Echoes of Valour: Heroic Values in The Battle of Maldon and its Modern Adaptations

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Heroic Values in *The Battle of Maldon* and its Modern Adaptations

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INTRODUCTION

The Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* tells the tale of the clash between the Anglo-Saxon forces of lord Byrhtnoth and the invading Viking army, which reportedly took place in August of the year 991.[1] The battle ended in the loss of the Anglo-Saxon army. Although the poem is incomplete, it narrates the moments leading up to the battle, the fight in which the lord dies, soldiers fleeing and the remaining soldiers swearing to follow up on their promise to fight for their fallen leader. Notably, *The Battle of Maldon* presents different heroic behaviours: the excessive desire for glory (*ofermod*) of lord Byrhtnoth in his decision to let the Vikings pass the waterway, the cowardly retreat of soldiers, and the loyalty and bravery of the remaining English warriors. Moreover, the poem touches on an integral part of Anglo-Saxon lord-retainer relationships: gift-giving as a way to form bonds of loyalty.[2] In this thesis, I aim to identify the heroic ideals from the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* in four modern adaptations. My research question is: *How do modern adaptations of The Battle of Maldon interpret and translate the heroic values of the original poem?* By investigating how different modern adaptations represent the heroic values, one can understand the changing perceptions of these heroic ideals and how the heroic ideals were made appropriate for different modern audiences.

The four modern adaptations

Compared to the Old English poem *Beowulf* with its hundreds of adaptations,[3] *The Battle of Maldon* has only rarely been adapted into new forms. As Roberta Frank has noted, the Old

[1] D. G. Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1991), 35.
[2] Stephen Pollington, "The mead-hall community," *Journal of Medieval History* 37:1 (2011), 27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2010.12.010.
[3] Kathleen Forni, *Beowulf's Popular Afterlife in Literature, Comic Books, and Film*, 1st edition (Routledge), 1. https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.4324/9780429466014.

English poem was often overlooked during scholarly considerations of Old English texts and was met with public indifference.[4] The Old English poem did survive the indifferent attitude of scholars and audiences alike due to its display of the northern heroic spirit – specifically Byrhtwold's heroic speech – and the lively discussion among scholars about the definition of *ofermod*.[5] Even though the poem *The Battle of Maldon* had not received a lot of attention in the past, there are a number of adaptations of the poem for a modern audience.

Four of the adaptations have been picked to investigate the manners in which the heroic values are adapted for their modern audiences. These specific texts have been chosen because of their accessibility and transparency about their nature as adaptations of *The Battle of Maldon*. The form of these adaptations are all texts, although the text form differs per adaptation. *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son* by J.R.R. Tolkien is the first adaptation, which was published in 1953. It is written in the form of a play, narrating the events right after the battle. The next adaptation is Pauline Clarke's *Torolv the Fatherless,* a children's book prose adaptation of the Old English poem published in 1959. The third adaptation is the short story "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One*"* (for convenience referred to as Anno Domini) in K.V. Johansen's *The Storyteller*, which was first published in 2008. The fourth adaptation is the narrative poem *At Maldon* by J.O. Morgan published in 2013. These four works all narrate the events of *The Battle of Maldon* and elaborate on the circumstances of the fight through the lens of the author.

Theory, method and methodology

In order to investigate how the four different authors incorporated heroic values of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* in their adaptations, I will use Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory*

[4] Roberta Frank, "*The Battle of Maldon*: Its Reception, 1726-1906," *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 242-3.
[5] Helmut Gneuss, "'The Battle of Maldon' 89: Byrhtnoð's 'Ofermod' Once Again," *Studies in Philology* 73: 2 (1976), 118. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173900.

of Adaptation. Hutcheon states that calling a work an adaptation announces its relationship to another work.[6] Yet, the connection between the works does not take away from the value of the adaptation as it brings a new element to the already existing material. As noted in *A Theory of Adaptation*, the definition of 'to adapt' is "to adjust, to alter, to make suitable."[7] Especially the definition "to make suitable" applies to the adaptations of heroic values from *The Battle of Maldon*, since the authors of the modern adaptations had to make the contents of *The Battle of Maldon* suitable for modern audiences. The heroic values can be considered the themes and motifs of the original poem. Roberta Frank notes that the ideals have close parallels to other northern European poetry from around the same period and names works such as *Beowulf* and the tales of Hrólfr Kraki as examples among others.[8] Therefore, I aim to consider the heroic values of the modern adaptations of *The Battle of Maldon* as themes that the authors would have reinterpreted in their adaptations.

Hutcheon also explains how the author, the context, audience and form of adaptations all influence the eventual text that is the adaptation. Firstly, the background of the author may have influenced their choices in adapting. A point of interest is why an author would choose to adjust the heroic values or reproduce them as portrayed in the Old English poem. An example of adjusting the heroic values can be found in the way Tolkien has left out gift-giving in his adaptation, since his two characters did not experience this ideal themselves. Secondly, the context of the adaptation denotes the place and time in which the author developed and published their adaptation. Tolkien and Clarke both published in the 20th century, while Johansen and Morgan wrote in their adaptations in the 21st century. Thirdly, the audience of the adaptation means I will consider the intended audience for the specific adaptation and how

[6] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2012), 6.
[7] Ibid.,7.
[8] Roberta Frank, "*The Battle of Maldon* and Heroic Literature," *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1991), 197.

the author adjusted the heroic values to connect with the audience. An example of an adjustment is simplifying the relationships between the lord and retainer for an audience of children, as can be seen in *Torolv the Fatherless*. Lastly, the forms of the adaptations are to be considered. The adapter can decide to follow the form of a poem or change it to accommodate for their views on the original and adjust for a wider audience, or a specific audience in order to engage with the original text on a different level. An example is Tolkien's publication *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son*, which was published in a scientific journal. The intended audience is then people already familiar with the source text and will engage with the adaptation in more depth and detail. Overall, these four factors contribute to the reinterpretation of the heroic values in the adaptations.

The four adaptations all use a medieval text as their source text. In other words, the adaptations are all examples of medievalism, which can thus be considered an expansion upon adaptation theory for these works. Michael Alexander defines medievalism as follows: "Medievalism is the offspring of two impulses: the recovery by antiquarians and historians of materials for the study of the Middle Ages; and the imaginative adoption of medieval ideals and forms."[9] The Middle Ages is used as inspiration for a modern interpretation of that specific time, like how the modern adaptations used *The Battle of Maldon* to create a new rendition of the Old English poem. This specific type of adaptation is what Katherine A. Brown refers to as "restoration."[10] The angle of the adaptations relies on the historical resource, which the authors supplement with historical fiction by building a world around the original text. Thus, each adaptation engages with the characters' own experiences differently, which sets each text apart from the others.

[9] Alexander Michael, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), xx.
[10] Katherine A. Brown with Joshua Davies and Sarah Salih, "Medieval Restoration and Modern Creativity," in *Studies in Medievalism XXV: Medievalism and Modernity*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 12.

