had indeed wanted revenge, they had ample opportunity before Beowulf's death. Additionally, Farrell points out that Beowulf was not involved in any of the "stages" of the Swedish-Geatish feud the messenger mentions.[105] In Farrell's view, the speech of the Messenger merely has symbolic value and is not meant to earnestly express a concern for impending vengeance at hands of outside threats.

However, regardless of whether or not the Messenger's speech has roots in symbolic speech, this paper asserts that his gloomy predictions certainly make sense when placed in context with the rest of the poem as this chapter has analysed it. Firstly, the Swedish attack on the Geats following Hrethel's death demonstrates that it is indeed realistic within the world of *Beowulf* for attacks to take place on a people after their leader has died. Furthermore, not a single violent feud in the poem simply ceases to continue for no discernible reason. Secondly, Farrell's argument that Beowulf's minimal involvement in the Swedish-Geatish feud should not be enough to warrant a new Swedish attack on the Geatish people does not hold up either: this thesis clearly has shown that within the *fæhð*, people were guilty by association with an involved group, meaning Beowulf's very association with the Geats would have been enough to render him and his people a target for vengeance, even without his individual participation in the conflict. In light of this assessment and the analysis above, we can consider the Messenger's speech a lament for the existence of the vengeance ideology that seems to motivate so many of the conflicts.

---

[104] *Beowulf*, ll. 2999-2300.

[105] Farrell, *Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats*, 28-29.

Ġid oft wrecen*: the Finnsburh episode*

The final feud this chapter will analyse is one involving the Danes. Whereas the ending of *Beowulf* spells doom for the Geats, it is early on in the poem where it becomes evident that the Danes receive a similarly bleak outlook: as the impressive hall Heorot is described, it is also immediately said that "heaðowylma bād / lāðan līġes" [it awaited the hostile surges of hateful flames].[106] Additionally, it is already announced "þæt se ecghete āþumswēoran / æfter wælnīðe wæcnan scolde" [that the sword-hate of oath-swearers would awaken from deadly hatred],[107] foreshadowing a feud between the Danes and the Heothobards that will be addressed in the next chapter. Like the Geats, it seems the Danes are condemned to a vicious cycle of vengeance as well, rendering the endlessness of *fæhð* in *Beowulf* not exclusive to just one tribe. In order to demonstrate the *Beowulf*-poet's clever usage of the perpetual and tragic nature of *fæhð*, this section will now go on to examine the Danish-Frisian conflict described in the Finnsburh episode.

The Finnsburh episode is recited by a *scop* at the feast that takes place after Grendel's defeat, and covers lines 1068-1159. The story is introduced as describing the death of Hnæf the Scylding. Hnæf's sister, Hildeburh, was given in marriage to the Frisian king Finn, with whom she had a son. Both Hnæf and this son lost their life when battle broke out between the Danes and Frisians. Finn then came to a peace-agreement with Hengest, who likely followed up Hnæf as leader.[108] After spending a winter in Finn's company, however, Hengest had his mind on *gyrnwræce* [grief-vengeance], driving him to kill Finn and afterwards return with his people to Denmark, taking Hildeburh along with them.

The perpetuity of *fæhð* underlining these events is apparent: neither inter-marriage nor a peace-treaty between the Frisian and Danes could ensure a lasting peace between the two folks. The narrative can furthermore be read as a tragic one, as is perhaps best illustrated by the fate of the *ġeōmoru ides* [sad woman] Hildeburh. Orchard describes the way the *Beowulf*-poet portrays

---

[106] *Beowulf*, ll. 82b-23a

[107] *Beowulf*, ll 84-85.

[108] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 174.

Hildeburh's fate as "highlight[ing] her impotence and passivity, as well as her innocence".[109] Orchard's claim can be illustrated by the poet's description of Hildeburh in line 1072 as "unsynnum" [guiltless] and, in line 1076, her grief as being "nallas hōlinga" [not without reason]: the poet comes across as sympathetic towards her fate. Moreover, much like the aforementioned Hrethel, Hildeburh had kinsmen on both sides of the battle, suggesting that she too was not able to find any possible resolution through vengeance. Leonard Neidorf challenges this view of Hildeburh as a victim of tragedy, and instead argues that the Finnsburh episode describes her "transition from suffering to satisfaction" as entertainment for the celebrating Danes.[110] Neidorf justifies Hildeburh's public display of mourning her son and brother by suggesting it was meant to remind the surviving Danes that their kin had been wronged, in turn encouraging them to avenge themselves.[111] In this scenario, Finn's death would compensate for the demise of Hildeburh's son and brother.

The question of whether Hildeburh played the role of a passive, innocent victim or that of a catalyst for further vengeance is not one this chapter will venture to answer, as it is outside of the scope of this thesis. For the purpose of this chapter, it is significant that regardless of whether or not Hildeburh is eventually recompensed, the poet describes her exclusively with terminology expressing sympathy: even in a scenario where Hildeburh's fate is not seen as a tragedy within the society of the poem, the *Beowulf*-poet's language use still invites his audience to see it as such.