Thesis roadmap

To answer the research question "How do modern adaptations of The Battle of Maldon interpret and translate the heroic values of the original poem?," I will use the following chapter layout. The first chapter is about the heroic values in *The Battle of Maldon*. In the first chapter, the heroic values are explored and explained. The next chapters are each about one of the modern adaptations of *The Battle of Maldon*, organised from the oldest publication to the most recent one. Chapter 2 is about the first adaptation: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son*. The third chapter discusses Pauline Clarke's *Torolv the Fatherless*. Chapter four is about the short story "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One" in K.V. Johansen's *The Storyteller*. The fifth and final chapter is an analysis of J.O. Morgan's poem *At Maldon*. The thesis will end with a conclusion that answers the research question and sets out to explain opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 1 – HEROICS IN THE OLD ENGLISH POEM *THE BATTLE OF MALDON*

This chapter will discuss which heroic values are emphasised in the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*. The specific heroic ideals that I am going to focus on are the (excessive) desire for glory (*ofermod*), gift-giving, and the cowardice and suicidal loyalty of members of the *comitatus*. These features are emphasized by the poet in the original poem, and have sparked scholarly discussion regarding whether the poet criticises this behaviour or praises it through a nostalgic lens.[11] In this chapter, I will go over what the heroic values entail, how the poem offers commentary on Byrhtnoth and the Anglo-Saxon soldiers, and how the poem may still be considered a heroic poem while it provides critical commentary on the behaviour of the characters.

The Battle of Maldon considers the heroic code from different standpoints, which is tied to the gift exchange between the lord and his retainers, and the vows made and honoured in the text. Fred C. Robinson notes: "Like respect for the law today, loyalty in pre-Conquest society was the sine qua non, and its absence marked the difference between civilization and primeval disorder."[12] The established order of the hierarchical nature of loyalty is to be considered the necessary component for society to function. This tradition is also emphasized through the characters' voices in the poem. Additionally, the poet utilizes maxims to establish the heroic code in the poem.[13] Through the proverbial speech, the characters in the poem consider ideals that are traditional to their background and culture in a way that invokes authority. An example of this heroic ideal can be found in the speech of Byrhtwold.

[11] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" 33-35.
[12] Fred C. Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R.M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 436.
[13] Paul Cavill, "Maxims in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Neophilologus* 82: 4 (1998), 640-1.

The desire for glory

The Battle of Maldon tells of the defeat of the English forces in their battle against the invading Danes. The poet seems to ascribe the loss of the English to what scholars have construed to be a tactical error made by the earl of the Anglo-Saxon soldiers, Byrhtnoth. The decision of the earl Byrhtnoth to let the Vikings approach and cross the waterway is presented as a mistake: "Ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode / alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode" [Then because of his pride the earl set about allowing the hateful race too much land].[14] The poet names Byrhtnoth's "ofermode" as the reason the earl allowed the enemy to gain their footing. As some scholars have argued, this "ofermode" should be interpreted as his desire for glory, since beating the Vikings on equal grounds would have been a very admirable feat. J.R.R. Tolkien states: "Honour itself was a motive, and he sought it at the risk of placing his *heorðwerod*, all the men most dear to him, in a truly heroic situation, which they could redeem only by death."[15] In his view, Byrhtnoth's desire for glory was excessive and endangered his men unnecessarily, which resulted in the defeat of the English.

The word *ofermod* has sparked much scholarly debate about not only the definition of the word, [16] but also the poet's intention in using the word. As it stands, it may seem like the poet denounces Byrhtnoth for making such a tactical error based on his desire for glory. George Clark discusses the possibility that Byrhtnoth was tricked by the opposing force to allow them to cross the waterway, yet ultimately concludes that there is no textual evidence that points towards Byrhtnoth being tricked.[17] Clark goes on to state that "the ofermod which impells Byrhtnoth to let the vikings cross the Pante is the same heroic spirit which drove him

[14] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" ll. 89-90.
[15] J.R.R. Tolkien, "(III) Ofermod" *The Battle of Maldon together with The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, ed. Peter Grybauskas (London: HarperCollins, 2023), 30.
[16] Helmut Gneuss, "*The Battle of Maldon* 89: Byrhtnoð's *Ofermod* Once Again," *Studies in Philology* 73:2 (1976), 118.
[17] George Clark, "The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem," *Speculum* 43 (1968), 53-57.

to choose battle instead of tribute."[18] Additionally, Mark Griffith speculates that Byrhtnoth had not been able to see the entirety of the Viking army and thus made his decision based on an erroneous observation.[19] Griffith concludes with the possibility that Byrhtnoth misspoke during his exchange of words with the Vikings' herald: "the poet tells us enough to understand the request of the Vikings and the reaction of the ealdorman. In this interpretation, this reaction, in giving too much land to the Vikings, follows from having given them too many words."[20] Then, Byrhtnoth's choice of words would have forced him to allow the battle to happen in order to not damage his own reputation and honour. In their article "*The Battle of Maldon*: A Historical, Heroic and Political Poem," W.G. Busse and R. Holtei discuss what constitutes as heroism in the poem.[21] They do not consider Byrhtnoth's decision to let his army engage in the fight with the Vikings heroic, as the poem does not state the Anglo-Saxon forces were outnumbered.[22] Similarly, John D. Niles ascribes the idea that Byrhtnoth was outnumbered as described in the Liber Eliensis to a myth.[23] While striving for glory is an important part of the heroic ethos as it earned someone recognition, fame and even gifts for fulfilling oaths in the mead-hall community,[24] Byrhtnoth's decision took this desire for glory to the extreme which is what the poet criticises him for. There seems to be a general agreement that the *ofermod* of Byrhtnoth denotes his excessive pride, and that the poet did not agree with his decision.

[18] Clark, "The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem," 71.
[19] Mark Griffith, "The Battle of Maldon: The Guile of the Vikings Explained," *Notes and Queries* 63 (2016), 185.
[20] Ibid., 186.
[21] W. G. Busse and R. Holtei, "'The Battle of Maldon': A Historical, Heroic and Political Poem," *Neophilologus* 65:4 (1981): 614–620. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01512576.
[22] Ibid., 615.
[23] John D. Niles, "Maldon and Mythopoesis," *Old English Literature*, ed. Liuzza, 454.
[24] Stephen Pollington, "The Mead-Hall Community," *Journal of Medieval History* 37:1 (2011), 30-31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2010.12.010.

Loyalty based on gift-giving

Gift-giving is a crucial part of the heroic ethos and system of loyalty in place for a lord and his retainers. It was a way for the lord to bind warriors to himself in a mutual beneficial fashion: the lord strengthened his forces in battle, while the retainer received gifts of the lord and gained social status.[25] That also means that desertion resulted in public disgrace.[26] Gifts bound the lord and retainer in "a relationship of obligation."[27] Apart from being honour-bound through oaths, the exchange of gifts also signified the honour of the individual. As Stephen Pollington states: "Every presentation was a badge of honour for the recipient and a mark of nobility and largesse for the donor; this was an economy of prestige in which gold necklaces, ring-hilted swords, battle-coats, helmets and horses were the currency."[28] The ideal of gift-giving was important to establish relationships between lords and retainers.