In addition to the Beowulf-poet's semantic choices, the placement of the Finnsburh episode within the narrative of the poem may also be able to provide us with insight into the poet's sentiments towards *fæhð*. As mentioned before, the episode is related during the feast that follows Beowulf's victory over Grendel. By extension, it also precedes the revenge attack of Grendel's mother. Although past scholarship on *Beowulf* has claimed the circumstances under which the Finnsburh episode was recited do not bear any relevance on

---

[109] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 177-178.

[110] Leonard Neidorf, "Hildeburh's Mourning and the Wife's Lament," *Studia Neophilologica* 79 (2017): 197-198.

[111] Neidorf, "Hildeburh's Mourning," 202.

the possible interpretations of it,[112] more modern takes on the matter have rightfully maintained that the many other parallels and contrasts warrant a closer look at the episode.[113] To interrupt a feast held for victory in a revenge-killing with a story that highlights the disastrous collateral damage that comes with vengeance arguably adds a layer of irony to the layer of celebration, as is justified when the peace is disturbed by Grendel's mother soon after. Laying the groundworks for showing the negative sides to feuding early on in the poem, too, would have allowed the poet to familiarise his audience with the inevitable doom that befalls the Swedes and Geats, and eventually spells the end for Beowulf and his people.

Conclusion

Through examining the narrative, semantics, and structure of *Beowulf*, this chapter has ventured to show that the manner in which the characters within the poem express their sentiments about revenge is at variance with that of the poet's narrative voice. Although Beowulf's words and actions suggest there is glory and pride to be found in vengeance, the grief and death that continually result from it are in stark contrast with this positive view. The ending of the poem, too, is marked by grief and death, and the audience is left with predictions that suggest these matters will carry on in the time beyond the scope of the poem. Delving into the poet's semantic decisions furthermore shows that he did not mean for his audience to consider ongoing *fæhð* a good thing. Without condemning "good" kings such as Onela and Beowulf despite their participation in *fæhð*, the poet manages to paint a clear picture of the misfortune that lies at the heart of *fæhð* by contrasting his feuding vocabulary with terms of hate and sadness. Lastly, a variety of contrasts, parallels, and structural elements found within *Beowulf* highlight the negative aspects of *fæhð* discussed in this chapter. The final scenario this chapter discussed in which some of these can be found, namely the Finnsburh episode, briefly touched upon intermarriage between the Danes and Frisians not being cause

[112] Martin Camargo, "The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in *Beowulf*," *Studies in Philology* 78 (1981): 121-122.

[113] Michael Benskin, "The Narrative Structure of the Finnsburh Episode in Beowulf," *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur älteren Germanistik* 77 (2017): 38-39.

for lasting peace. The next chapter of this thesis will look at similar marriages in *Beowulf* in greater detail, and in addition explore other methods through which one could attempt to settle a feud within the world of *Beowulf*.

CHAPTER 3 - ALTERNATIVES TO FEUDING IN *BEOWULF*

Chapter 2 of this thesis has established that the majority of *fæhð* in *Beowulf* cannot be resolved peacefully, as neither man nor monster is able to overcome their wish for retribution. Whereas the focus of the previous chapter was on this continuous desire for vengeance and the endless nature of *fæhð*, the current chapter will approach *fæhð* from a different angle and show that *Beowulf* addresses methods that are meant to either prevent conflict or end it peacefully. This chapter will analyse these methods, and examine whether they are implied, either by the poem's characters or the poet's narrative voice, to be viable or not.

The first of these methods that this chapter will analyse is the act of "peace-weaving". As the word suggests, this process involves the promotion of peace within and between tribes, a task that customarily befalls a woman. Several peace-weavers are found in *Beowulf*, yet none of them ultimately succeed in their task of settling *fæhð*. The second matter to be analysed is a preventative measure: the act of gift-giving. Through exchanging gifts, leaders and their thanes set a mutual expectation of loyalty and service to one another. Lastly, this chapter will examine the payment of *wergild*. Although the role monetary settlements play in *Beowulf* is a minor one, they are implied to be the only means of permanently resolving a conflict.

The potential of peace-weaving: political marriages

Following Dorothy Carr Porter,[114] this section will first briefly establish what is meant with the term *freoðuwebbe* or "peace-weaver". Its only appearance in *Beowulf* is in context with the murderous Thryth,[115] who slaughtered any man who insulted her:

---

[114] Dorothy Carr Porter, "The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*: A New Context," *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001): sec. II, para. 1.

[115] This name does not appear in the manuscript; I am following Peter Baker, who chooses this name "more on account of its familiarity than because of its probability". Peter S. Baker, "The Angel in the Mead-Hall," in *Honour, Exchange and Violence in* Beowulf (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 104.

Ne bið swylc cwēnlic þēaw
idese tō efnanne, þēah ðe hīo ǣnlicu sȳ,
þætte freoðuwebbe fēores onsæce
æfter ligetorne lēofne mannan.[116]

[Such a queenly manner is not for a lady to perform, beautiful though she be, that a peace-weaver should deprive the life of a dear man after a perceived insult.]