In *The Battle of Maldon*, there are references to this type of gift-giving. Byrhtnoth is referred to as a "sincgyfan"[29] and "beahgifan"[30], both translated as treasure-giver. These titles show Byrhtnoth did bind his retainers to himself through gift-giving. A specific reference to gift-giving can be found in a description of Byrhtnoth as a lord of Godric: "þe him mænigne oft mear gesealde;" [who had often made him a gift of many a horse].[31] Godric goes on to abandon the fight when his lord dies and steals Byrhtnoth's horse in order to flee. Thus, Byrhtnoth fulfilled his end of the honour-bound relationship by providing Godric with gifts

[25] Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, "Old English Heroic Literature," in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David F. Johnson and Elaine M. Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77.
[26] Rosemary Woolf, "The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord in the "Germania" and in "The Battle of Maldon"," *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), 73. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510668.
[27] Pollington, "The Mead-Hall Community," 27.
[28] Ibid., 27.
[29] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" l. 278.
[30] Ibid., l. 290.
[31] Ibid., l. 188.

such as the aforementioned horses, while Godric deliberately fails to fulfil his side of the relationship by fleeing during the battle.

Loyalty based on oaths

The third heroic value that will be discussed is the use of oaths as a way to establish loyalty in the poem. There are soldiers that flee the battlefield after their lord's death. This flight allows the poet to engage with the idea of loyalty, which is one of the major themes in the poem. [32] The thegns were bound to Byrhtnoth through an oath. As Stephen J. Harris states: "Oaths of loyalty and obedience were of utmost importance to the Anglo-Saxons."[33] The oaths sworn were also tied to Anglo-Saxon legal codes.[34] Ergo, the breaching of oaths could have severe consequences and incompliance with an oath could even result in divine punishment. Harris describes that legal and moral behaviour were not distinguished from one another and that "oaths were thought akin to prayers and involved participation by a divine judge or judges."[35] Additionally, it is mentioned that "irreligion brings on the wrath of God, sometimes in the shape of his Danish and Norwegian scourges."[36] Therefore, the notion of oaths is integral to the poem and the discussion surrounding the flight and loyalty of the soldiers of Byrhtnoth. The fleeing soldiers broke their shield wall and is one of the reasons for the English defeat.[37] Additionally, it has been noted before that the breaking of the shield wall can be paralleled to the breaking of oaths, together with more imagery of breaking in the poem.[38] Thus,

[32] Roberta Frank, "*The Battle of Maldon* and Heroic Literature," *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1991), 204.
[33] Stephen J. Harris, "Oaths in *The Battle of Maldon*," *The Hero Recovered: Essays on Medieval Heroism in Honor of George Clark*, ed. Robin Waugh and James Weldon (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, College of Arts and Sciences, Western Michigan University, 2010), 88.
[34] Matthias Amon, "'Ge mid wedde ge mid aðe': the functions of oath and pledge in Anglo-Saxon legal culture," *Historical Research* 86:233 (2013), 515. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2281.12024.
[35] Harris, "Oaths in *The Battle of Maldon*," 90.
[36] Ibid., 91.
[37] Clark, "The Battle of Maldon: A Heroic Poem," 61.
[38] Harris, "Oaths in *The Battle of Maldon*," 92.

specifically the flight of the soldiers can be understood as a breach of the heroic oath and the consequences of this breach is the defeat of the English forces.

The poem describes how the sons of Odda, Godric, Godwine and Godwig, are the first to flee. As aforementioned, Godric steals Byrhtnoth's horse and runs off together with his brothers into the woods:

þæt wurdon Oddan bearn ærest on fleame,
Godric fram guþe, and þone godan forlet
þe him mænigne oft mear gesealde;
he gehleop þone eoh þe ahte his hlaford,
on þam gerædum, þe hit right ne wæs,
and his broðru mid him begen ær[n]don,
God[w]ine and Godwig, guþe ne gymdon,
ac wendon fram þam wige and þone wudu sohton,
flugon on þæt fæsten and hyra feore burgon

[the sons of Odda were the first in flight there,
Godric turned from the battle, and abandoned the brave man
who had often made him a gift of many a horse;
he leapt on the horse that his lord had owned,
on to the trappings, which was highly improper,
and his brothers both ran off with him,
Godwine and Godwig, they did not care for the battle,
but they turned from the fight and sought the woods,

they fled into that place of safety and saved their lives][39]

Their decision to flee betrays their oath to their lord to assist him in battle. Yet, some scholars have argued that their oaths are void since Byrhtnoth has died.[40] Regardless, the remaining retainers call the soldiers' flight treacherous. Not only does Offa blame the three brothers for leaving the battlefield, but he also berates Godric for deceiving the troops:

Us Godric hæfð,
earh Oddan bearn, ealle beswicene:
wende þæs formoni man, þa he on meare rad,
on wlancan þam wicge, þæt wære hit ure hlaford;
forþan wearð her on felda folc totwæmed,
scyldburh tobrocen.

[Us Godric has
betrayed, one and all, the cowardly son of Odda:
too many men believed, when he rode away on the horse,
on the prancing steed, that it was our lord:
because of that the army became fragmented here on the battlefield,
the shield-fort smashed to pieces.][41]

Offa states that the flight of Godric and his brothers caused other soldiers to flee, as they thought they saw their lord riding away on his horse. While the sons of Odda may have broken their oath by making the decision to run into the forest, the soldiers who mistook

[39] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" ll. 186-94.
[40] Harris, "Oaths in *The Battle of Maldon*," 95.
[41] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" ll. 237-42.

Godric as Byrhtnoth might not have been aware of their betrayal. Ultimately, the escape of the sons of Odda is one of the reasons for the breaking of the Anglo-Saxon defence.

The true ideal of loyalty portrayed in *The Battle of Maldon* is seen in the remaining retainers' decision to keep fighting. They make this decision based on their feelings of connectedness and loyalty to Byrhtnoth. As Donald Scragg states:

> The poet developed an extended image by presenting the ealdorman of Essex and his English defenders as a Germanic war-lord with his warrior band or 'comitatus'. Tacitus in the *Germania* refers to a practice amongst the Germanic tribes by which a group of noble companions attached themselves to a lord with bonds of allegiance so strong that they were prepared to protect him with their lives.[42]

The comitatus in *The Battle of Maldon* thus denotes the retainers that remain on the battlefield and give their lives during the fight. The soldiers who speak on their commitment to their general do so after Byrhtnoth's death. These are Ælfwine, Offa, Leofsunu, Dunnere and Byrhtwold. Additionally, there are warriors that do not speak but instead continue fighting: Æscferth, Edward the Tall, Æthelric, Wistan and another Godric. Leofsunu states: "'Ic þæt gehate, þæt ic heonon nelle / fleon fotes trym, ac wille furðor gan, / wrecan on gewinne minne winedrihten." ['I vow that I shall not from here / flee the length of a foot, but I intend to push forward, / to avenge my lord and friend in the struggle.][43] Furthermore, the poet comments on Offa's death:

> he hæfde deah geforþod þæt he his frean gehet,
> swa he beotode ær wið his beahgifan
> þæt hi sceoldon begen on burh ridan,

[42] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" 33.
[43] Ibid., ll. 246-8.

hale to hame, oððe on here crin[c]gan,

on wælstowe wundum sweltan.