From these lines, we can only infer that *freoðuwebbe* equates to womanhood, as they contrast this term and the customary expectations of a lady with Thryth's actions. Based on research from Larry M. Sklute,[117] Porter expands the definition of a *freoðuwebbe*, describing it as a poetic term referring to a woman whose duty it is to promote peace through a variety of possible ways.[118] One of these reasons to employ a *freoðuwebbe* has been addressed in the introduction of this chapter: a woman could be given in marriage to a man of a hostile tribe as a means of establishing peace. As scholars generally see being involved in this type of marriage as the most defining characteristic of a *freoðuwebbe*,[119] it is with two such married women in *Beowulf* that this analysis starts.

Chapter two of this thesis briefly mentioned one of *Beowulf*'s peace-weavers: Hildeburh, whose marriage to Finn and subsequent bearing of his son was likely meant to secure peace between the Danes and Frisians.[120] The examination of the Finnsburh episode has already shown that this attempted settlement was not successful due to Hengest's inability to move past his desire for *gyrnwræce*. In addition to her peace-weaving not being able to prevent this incident taking place, we can also infer from the poem that both Hildeburh and her son suffered conflicting loyalties due to their respective familial and tribal bonds.

---

[116] *Beowulf*, ll. 1940b-1943.

[117] Larry M. Sklute, "*Freothuwebbe* in Old English Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970): 534-535.

[118] Porter, "Social Centrality," sec. II, para. 1. See also Peter Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in* Beowulf, 112.

[119] Baker, "The Angel in the Mead-Hall," 109-110.

[120] *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 273. See also Neidorf, "Hildeburhs Mourning," 203.

With respects to Hildeburh, this phenomenon is illustrated by her aforementioned grief on behalf of kinsmen on both sides. In lines 1072b-1075, Hildeburh is described as being "gēomoru" [sad, mournful] as a result of the death of her "leofum" [loved ones], namely her mixed-descent son and her brother Hnæf. Her mourning is extended towards the fallen Frisians in lines 1076-1081:

> Nalles hōlinga Hōces dohtor,
> meotodsceaft bemearn syþðan morgen cōm,
> ðā hēo under sweġle ġesēon meahte
> morþ̣orbealo māga þǣr hēo ǣr mǣste hēold
> worolde wynne. Wīġ ealle fornam
> Finnes þeġnas nemne fēaum ānum.

[Not without reason did the daughter of Hoc lament the decree of fate when the morning came, she could see the miserable slaughter of kinsmen under the sky, where she held all the joy in the world before. War took all of Finn's thanes, save a few.]

As the slaughter of her kinsmen is contextualised here with the majority of Finn's thanes falling in battle, it is reasonable to assume that the poet wants his audience to know that Hildeburh grieved for the Frisians as well as for her family. Moreover, as Porter points out, Hildeburh's marriage to Finn ultimately does not render her a Frisian rather than a Dane in the eyes of the Danish people, as evidenced by the fact they ferry her back to Denmark after the battles have ended.[121]

In a similar vein, the fact that Hildeburh's son fought in the battle signifies that his mixed descent did not exempt him from battling either tribe. Although it is debatable which side of the battle he fought on, it is most reasonable to assume that he fought on the side of the Frisians as this was the tribe he grew up in.[122] However, by the time his dead body is burned, Hildeburh has him placed next to his Danish uncle on the pyre, thus emphasising his Danish kinship instead.[123] The conflicting loyalties of Hildeburh and her son illustrate

---

[121] Porter, "Social Centrality," sec. II, para. 3.

[122] This view is generally accepted by various scholars as well, who place the son at the side of the Frisians without further elaboration.

[123] Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, *A Beowulf Handbook* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 265.

that neither peace-weaving nor being of mixed descent is presented in *Beowulf* as successfully breaking the cycle of retributive violence. Within the societal context of the poem, one kinship bond is ultimately going to be seen as precedent over another.

Another attempt at peace-weaving through marriage in *Beowulf* is implied to eventually be unsuccessful as well. After returning to his homeland, Beowulf tells his fellow Geats of Hrothgar's attempt to settle *wælfæhða*[124] [slaughter-*fæhða*] by giving his daughter Freawaru in marriage to the Heoðobardian prince Ingeld. Beowulf expresses his cynicism towards this approach by saying that "Oft seldan hwær / æfter lēodhryre lȳtle hwīle / bongār būgeð, þēah sēo brȳd duge"[125] [Very seldom anywhere, after the fall of a leader, does the murderous spear bend down even for a little while, though the bride be good], a statement that underlines the apparent futility of peace-weaving in *Beowulf*. Beowulf also explains which events he believes will renew *fæhð* :

> Mæġ þæs þonne ofþynċan ðeodẹn Heaðo-Beardna
> ond þeġna ġehwām þāra lēoda
> þonne hē mid fæmnan on flett gȃð,
> dryhtbearn Dena, duguða biwenede.
> On him gladiað gomelra lāfe,
> heard ond hringmæl Heaða-Beardna ġestrēon
> þenden hīe ðām wæpnum wealdan mōston[126]

[It may then displease the leader of the Heoðobards and each thane of his people when he, the noble son of the Danes, walks onto the floor with that maiden, splendidly attained. On him glisten ancient heirlooms, hard and embellished with rings, the Heoðobards' treasure for as long as they were able to wield those weapons.]