He læg ðegenlice ðeadne gehende.

[yet he had accomplished what he promised his lord,

as he vowed for merly to his treasure-giver

that they must both ride back to their dwelling,

safe into the homestead, or die amongst the vikings,

perish with wounds on the field of slaughter.

He lay near his lord as a thegn should.][44]

Both these quotes portray the warriors as wanting to avenge their lord and pay for this with their lives. Furthermore, the speeches of the remaining Anglo-Saxon men show the importance placed on communal action.[45] The retainers decide to fight until the end on the battlefield, highlighting their loyalty and remaining true to their oaths. Harris explains that part of honouring a military oath is shown to be suffering.[46] Nevertheless, the remaining soldiers fighting at Maldon take their suffering in stride.

The retainers who did not flee the battlefield acted out of suicidal loyalty. This concept has also sparked debates among scholars.[47] The most loyal thegns are shown to accompany their lord till the end through their speeches and continuing to fight after their lord's death. Their desire to enact vengeance for the death of Byrhtnoth is part of the heroic ethos: "A retainer should protect his lord from attack even if he has to risk death or die in order to accomplish this successfully. If his lord is killed, the retainer should take vengeance on the

[44] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" ll. 289-94.
[45] Busse and Holtei, "'The Battle of Maldon': A Historical, Heroic and Political Poem," 620.
[46] Harris, "Oaths in *The Battle of Maldon*," 101.
[47] David Clark, "Notes on the Medieval Ideal of Dying with One's Lord," *Notes and Queries* 58: 4 (2011), 475. https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjr147.

killer, again if need be at the cost of his own life."[48] The retainers who remain in the battle know their situation is dire, but their fight is not yet lost.[49] Nevertheless, it does appear as if the warriors' end goal is to lay down their lives, which does not necessarily mean they follow through with vengeance. An example is Offa who makes clear in his speech that he will not come out of the battle alive. As Rosemary Woolf states: "The decision to die taken by Byrhtnoth's retainers is therefore not a matter of adherence to a traditional code of duty but rather an individual insight into the nature of loyalty which reflects their own peculiar greatness."[50] Yet, the poet comments on Offa's death: "He læg ðegenlice ðeadne gehende." [He lay near his lord as a thegn should.][51] Thus, the poet seems to be of the opinion that the suicidal loyalty is exemplary behaviour of a good thegn, even though this exact behaviour is dubious in its compliance to the heroic ethos.

Byrhtwold's speech

Another important insight into the heroics of *The Battle of Maldon* is Byrhtwold's speech. His speech encourages the remaining soldiers and himself to continue fighting:

> 'Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
> mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægan lytlað.
> Her lið ure ealdor eall forheawen,
> gód on greote. A mæg gnornian
> se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wendan þenceð.
> Ic eom frod feores: fram ic ne wille,
> Ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,
> Be swa leofan men, licgan þence.'

[48] Woolf, "The ideal of men dying with their lord in the "Germania" and in "The Battle of Maldon"," 72.
[49] Niles, "Maldon and Mythopoesis," 462.
[50] Woolf, "The ideal of men dying with their lord in the "Germania" and in "The Battle of Maldon"," 81.
[51] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" l. 294.

['The spirit must be the firmer, the heart the bolder,

courage must be the greater as our strength diminishes.

Here lies our leader all cut to pieces,

the great man in the dirt. He will have cause to mourn for ever

who thinks of turning away from this battlegame now.

I am advanced in years; I do not intend to leave,

but I beside my own lord,

beside that wellbeloved man, intend to lie.'][52]

Byrhtwold's speech has been discussed as an important signifier of the present ideal of comitatus in the poem, specifically the lines 312-13. As Thijs Porck states: "The first two lines of Byrhtwold's speech encapsulate the heroic ethos in the form of a maxim."[53] Lines 312-13 are a traditional saying that Byrhtwold uses to invoke authority and give advice to the other thegns on how to act next.[54] Additionally, Byrhtwold is another retainer who, like Offa, does not intend to walk away from the battle but desires to die alongside his lord. The specific invocation of the heroic ethos by Byrhtwold shows that the poet is making a connection between the heroic ethos and the different sides to loyalty in *The Battle of Maldon*.

Praise and criticism of the poet

As the poem engages with the ideas surrounding the northern heroic spirit, part of the debate is whether the poet uses these examples to criticise or praise the behaviour of the men. As aforementioned in the discussion surrounding Byrhtnoth's *ofermod*, the poet seemingly condemns the ealdorman for letting his pride influence his decision to engage in battle. J.R.R.

[52] Scragg, "*The Battle of Maldon,*" ll. 312-19.
[53] Thijs Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History* (Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 161.
[54] Cavill, "Maxims in *The Battle of Maldon*," 640.

Tolkien in his essay *Ofermod* states about the lines 89-90: "They are lines in fact of *severe* criticism, though not incompatible with loyalty, and even love."[55] While the poet disapproves of Byrhtnoth's decision, he can still see the lord as a praiseworthy man. Moreover, the poet portrays the northern heroic spirit and loyalty in the poem through Byrhtnoth and his retainers, meaning that the thegns also have to be considered to confirm whether the poem is merely critical or also praising behaviours of the Anglo-Saxons failed defence against the Vikings. The thegns can generally be sorted into two different behavioural categories: one group is controlled by fear and the other values their loyalty over their fear. Even though the poem does contain some critical views on the battle, there is also praise for the loyalty of Byrhtnoth and the retainers. Thus, the poem can be seen as a work with critical views, but it ultimately paints a rather positive picture of the thegns of Byrhtnoth.

Conclusion

To conclude, *The Battle of Maldon*'s poet portrayed the heroic ideals from different perspectives. The ealdorman Byrhtnoth is described to be strive for glory excessively, which leads to the loss of the Anglo-Saxons. Even though the poet seemingly criticises the general for this choice, the heroics of Byrhtnoth are still acknowledged. The definition of the *ofermod* of Byrhtnoth can generally be taken to mean overconfidence or pride, which can be expected to be incorporated into the modern adaptations. The poet also shows the different sides of loyalty in the poem. As it is one of the main themes of the text, the retainers both show different ways of honouring their obligations from the relationship established through gift-giving and their oaths of loyalty. One group flees the battlefield once Byrhtnoth dies, which can be interpreted as a breaking of their oath and not fulfilling their requirements set through gifts from their lord. The second group, consisting of the remaining soldiers, reiterate their

[55] Tolkien, "(III) Ofermod," 31.

loyalty to Byrhtnoth and address their desire to die alongside their lord in speeches. Lastly, Byrhtwold calls upon a heroic maxim in his speech to encourage the thegns in the fight, which reinforces the ideal of the warrior-band also established in the heroic ethos. The poet does criticise the characters in the poem, but the heroics of the thegns and even Byrhtnoth are emphasized in the text. Therefore, the text can be understood to be a heroic poem that contains critical opinions of the poet.