Fabienne Michelet notes the reoccurrence of the construction "on flett gæð" twenty lines onwards, where an old Heoðobard remarks that the young Danish warrior mentioned in the lines above "morðres gylpeð"[127] [boasts of murder]

---

[124] *Beowulf*, l. 2028b.

[125] *Beowulf*, l. 2029b-2031.

[126] *Beowulf*, ll. 2032-2037.

[127] *Beowulf*, l. 2055a.

by wearing the treasure. She argues that the use of this phrase in both the description of the young Danish warrior and the criticism of the old Heoðobard serves to emphasise the fact that the sight of the treasure recalls the memories of past injury.[128]

This renewal of past grievances at the sight of old treasure, combined with Beowulf's notion that the "murderous spear" rarely bends down after a peace-weaving through marriage, explains why it is foreshadowed in lines 84-85 of the poem that *ecghete* [sword-hate] will reawaken for the Danes: Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld will ultimately not be able to prevent *fæhð* between the Danes and Heoðobards. This fact is confirmed by a reference to Hrothgar and Ingeld in the poem *Widsith*, which states that the aforementioned Danes "forheowan æt Heorote Heaðobeardna þrym" [cut to pieces the Heothobard host at Heorot].[129] The audience of *Beowulf* would likely have been familiar with *Widsith*, and thus recognised the foreshadowing of *ecghete* eventually being reawakened.

The potential of peace-weaving: Wealhtheow and her speeches

The analysis of the two peace-weavers above has shown that peace-weaving through tribal intermarriage is not a successful method of settling *fæhð* without violence. Another way in which a woman can "weave peace" (which also proves to be unsuccessful in *Beowulf*) is by publicly encouraging harmony through behaviour and speech.[130] One woman who employs such a method, Wealhtheow, (re-)enters the poem as soon as the tale of the Finnsburh episode is told. Sam Newton remarks that the "narrative juxtaposition" of Wealhtheow appearing right after the description of Hildeburh's tragedy is likely intended to serve as a foreshadowing. He argues that the juxtaposition of the two women is meant to foreshadow Wealhtheow's prospective failure at

---

[128] Fabienne L. Michelet, "Hospitality, Hostility, and Peacemaking in *Beowulf*," *Philological Quarterly* 94 (2015): 38.

[129] *Widsith*, l. 48, in *Old English Shorter Poems volume II*, ed. and trans. Robert E. Bjork (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014), 47.

[130] Sklute, "*Freothuwebbe*," 534-535.

maintaining peace indefinitely, as she is bound to eventually experience the same reversal from "peace to anguish" that Hildeburh did.[131]

Newton's assessment raises the question why Wealhtheow's peace-weaving was doomed to fail. To answer this question, it is necessary to analyse Wealhtheow's peace-weaving and the response it receives within the poem. Rather than by being part of a political marriage, Wealhtheow performs her duty as a weaver of peace by giving speeches. The first of these speeches is directed towards her husband Hrothgar, in which she attempts to inspire him to do well as a king:

> Þū on sǣlum wes,
> goldwine gumena, ond tō Ġēatum spræc
> mildum wordum, swā sceal man dôn.
> Bēo wið Ġēatas glæd, ġeofena ġemyndiġ,
> nēan ond feorran þā þū nū hafast.[132]

[You be joyful, gold-friend of men, and speak with gentle words to the Geats, as a man must do. Be gracious with the Geats, mindful of the gifts you now have from near and from far.]

In addition to giving him this advice, Wealhtheow encourages Hrothgar to take one of her sons as heir to his throne rather than Beowulf. She furthermore expresses her confidence that Hrothgar's cousin Hrothulf will be able to do good for the Danes. However, as analysis in the next section of this chapter will elaborate upon, it was likely known to the audience of *Beowulf* that Hrothulf would eventually violently seize the throne, and as a result evidently fail to maintain the peace.[133] Consequently, this particular statement can be read as being ironic. A similar sense of irony can be found in Wealhtheow's second speech, which she addresses to Beowulf: she observes that "Hēr is ǣġhwylċ eorl ōþrum ġetrywe" [here is every man faithful to the other].[134] When keeping Hrothulf's later rebellion in mind, this statement reads as a

---

[131] Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East-Anglia* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), 90.

[132] *Beowulf*, ll. 1170b-1174.

[133] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 220.

[134] *Beowulf*, l. 1228.

dramatically ironic foreshadowing of conflict rather than a description of the status quo.

The fact that both of Wealhtheow's speeches can be interpreted as ironic underlines the inefficacy of her words. This inefficacy may be explained by the observation that her words fall on deaf ears: Orchard notes that neither of the two speeches are answered by their addressees, a phenomenon that he remarks is "striking in the context of the decorous speech-patterning that characterises the whole of the first part of the poem".[135] As neither Beowulf nor Hrothgar feel inclined to respond to her speeches, the poem provides us with no reason to believe that any other of her kinsmen do heed her words.