CHAPTER 2 – THE HOMECOMING OF BEORHTNOTH, BEORHTHELM'S SON

The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son is J.R.R. Tolkien's imagined sequel to the old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*. The text has the form of a play, which consists of a dialogue between two imaginary characters. J.R.R. Tolkien is primarily known for his fantasy works *The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit,* and *The Silmarillion.* Moreover, Tolkien was a philologist and a professor of Old English. He has engaged with *The Battle of Maldon* over the course of his life and the text could be considered the second most influential Old English source of inspiration for his Legendarium.[56] *The Homecoming* was originally published in the scientific publishing journal *Essays and Studies* in 1953,[57] accompanied by a historical preface on the battle called *Byrhtnoth's Death* and a short essay on *ofermod*.[58] Therefore, its intended audience consists of people familiar with the original text and other Old English poetry, which is further enforced by the intertextuality through references to other Old English works. Subsequently, the play was produced by the BBC Third Programme by means of a radio performance.[59] Tolkien also recorded his own rendition of the play after he was not satisfied with the BBC's version. In this chapter, I will discuss how *The Homecoming* engages with the heroic values elaborated on in Chapter 1. The strive for glory and the dialogue about Byrhtnoth will be analysed first. Then, I will talk about how *The Homecoming* brings up the gift-giving and oath-swearing and loyalty. Lastly, I will investigate how the text praises and criticises the poem/characters of the poem.

[56] Peter Grybauskas, "Introduction," *The Battle of Maldon together with The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, ed. Peter Grybauskas (London: HarperCollins, 2023), xvi.
[57] Ibid., xvii.
[58] Ibid., xiv.
[59] Ibid., xviii.

Two different opinions on the desire for glory

Tídwald and Torhthelm take opposing stances on whether or not Byrhtnoth made a correct decision and give differing opinions on those retainers who gave their lives and the ones who fled the battlefield. The two characters articulate positive and negative sides to the northern heroic spirit. Because Tída and Totta balance each other out, Tolkien's sequel neither definitively condemns nor praises the fight that took place. Yet, the portrayal of Totta and Tída does suggest which view Tolkien favours. Tom Shippey explains that Tolkien is attacking Old English poetry through the character of Torhthelm.[60] Totta's obsession with poetry and his idealisation of the fight contribute to this idea by continuously referring to Old English poetry and romanticising the battle. Examples of his poetic references are "As lays remind us"[61] and "I can't abide his eyes, bleak and evil / as Grendel's in the moon."[62] He first makes a general mention of lays and then explicitly refers to Grendel, one of the monsters in the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Totta's romanticisation of the battle happens through his comments on how he had wanted to be on the battlefield: "I wish I'd been here, not left with the luggage and the lazy thralls, cooks and sutlers!"[63] His desire for battle is not only to prove his loyalty to Byrhtnoth, but to also earn his own glory. Totta idolizes Byrhtnoth exactly because of his strife for glory:

> of the friends of men first and noblest,
> to his hearth-comrades help unfailing,
> to his folk the fairest father of peoples.
> Glory loved he; now glory earning
> his grave shall be green, while ground or sea,
> while word or woe in the world lasteth.[64]

[60] Tom Shippey, "Tolkien and 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth'," *Roots and Branches Selected Papers on Tolkien* (Zollikofen: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007), 329.
[61] J.R.R. Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," *The Battle of Maldon together with The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, ed. Peter Grybauskas (London: HarperCollins, 2023), 11.
[62] Ibid., 12.
[63] Ibid., 12.
[64] Ibid., 15.

In his essay on *ofermod*, Tolkien goes into detail on how *The Battle of Maldon* exemplifies the northern heroic spirit while highlighting exactly what the issues are with it. He calls the northern heroic spirit "of gold and an alloy."[65] By referring to the northern heroic spirit as a mix of metals, Tolkien means that it is never entirely pure, as there is always an ulterior motive for the hero to act heroic. He names Byrhtnoth's decision to allow passage to the Vikings an "act of pride and misplaced chivalry".[66] For Byrhtnoth, his alloy would therefore be his excessive chivalry. Tolkien explains that Byrhtnoth decided to allow the Vikings to pass because he desired to be remembered in life and death. In other words, he wanted to be considered glorious and goes beyond what was necessary to win the battle. Thus, the excessive nature of Byrhtnoth's desire for glory is heavily critiqued by Tolkien.

Totta displays a number of behavioural problems which tie into his portrayed desire for glory. Shippey notes that Totta is cowardly, boastful, and murderous.[67] Indeed, Totta goes as far as to use Byrhtnoth's sword to attack a body looter while mistakenly thinking it is one of the Danes. Before using the sword, Totta saw the shapes and assumed them to be "Troll-shapes" or "hell-walkers."[68] These assumptions show Totta to be very imaginative, murderous, and scared. He also acts impulsively, attacking the body looter without even thinking. The reason Tolkien would be attacking Old English poetry is because he ascribed Byrhtnoth's error to his desire to be the object of minstrels' songs. J.R.R. Tolkien displayed two different sides of the discussion surrounding *The Battle of Maldon* through the two characters in his imagined sequel – and Totta appears as the romanticisation of war and the excessive desire for glory.

[65] Tolkien, "(III) Ofermod," 28.
[66] J.R.R. Tolkien, "(I) Beorhtnoth's Death," *The Battle of Maldon together with The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, ed. Peter Grybauskas (London: HarperCollins, 2023), 4.
[67] Shippey, "Tolkien and 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth,'" 326-7.
[68] Ibid., 16.

Tídwald behaves like the opposite of Torhthelm. He is more down-to-earth and has experience with battle. When Totta does not understand how the Vikings crossed the causeway without there being more of their corpses around, Tída is able to answer his question by saying:

> … our lord was at fault,
> or so in Maldon this morning men were saying.
> Too proud, too princely! But his pride cheated,
> and his princedom has passed, so we'll praise his valour.
> He let them cross the causeway, so keen was he
> to give minstrels matter for mighty songs.
> Needlessly noble.[69]

Tída offers his own insights as the older one of the two and shares his knowledge of the battle's outcome. Moreover, Tída criticises Byrhtnoth for letting his pride cloud his judgement and names Byrhtnoth's desire to be sung about by minstrels as the reason for letting the Vikings pass. This idea complies with Tolkien's own essay on *ofermod*. As Mary R. Bowman states: "Beorhtnoth's choice, according to Tídwald, is informed not by a sense of what a responsible leader ought to *do* but by his desire to *look* heroic in a poem."[70] The older of the two also mentions Beowulf. Totta implicitly compares Byrhtnoth to Beowulf when bringing up his funeral:

> … The wall is fallen,
> women are weeping; the wood is blazing
> and the fire flaming as a far beacon.
> Build high the barrow his bones to keep![71]

This utterance refers to Beowulf's funeral pyre, which is also an example of the intertextuality that only the intended audience of scholars familiar with *Beowulf* would understand. Through

[69] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 20.
[70] Mary R. Bowman, "Refining the Gold: Tolkien, The Battle of Maldon, and the Northern Theory of Courage," *Tolkien Studies* 7 (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2010), 95.
[71] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 15.

this reference, Totta evokes the image of a heroic end with a grand funeral and riches for the dead. Tídwald points out that Byrhtnoth's funeral will be different:

> These are Christian days, though the cross is heavy;
> Beorhtnoth we bear not Béowulf here:
> no pyres for him, nor piling of mounds;
> and the gold will be given to the good abbot.
> Let the monks mourn him and mass be chanted![72]

While Torhthelm is more concerned with the heroic ethos, especially the idea of glory, Tída reminds him of the actual situation. Byrhtnoth will not get the same grandiose funeral that Totta is imagining when thinking of Beowulf. Tída calls upon the Christian ideals instead of the pagan ones that comply with the heroic values of *The Battle of Maldon*. Thus, Tídwald does not follow the heroic value of desire for glory like Torhthelm does. Instead, Tída criticises Byrhtnoth for his choices in battle and even points out that his funeral will be a Christian one.

Gift-giving and the mead hall

In *The Homecoming*, the two characters do not discuss the ideal of gift-giving. The lack of discussion surrounding the ideal of gift-giving is not out-of-place, since both Torhthelm and Tídwald are not retainers of Byrhtnoth. As Tompkins states: "the main characters are commoners, not the noble warriors of most of Old English poetry."[73] Totta and Tída were not present at the battle and would also not have received gifts like Godric had as mentioned in *The Battle of Maldon*. Yet, the two men do refer to Byrhtnoth's generosity, especially towards those who were dear to him. During his chant about Byrhtnoth, Totta first mentions his riches: "and rich raiment and rings gleaming, / wealth unbegrudged for the well-beloved."[74] This utterance shares the idea of gift-giving and paints Byrhtnoth as a wealthy lord who happily

[72] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 15.
[73] J. Case Tompkins, ""The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son": Tolkien as a Modern Anglo-Saxon," *Mythlore* 23: 4 (2002), 71.
[74] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 15.

shared his treasure with those close to him. Additionally, Tída also brings up the beer Byrhtnoth used to serve in his hall: "The beer he gave / was good and plenty to gladden your heart, / both strong and brown."[75] Thus, Tolkien did establish the traditional values of the mead hall but did not explicitly incorporate them into the two characters. Therefore, there is no importance placed on the ideal of gift-giving in the circumstances of *The Homecoming*.

About the loyal and disloyal retainers

The two men also talk about Byrhtnoth's retainers. While they are searching for the body of their lord, Tída and Totta come across the corpses of Wolfmær, Ælfnoth, Ælfwine, and Offa. Especially when the two come across Wolfmær and Ælfwine, they emphasize how young these retainers were. Tída says about seeing Wolfmær dead: "It's a wicked business / to gather them ungrown. A gallant boy, too, / and the makings of a man."[76] Totta even remarks that Wolfmær was one year younger than himself.[77] Then, only a little later Torhthelm also mentions how young Ælfwine is: "And here's Ælfwine: / barely bearded, and his battle is over."[78] The emphasis on the young age of these retainers is not only confronting for Totta, but it also highlights the difference between the younger retainers and Offa. When talking about Offa, the two men praise him. So does Tída say: "He was a brave lordling."[79] And in response, Totta mentions how he heard Offa talk about people boasting: "'There are cravens at council that crow proudly / with the hearts of hens': so I hear he said / at the lords' meeting. "[80] He then goes on to talk about lays and what they say about oaths: "'What at the mead man vows, when morning comes let him with deeds answer, or his drink vomit and a sot be shown.'"[81] Totta, and also Tída, are thus aware of the vows taken by the retainers they found

[75] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 20.
[76] Ibid., 10.
[77] Ibid., 10.
[78] Ibid., 11.
[79] Ibid., 11.
[80] Ibid., 11.
[81] Ibid., 12.

dead on the battlefield. Offa is the one that they both acknowledge the most in relation to Offa's comments on and his own swearing of oaths.

While Tídwald and Torhthelm are searching, the two also talk about the flight of the soldiers. No names are mentioned, but Tída and Totta comment on the idea of fleeing during battle. Totta says:

> But it's bad when bearded men
> put shield at back and shun battle,
> running like roe-deer, while the red heathen
> beat down their boys. May the blast of Heaven
> light on the dastards that to death left them
> to England's shame![82]

Totta immediately rejects the idea of abandoning the fight and once again places emphasis on the age of the soldiers. He gets worked up and condemns the "bearded men" who would have fled the battlefield and left the "boys" behind. It is worth noting that the younger of the two characters places this initial emphasis on the age difference. Clearly, it is the expectation that as the older soldier, or as the lord, you need to take care of the younger soldiers standing beneath you. This idea of responsibility complies with Tolkien's idea on the lord's responsibility in his essay *Ofermod*, for which he uses Beowulf as a lord and his retainer Wiglaf as an example: "As it is, a subordinate is placed in greater peril than he need have been, and though he does not pay the penalty of his master's *mod* with his own life, the people lose their king disastrously."[83] Tolkien states that the lord is responsible for his subordinates and should not unnecessarily endanger them. By emphasizing the responsibility of the lord and of the older retainers, a hierarchy is established of rank and age.

Tídwald, as the older of the two, has more experience in battle and understands the desire to flee more than Totta. Totta's harsh reaction to the deserters is followed up by him

[82] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 11.
[83] Tolkien, "(III) Ofermod," 29-30.

speaking on his desire to have participated in the battle. In response to this wish, Tídwald shares his own ideas on how fighting goes:

> Your time'll come,
> and it'll look less easy than lays make it.
> Bitter taste has iron, and the bite of swords
> is cruel and cold, when you come to it.
> Then God guard you, if your glees falter!
> When your shield is shivered, between shame and death
> is hard choosing.[84]

Tída is more sympathetic towards the idea of fleeing. His own experience with battle shines through his argument here. He explains that the reality of battles is much different than Totta is familiar with through lays. Moreover, Tída makes it known how difficult it is to remain certain of your choice to fight. He seemingly sympathises with the men who decided to flee. His more down-to-earth thought process and his own experiences are the reason he views the idea of flight differently than Totta, who is familiar with fighting through lays that idealise battles. This difference shows how Tolkien highlighted how the northern heroic ideals change one's perspective on something like a fight, even if bound by an oath. On the one hand, there is Totta who condemns the flight of the soldiers because they left behind others in a losing battle. On the other hand, Tída explains to Totta how the reality of war makes the idea of fleeing compared to fighting more attractive.

Torhthelm as the Maldon poet

Torhthelm echoes the encouraging words Byrhtwold uttered in *The Battle of Maldon*. In the end of the play, Totta is sitting in the cart while half-asleep. He dreams of the words:

> Heart shall be bolder, harder be purpose,
> more proud the spirit as our power lessens!
> Mind shall not falter nor mood waver,
> though doom shall come and dark conquer.[85]

[84] Tolkien, "(II) The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," 12.
[85] Ibid., 24.