In spite of Wealhtheow's failure in weaving peace through speech, Alaric Hall argues that she was successful in her function as a *freoðuwebbe* after all. Because Wealhtheow's origins are left unaddressed in the poem beyond the identification of her as an "ides Helminga" [lady of the Helmingas],[136] Hall says it is "most likely" that Wealhtheow was married off to the Danes in an attempt at peace-weaving that was "surely successful".[137] If Hall's assessment is correct, it would mean that *Beowulf* contains at least one example of an act of peace-weaving successfully settling *fæhð*. However, no evidence can be found in *Beowulf* to substantiate this claim,[138] nor is it clear whether the Helmingas were indeed a different, hostile tribe. Hall acknowledges this problem, saying that "it might in theory be that the Helmingas were a scion of the Danish people". If this hypothesis is correct, Wealhtheow and Hrothgar's marriage is even less likely to have come forth from political motivations, as they belong to the same people.

Hall then immediately counters this theory by saying Wealhtheow's name literally means "foreign slave", and that the contemporary audience of *Beowulf* would have known to attach importance to the implications of certain

---

[135] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 221-222.

[136] *Beowulf*, l. 620.

[137] Alaric Hall, "Hygelac's only daughter: a present, a potentate and a peaceweaver in *Beowulf*," *Studia Neophilologica* 78 (2006): 85.

[138] Baker dismisses Hall's claim as a "logical broad-jump", in "The Angel in the Mead-Hall," 110.

names.[139] Recent scholarship has cast doubt on this translation of Wealhtheow's name, and in doing so, challenged the notion that she was indeed married off to the Danes for political reasons. Neidorf explains the discrepancy between Wealhtheow's name supposedly meaning "foreign slave" and her being described as nobility in the poem by suggesting there is no discrepancy at all; instead, he convincingly argues that "Wealhtheow" is a scribal corruption of the name Wælþeo. In this scenario, the first element to make up her name, *wæl-*, would have been derived from *wala* [chosen, beloved], and the second, *þeo*, from *þewaz* [servant], which carried religious associations when used in names and thus celebrated a devotion to God.[140] As such, rather than a foreign slave, Hrothgar's queen may have been a beloved noblewoman.

In light of Neidorf's research and the lack of evidence within *Beowulf* to prove the contrary, there is no reason to believe that Wealhtheow and Hrothgar's marriage is one that was established for political reasons, meaning Wealhtheow is a peace-weaver only through her acts of speech. Moreover, as this thesis has shown, it would make more sense in the context of *Beowulf* for a political marriage to be underlined as such: if Wealhtheow's marriage to Hrothgar is an exception to the rule of "the murderous spear seldom bending down" in spite of a good political bride, emphasising this success would be a good way of praising Hrothgar. Instead, no such attention is given to Hrothgar and Wealhtheow's marriage, suggesting that it is not meant to be considered a successful act of peace-weaving, thus leaving the poem void of them entirely.

Gift-giving and loyalty

As the above analysis has demonstrated, peace-weaving, whether by means of encouraging speeches or marriage exchanges, is one way by which the society of *Beowulf* attempted to promote and maintain peace. The following section will examine a different type of exchange: the gift-exchange between and amongst leaders and their retainers. Two major reasons for the exchange of

---

[139] Hall, "Hygelac's only daughter," 5.

[140] Leonard Neidorf, "Wealhtheow and Her Name: Etymology, Characterization, and Textual Criticism," *Neophilologus* 102 (2018): 75-86.

gifts can be discerned in *Beowulf*. Firstly, giving a gift would bring honour to the giver and set him up to receive material wealth or services in return.[141] Secondly, in line with heroic tradition, the giving of gifts by a retainer to his thanes is meant to contribute to the loyalty of the latter group.[142] Both reasons appear to share the cultivation and maintenance of good, loyal relationships as a common goal. In *Beowulf*, the relationship between Hygelac and Beowulf is exemplary for such a loyal bond built through gift-giving.[143] This type of relationship could in turn be beneficial in the context of *fæhð*, either as a preventative measure or as incentive for upholding strong bonds of kinship and the expectations that come with them.

However, like peace-weaving, gift-exchange is not a definitive way of maintaining loyalty and peace in *Beowulf*. One example that substantiates this claim can be derived from the aforementioned (ironic) part of Wealhtheow's speech that expresses her hope Hrothulf would do well for the Danes. She provides a reason for her optimism in the following lines:

> wēne iċ þæt hē mit gōde ġyldan wille
> uncran eaferan ġif hē þæt eal ġemon,
> hwæt wit tō willan ond tō worðmyndum
> umborwesendum ær ārna ġefremedon.[144]

[I think that he with good will repay our descendants, if he remembers all the kindnesses that we brought about, back in his youth, for his desires and glory.]

These lines imply that Wealhtheow and Hrothgar have attempted prior to Hrothulf's betrayal to earn his loyalty through acts of kindness. In light of the aforementioned examination of gift-giving and loyalty, it is reasonable to assume these received kindnesses included material possessions, as it is customary for a ruler to encourage loyalty by giving gifts.

---

[141] Baker, "Loot and the Economy of Honour," in *Honour, Exchange and Violence*, 55-56.

[142] Bremmer, "Old English Heroic Literature," 77.

[143] In one of his speeches, Beowulf says he has repaid Hygelac for his generosity. *Beowulf*, ll. 2490-2401.

[144] *Beowulf*, ll. 1184-1187.

Interestingly, there is no more mention of Hrothulf within *Beowulf* after this speech. Scholars have accounted for Hrothulf's absence in the remainder of the narrative by arguing that it was more than likely know to the contemporary audience of *Beowulf* that, in other legends, Hrothulf indeed seized the throne and ended up slaying his cousin.[145] Recently, Dennis Cronan has challenged this negative view, saying instead that the poem not mentioning Hrothulf after Wealhtheow's speech was meant to prevent damaging Hrothulf's reputation and instead present him as honourable. Simultaneously, equating Beowulf with the "honourable" Hrothulf as equally worthy heirs to the throne would in Cronan's view enhance Beowulf's reputation.[146] Cronan believes, in other words, that the contemporary audience of *Beowulf* was meant to respect rather than disapprove of Hrothulf.

However, despite Hrothulf only being mentioned twice in *Beowulf*, the poem provides us with context that suggests Hrothulf is not to be trusted. The first instance of context for this distrust is prior to Wealhtheow's speech, where "suhtergefæderan" [uncle and nephew] Hrothgar and Hrothulf are described as "ġȳt" [still] being true to each other. The appearance of "ġȳt" in this line foreshadows that, eventually, Hrothgar and Hrothulf will be at strife with one another.[147] The second instance can be found in the half-lines that follow the first mention of Hrothulf: "Heorot innan wæs / frēondum afylled; nalles fācẹnstafas / Þeod-Scyldingas þenden fremedon" [the interior of Heorot was filled with friends, the people of the Scyldings had performed no acts of malice yet].[148] The prediction of *fācenstafas* placed in close proximity to the first out of merely two total mentions of Hrothulf suggests that scholarship earlier than Cronan's was right in assessing Wealhtheow's words about Hrothulf as likely being interpreted as ironic by *Beowulf*'s audience, and foreshadowing future malice by Hrothulf's hands outside of the context of the poem. The dramatic irony of Wealhtheow's words, as well as the fact that

---

[145] Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 220.

[146] Dennis Cronan, "Narrative Conjunctions in *Beowulf*," *English Studies* 99 (2018): 466-468.

[147] *Beowulf*, l. 1164.

[148] *Beowulf*, ll. 1017b-1019.

Hrothulf would eventually end up slaying his cousin, show that the kindnesses Hrothulf received did not consolidate his loyalty towards his kinsmen.

The matter of gift-exchange not always securing loyalty from the recipient to the giver can be exemplified further by the words and deeds of the eleven men Beowulf took to the dragon fight: all but one of these men, Wiglaf, deserted their lord at the sight of the dragon's fire. The relevance of gift-giving to these actions is emphasised by the two speeches Wiglaf holds to his companions: in his first speech, Wiglaf expresses his loyalty to Beowulf and speaks of the promise he and the others made to repay Beowulf, whom he describes as the one who gave them "bēagas" [rings],[149] for the "gūðġetawa" [war-equipment][150] they received; in the second speech, Wiglaf criticises those that abandoned Beowulf, once more taking pains to describe Beowulf as a giver of gifts and specifying the treasures they have received. From the fact that Wiglaf takes care to mention the act of gift-exchange in both his praise of Beowulf and his criticism towards the deserters, we can conclude that it was indeed this act that was meant to ensure the dedication of the men, yet failed to do so.

Mediation through money

While gift-giving is certainly not described as an effective way to bind groups together in *Beowulf*, making use of wealth may be useful in paying off the *fæhð* that resulted from it. As noted in chapter 2 of this thesis, Grendel did not want to settle *fæhð* with payment, implying that this approach could have been fruitful. Similarly, of his mother's reciprocation it is said that "ne wæs þæt ġewrixle til / þæt hīe on bā healfa bicgan scoldon / frēonda fēorum" [that exchange was not good, that they on both sides had to pay with the lives of friends].[151] This exchange between Grendel's life for Æschere being condemned by the poet begs the question whether a "good exchange" does exist in the world of *Beowulf*.

---

[149] *Beowulf*, l. 2635b.

[150] *Beowulf*, l. 2636a.

[151] *Beowulf*, ll. 1304b-1306a.

Although not much in the way of an answer to this question can be inferred from the poem, we can find in it one example of the paying of *wergild* leading to successful conflict resolution: Hrothgar had been able to pay off a "fæhðe mæste"[152] [great *fæhð*] that Beowulf's father Ecgtheow had been involved in. Unlike with many other conflicts in *Beowulf*, nothing in the poem is suggestive of Ecgtheow's *fæhð* eventually being cause for retributive violence, and thus we have no reason to doubt Hrothgar's success in the arbitration. Past scholarship maintains that we are to view Hrothgar's success in relation to the Grendelkin: Kahrl asserts that the poet deliberately mentions Grendel's incapacity to pay to contrast with this later example of a successful settlement through payment.[153] If Kahrl's assertion is correct, it would by extension mean that the poet takes care to emphasise the effectiveness of monetary settlement by contrasting the actions of the *gōd cyning* with those of the condemned monster. In light of this conclusion, the paying of *wergild* may indeed have been a "good exchange" in the eyes of the poet.