It might appear as if Totta is overly occupied with lays and the heroic ideals, yet some scholars have argued that Totta is in fact disillusioned with the image of war. Nancy Bunting states: "Torhthelm is not a "coward" in a battle by daylight surrounded by his comrades in arms, but rather he … is stunned by the mass of mutilated bodies and the destruction of battle which the older veteran, Tídwald, Torhthelm's foil, accepts and comments on."[86] Torhthelm seemingly relies more on the heroic values to make sense of the desolate battlefield they are walking across. Tolkien also comments on Byrhtwold's speech in his essay on *ofermod*, stating that lines 312-13 were part of "an ancient and honoured expression of heroic will."[87] Additionally, his thought-process being filled with poetry has another purpose. It has been noted that in Tolkien's fictional sequel, Torhthelm is implied to become the poet of *The Battle of Maldon*.[88] Totta's utterance of the iconic lines of Byrhtwold is an example of him starting to compose the poem. Tolkien's premise that Totta is the poet also supports the idea that the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* was someone with first-hand knowledge of Byrhtnoth's court. In this way, Tolkien brought his sequel back into the reality of the Old English poem and connects it to the imagined timeline proposed in the play.

Conclusion

In conclusion, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son* is a text that engages with two opposing views on *The Battle of Maldon*. The two characters Torhthelm and Tídwald hold different opinions on the northern heroic spirit exemplified in *The Battle of Maldon*. While the two are tasked with finding the corpse of Byrhtnoth, they discuss the battle that took place the day prior. Totta really admires Byrhtnoth and the loyal retainers, while he condemns the soldiers who fled. Additionally, Torhthelm is especially struck by how young

[86] Nancy Bunting, "Tolkien's Homecoming," *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center* 34 (Wheaton: Marion E. Wade Center, 2017), 33.
[87] Tolkien, "(I) Beorhtnoth's Death," 6.
[88] Peter Grybauskas, "A Portrait of the Poet as a Young Man: Noteworthy Omission in The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," *Tolkien Studies* 17 (2020), 169.

the men who died during the battle are. Perhaps as a way to cope, he continuously refers to lays and even composes the famous lines spoken by Byrhtwold in the Old English poem. It is strongly implied Totta is the poet of *The Battle of Maldon*. Yet, Torhthelm has his weak points. He desires glory, which is similar to Byrhtnoth. Tídwald has his own experiences with battle and is not as harsh towards the sentiment of fleeing during battle. Yet, his opinion on Byrhtnoth's desire for glory is negative. Tída condemns him for his *ofermod*, which Tolkien also ascribed to Byrhtnoth's excessive desire to be sung about by minstrels. Moreover, Tídwald points out to Totta that he should not get totally swept away with the lays he refers to. He emphasizes the Christian burial Byrhtnoth will receive. Overall, Tolkien used the two characters to portray a dialogue between different opinions on *The Battle of Maldon* all the while infusing his own views in addition to his essay accompanying the play.

CHAPTER 3 – TOROLV THE FATHERLESS

The story of *Torolv the Fatherless*, published in 1959, is a reimagination of *The Battle of Maldon* which follows a young boy (nine winters old) named Torolv/Trolf whose mother has died and whose father is an absent Viking. The author, Pauline Clarke, has changed the names of some characters from *The Battle of Maldon*. For example, Byrhtnoth is called Brihtnoth in this adaptation. Torolv is originally from the Viking fortress Jomsborg. One day, Torolv drifts off in a little boat after he goes fishing. The young boy is lost at sea for some time before he gets picked up by a Viking fleet. Here he meets the Viking frontman who calls himself Ali, but Clarke's historical note at the end of the book clarifies that he is meant to be Olaf, son of Trygvvi, called Anlaf in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[89] They go on raids and end up in England. There, Torolv leaves the ship to find a pig to bring back to impress Ali, but he gets left behind instead. Without any protection, Torolv goes looking for a lord and ends up in Brihtnoth's mead hall. He gets adopted into Brihtnoth's court, but after a year the Vikings show up and the battle at Maldon takes place. Torolv is not allowed to fight, but he sneaks out to witness the battle anyway. After the fight, the story only narrates the following couple of weeks in which Torolv helps the character Edgwine with his composition of the poem by relating his witness account.

Pauline Clarke's novel fulfils a number of criteria to appeal to the younger audience. As discussed in *Classical Reception and Children's Literature*, these features are:

> length (novels for children tend towards the shorter end of the range of novel lengths), language (e.g. avoidance of difficult words or of expletives), characters (child or young protagonists often feature), purpose (e.g. an overtly didactic purpose in books aiming to improve reading skills; or an implicit moralising purpose), or kind (e.g. the

[89] Pauline Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1959), 179.

> Bildungsroman is commonly aimed at readers who could identify with its young protagonist).[90]

In Clarke's novel, the main character is a young boy, which connects with the younger audience. The story is not a long one and follows the developments of Torolv in his turbulent life, which makes it easier for children to connect with the protagonist. Overall, Pauline Clarke's reimagination of the plot and the characters of the Old English poem is similar to what Carl Edlund Anderson remarks about children's adaptations of *Beowulf*: "From adapting Beowulf by reimagining the familiar plot and characters of the poem, it is a short step to seeing Beowulf as a source of ideas and inspiration that may inform and colour the author's own more individual creations."[91] Therefore, Clarke's strategy for her retelling of *The Battle of Maldon* is one found in other adaptations of Old English poems. In this chapter, I will investigate how *Torolv the Fatherless* has incorporated the heroic values from *The Battle of Maldon*. The same categories that are established in Chapter 1 will be used to investigate the adaptation. First, I will give a brief summary of the book and discuss the desire for glory as portrayed in the story. Then, I will talk about loyalty through gift-giving and oath swearing. Thirdly, I am going to look at the portrayal of the soldiers' flight. Lastly, I will consider the heroic maxim of Byrhtwold, who is called Brihtwold in the story.

The desire for glory

Valour and glory are ideals that are noticeably used in the Viking context in the story. Torolv thinks about how other children follow their parents or sometimes a lord. However, he himself has never met his parents and instead would do things "by his own will and valour."[92] Torolv

[90] Hodkinson, Owen, and Lovatt, Helen, "*Introduction,*" *Classical Reception and Children's Literature : Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation* ed. Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt. First edition. (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019), 9.
[91] Carl Edlund Anderson, "Treatments of *Beowulf* as a Source in Mid-Twentieth-Century Children's Literature," *Beowulf as children's literature* ed. Bruce Gilchrist and Britt Mize (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 117.
[92] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 14.

desires to be let into the pirate fortress by means of "man's own courage".[93] As a very young boy, Torolv already internalised the heroic ideal of courage and glory and envisions himself to achieve these things as he thinks them to be characteristics of Viking pirates. The fact that Ali keeps returning with a lot of treasure to divide among his men, and thus earns glory on the battlefield, is partially the reason Torolv admires him so much. Moreover, this portrayal means that the ideal of desiring glory is not problematized among the Vikings. Yet, the Vikings are said to be pirates who bring suffering to the places they visit and are condemned by the English. Thus, raiding is depicted to be a morally bad profession. Even so, Torolv still looks up to Ali because he finds him to be his lord, not just a pirate. It is also why Torolv is devastated when he gets left behind: "Ali was to him like father, brother and hero, Ali would have been his lord, he wanted to serve him."[94] Torolv's image of a perfect lord (in part because of the renown he had earned) gets ripped away from him when the Vikings leave him, which also means that the main group concerned with earning glory on the battlefield is inaccessible for the reader and Torolv.