One final matter this chapter will analyse is that of treasure in *Beowulf*. After the dragon's treasure is buried alongside Beowulf, the poem describes it as being "eldum swā unnyt swā hyt ǣror wæs" [as useless to mankind as it was before]:[154] the gold cannot be used from underground, nor had it been of any use to the dragon or those who guarded it before the beast did. McNabb has noted that the dragon gold is not the only example of treasure being characterised as "useless" throughout the poem: Grendel's mere is also described to contain "māðmǣhte" [treasure][155] that never finds its way to the surface, and no amount of treasure-giving within Heorot could prevent outside attacks from taking place. Treasure in *Beowulf*, he argues, has no more value in the hands of men than it does in those of monsters.[156] As this thesis has already shown that, in the world of *Beowulf*, both monsters and men were involved in *fæhð*, it seems fitting to end this chapter with the proposition that

---

[152] *Beowulf*, l. 459b.

[153] Kahrl, "Feuds in *Beowulf*," 191-192.

[154] *Beowulf*, l. 3168.

[155] *Beowulf*, l. 1613a.

[156] Cameron Hunt McNabb, ""Eldum Unnyt": Treasure Spaces in *Beowulf*," *Neophilologus* 95 (2011): 157.

there may yet have been a use for all this treasure: to feature in a "good exchange" that put an end to retributive violence.

Conclusion

As the narrative of *Beowulf* is littered with cycles of vengeance that seem to be endless, this chapter has attempted to shed light on non-violent means of conflict prevention and resolution the poem has to offer. Two approaches to the promotion of peace, the acts of peace-weaving and gift-giving, have proven to be a temporary solution at best. Of a third approach, the payment of *wergild*, we cannot know for sure whether it could have been a definite means of settlement in the society of *Beowulf*. However, as we contrast Hrothgar's apparent success in settling *fæhð* with the poet's remarks about the Grendelkin's poor mercantile choices, we can assert that the poem hints towards the possibility *fæhð* can be paid off. By extension, we can conclude that, in spite of all the conflicts, the society of *Beowulf* may not be doomed to eventually destroy itself through constant retribution: "useless" treasure abounds, and may finally be of use if man and monster were to offer it as *wergild*.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined and detailed the role of the feud as a feature of both early medieval English society and *Beowulf,* one of the most prominent literary works of the Anglo-Saxon period. In order to keep a clear distinction between the poetic characterisation of the feud and its historical context, this thesis has considered the poem as a source on feuding that is separate from historical anecdotes and documents that provide insight into an early medieval English "feuding culture". As this approach has allowed for a better understanding of the particularities of feuding in a variety of contexts, this conclusion will now go on to highlight the differences between the representation of feuding throughout time and in *Beowulf*.

A first distinction that has become apparent through semantic analysis in the first chapter of this thesis is that between the denotation of Modern English *feud* and Old English *fæhð*. Whereas our modern understanding of feuding entails a general sense of hostility between two parties, medieval *fæhð* has proven to be more violent and political. These two elements are particularly noticeable in law codes such as those of Kings Alfred and Ine, and in the way *fæhð* is characterised and contextualised in *Beowulf*: both texts frame the term with mentions of compensation for past grievances.

Secondly, comparing the "feuding culture" in the early medieval English time period to the way the feud is characterised in *Beowulf* has demonstrated that the principle of the feud was considerably more glorified by the characters of *Beowulf* than it was by the *Beowulf*-poet and throughout history. Whereas the characters of the poem, particularly Beowulf himself, appear to consider participation in a feud to be an honour and even a duty, the *Beowulf*-poet's narrative voice is in stark contrast with his characters' optimism. This contrast is evidenced by the poet's usage of negative terminology to describe situations relating to *fæhð*, his dramatic foreshadowing of impending doom, and the many parallels that can be drawn between various scenarios in the poem involving *fæhð* that suggest it leads to nothing but death and despair. Similarly, rather than encouraging a system where society would take justice in their own hands, historical rulers have over time developed and expanded

on laws that acted as countermeasures for feuding. These observations show that the poet's concerns over feuding can be linked to the poem's historical context, as neither the *Beowulf*-poet nor early medieval English kings were encouraging of feuding and vengeance.

Lastly, we can conclude that the way the society of *Beowulf* attempted to settle *fæhð* differs in some ways from the way feuding was handled throughout early medieval English history. Whereas examples of peace-weaving abound in the poem, no historical records suggest that this approach was frequently put to practice in the real world. Additionally, although law codes show a preference for monetary compensation as a means of settling a feud, only one character in *Beowulf* actually employs this method. Instead, the society of *Beowulf* appears to prefer violent revenge, in spite of this method causing a vicious cycle of retaliation. However, in spite of the fact that settlement through payment only occurs once in the poem, this method is also the only one that is implied to be successful. Moreover, the methods more frequently employed by the characters of *Beowulf* appear to be futile, as none are capable of permanently settling a conflict. As the only settlement implied to be successful is one also found in legislation outside of the fiction of *Beowulf*, we can once again conclude that the *Beowulf*-poet's thoughts about feuding reflect the approaches taken to the feud by early medieval English kings.

The three comparisons above between the representation of feuding in history and in *Beowulf* offer us more context for reconsidering Paul Hyams's viewpoints on early medieval feuding as discussed by the introduction of this thesis. In his article, Hyams uses *Beowulf* as evidence for the "centrality" of feuding in Anglo-Saxon culture.[157] The aforementioned comparisons highlights the risk of treating the poem as historical fact: although the poem certainly includes themes familiar to its audience, scrutinising the way these themes are handled in their respective contexts reveals that the events in the poem do not reflect those of history.

---

[157] Hyams, "Feud and the State," 4-5.

Future research on the subject of feud and *fæhð* in early medieval England, *Beowulf*, or both, would do well to keep this distinction between fact and fiction in mind. As chapter one of this thesis has shown, the many known in Anglo-Saxon legislation regarding feuding render it impossible to make one sweeping statement about the relevance of feuding in this expansive time period. With respect to the poem, the above distinction could be used as a point of comparison in order to discover at what point in history the *Beowulf*-poet's apparent criticism of *fæhð* was most likely to represent the societal attitude of the time. In turn, a better impression of when the sense of justice represented by the poet would have been most familiar to *Beowulf*'s intended audience may aid in making a case for the ongoing debate regarding the dating of *Beowulf*. As this discussion is one that thus far has proven just as everlasting as *the feuds* in the poem, the payment of closer attention to feud, *fæhð*, and the way in which these concepts can be placed in history seems only appropriate: although the debate may ultimately not be settled by it, this payment may yet make way for an academic hero to offer alternative solutions to this scholarly feud.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

Dictionary of Old English: A to I online. Edited by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandall Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healy *et al*. Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016.

Thorpe, Benjamin. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities Volume 2: Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Library Collection Rolls, 2012.

Widsith. Edited and translated by Robert E. Bjork. In *Old English Shorter Poems: Volume II*, 44-55. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Secondary Sources

Attenborough, F.L. "The Laws of Ine and Alfred." In *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 33-94.

Baker, Peter S. *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf*. Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013.

Benskin, Michael. "The Narrative Structure of the Finnsburh Episode in *Beowulf*." *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur älteren Germanistik* 77 (2017): 37-64

Bjork, Robert E., and John D. Niles. *A Beowulf Handbook*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997.

Bremmer, Rolf H. Jr. "The Germanic Context of "Cynewulf and Cyneheard" Revisited." *Neophilologus* 81 (1997): 445-65.

———, "Old English Heroic Literature." In *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, edited by David Johnson and Elaine Treharne. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005.

Bonjour, Adrien. *The Digressions in Beowulf*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1950.

Camargo, Martin. "The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in *Beowulf*." *Studies in Philology* 78 (1981): 120-134.

Campbell, James, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald. *The Anglo-Saxons*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.

Carnicelli, Thomas A. “The Function of the Messenger in *Beowulf*.” *Studies in Philology* 72 (1975): 246-257.

Charles-Edwards, Thomas M. “Social Structures.” In *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500-c.1100*, edited by Pauline Stafford. Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 107-125.

Chambers, R.W. Beowulf*: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921. Accessed through Project Gutenberg.

Cronan, Dennis. “Narrative Conjunctions in *Beowulf*.” *English Studies* 99 (2018): 459-478.

Farrell, R.T. *Beowulf, Swedes, and Geats*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1972.

Hall, Alaric. “Hygelac’s only daughter: a present, a potentate and a peaceweaver in *Beowulf*.” *Studia Neophilologica* 78 (2006): 81-87.

Hyams, Paul. “Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England.” *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001): 1-43.

Kahrl, Stanley J. “Feuds in *Beowulf*: A Tragic Necessity?.” *Modern Philology* 69 (1972): 189-198.

Kershaw, Paul. “The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction in Viking Age England.” In *Cultures in Contact*, edited by Dawn Hadley and Julian D. Richards. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2000. 43-64.

Klaeber’s Beowulf. 4th edition. Edited by R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and John D. Niles. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008.

McNabb, Cameron H. ““Eldum Unnyt”: Treasure Spaces in *Beowulf*.” *Neophilologus* 95 (2011): 145-164.

Michelet, Fabienne L. “Hospitality, Hostility, and Peacemaking in *Beowulf*.” *Philological Quarterly* 94 (2015): 23-50.

Neidorf, Leonard. “Hildeburh’s Mourning and the Wife’s Lament.” *Studia Neophilologica* 79 (2017): 197-204.

———. “Wealhtheow and Her Name: Etymology, Characterization, and Textual Criticism.” *Neophilologus* 102 (2018): 75-86.

Newton, Sam. *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East-Anglia*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004.

Niles, John D. "The Myth of the Feud in Anglo-Saxon England." The Journal of English and Germanic Philology 114 (2015): 163-200.

Orchard, Andy. *A Critical Companion to Beowulf.* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003.

Page, R.I. *Life in Anglo-Saxon England*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1970.

Porter, Dorothy Carr. "The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*: A New Context." *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001): 1-6.

Sisam, Kenneth. "Beowulf's fight with the Dragon." *The Review of English Studies* 9 (1958): 129-140.

Sklute, Larry M. "*Freothuwebbe* in Old English Poetry." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970): 534-540.

Stafford, Pauline. "The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises." *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981): 173-90.

Thorpe, Benjamin. *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Compromising Laws Enacted under the Anglo-Saxon Kings from Aethelbirht to Cnut.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

White, Stephen D. "Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England: The Story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard." *Viator* 20 (1989): 1-17.