During the battle at Maldon in *Torolv the Fatherless*, no reference is made to ofermod. While Brihtnoth's decision to let the Vikings pass the waterway is debated by the characters, the author did not explicitly state that this decision was made out of pride. When the messenger returns to ask for the Vikings' passage, three retainers do not want to let them cross. Yet, Brihtnoth states: ""Why should we fear battle?" demanded Brihtnoth. "Better, as that man says, to have fair fight.""[95] Brihtnoth does not want to consider the retainers' input and instead wants to forge ahead with the fight. One of the retainers , Edward, responds to Brihtnoth's idea by bringing forward his own: "But this is rashness when tide and island have delivered so many into our hands! When we can thin their huge number, man by man, on the

[93] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 14.
[94] Ibid., 40.
[95] Ibid., 137.

ford! Pray, my lord, let us fight this way and pay no heed to their feints! They who lose men!"[96] Brihtnoth does not listen to his input and instead goes ahead with his answer to the messenger: ""We will let the sea dogs over," said the earl. Edward's face was a blank of horrified alarm. The earl strode to the bank and called over the cold water: "Now we make way for you, come and meet us, warriors to war. God alone knows who shall have possession of this place of slaughter.""[97] After his announcement, the fight starts. Therefore, *Torolv the Fatherless* does not mention ofermod as a motivator for Brihtnoth and instead, Clarke has the character Brihtnoth stress his desire for a fair fight. If Brihtnoth wanted to win in an equal battle instead of through Edward's more tactical plan, then the desire for glory is replaced with the desire for fairness that inspired Brihtnoth's decision to let the Vikings pass the waterway. His desire for fairness is a message expected to be incorporated into a book for children, since it is generally understood to be a positive trait instead of the negative trait of excessive pride Byrhtnoth holds in the original poem. Furthermore, Clarke's portrayal of Brihtnoth's desire for fairness is an example of "purpose (e.g. an overtly didactic purpose in books aiming to improve reading skills; or an implicit moralising purpose)".[98] Portraying an influential figure with a desire to solve a problem through fairness is a better model than someone who wants to solve a problem through excessive pride.

Loyalty and gift-giving

Torolv keeps himself occupied with thoughts about finding a lord and serving him, while in return gaining glory and gifts. During his stay on the Viking ships, the young boy receives gifts from Ali. Not only does Ali allow him to stay on the ship and provides Torolv with food and water, but also gifts him a brooch and a knife: ""A brooch suitable for a salmon[99],"" Ali

[96] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 137-8.
[97] Ibid., 138.
[98] Hodkinson and Lovatt, "*Introduction,*" 9.
[99] "Salmon" is used by the Vikings as an affectionate nickname towards Torolv since they fished him out of the water like a salmon.

said, tossing it. Also he had given him a knife, for which one of the men had sewed him a skin sheath."[100] Torolv admires Ali for his generosity towards his men and provides the reader with commentary on it: "When he was old enough to go with the raiders, he would cling on to his own treasures, hide them about him, he thought furtively. Ali shared all things out: sometimes there were angry words when a man saw his heart's desire go to someone else."[101] The novel portrays the ideal of gift-giving with the risk of jealousy, which can be considered a childish trait. The idea that someone can become jealous when others receive the gift they themselves desired is relatable to children, which means that Clarke added the nuance by explaining the gift-giving and the reactions it may elicit from the retainers. In sum, Torolv occupies himself with the ideal of gift-giving at an early age, the emotions associated with gifts, and how this ideal connects to Ali as his lord.

When Torolv is adopted into Brihtnoth's court, he and Brihtnoth talk about how Torolv should act. Part of this discussion is about his loyalty through oath and gift-giving. After this discussion, Brihtnoth gives the boy his first ring to show Torolv that he trusts him: "That evening the earl gave Torolv a small, gold arm-ring, his first, fine and delicate."[102] Torolv receives more gifts during his first Christmas: "Then there was the Christmas feast of swan and venison and wine; the presents his godparents gave him, a gold drinking cup with a lid from Alfled, a finger-ring from Brihtnoth; the plaintive harping and the songs."[103] It is thus made clear that Brihtnoth appears to be a generous lord just like Ali. Not just to Torolv, as Offa also refers to Brihtnoth as his "ring-giver"[104] and Brihtnoth is also referred to as a "mead-giver."[105] Clarke describes both Ali and Brihtnoth to use gift-giving to establish and maintain social relationships. Not only do they bind others to themselves through the gifts, but

[100] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 34.
[101] Ibid., 33.
[102] Ibid., 84.
[103] Ibid., 108.
[104] Ibid., 128.
[105] Ibid., 141.

they establish the hierarchical power structure with themselves at the head. Important to note is that Torolv is completely dependent on the two lords to survive. While he has noticed the jealousy of others, he himself near never becomes jealous of the other kids also receiving gifts. The gifts to Torolv do not have an immediate pay-off, since he is too young to fight. Instead, Torolv is adopted into the two societies and shown affection through the gift-giving.

Loyalty and oath-swearing

In *Torolv the Fatherless*, Torolv desires to serve a lord by swearing an oath to him. Before he leaves his home, Torolv thinks to himself that "[h]e would go into the fortress when he was eighteen, he would excel at brave deeds and dangerous feats, take his oaths, find a lord, and become a pirate."[106] Yet, when he is with Ali and his troops, Torolv does not swear an oath. His experience with Brihtnoth is different. Right before the battle takes place, Torolv asks to be allowed to fight. When Brihtnoth turns him down, he responds: "Is it because I have not sworn my oath?"[107] His response is what pushes himself to proceed and swear his oath right at that moment: "The boy clutched it [relic], and in the face of the earl's bodyguard, and looking ardently at the earl, he swore his oath: "By the Lord, before whom these relics are holy, I will be loyal and true to Brihtnoth, and love all that he loves, and hate all that he hates... ." He said it in bold voice. Many heard him and were moved."[108] Torolv commits himself to England and Brihtnoth through his oath, which is also the reason he forces himself to not run towards the Vikings after the battle is done. Thus, Torolv understands the immense loyalty that comes with swearing an oath even at his young age.

Torolv is not the only character who ends up swearing an oath in *Torolv the Fatherless*. While most retainers already swore their oath before Torolv came along, there is one other

[106] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 14.
[107] Ibid., 122.
[108] Ibid., 124.

person who swears an oath in the presence of Torolv. This person is Offa, who swears to Brihtnoth that either they return together after the battle, or die together:

> "O my dear lord," began Offa the marshal at the earl's elbow, and he took his lord's hand and kissed it. ""Many may there be," and he raised his head and turned and shouted the words towards Godric: "Many may there be who most proudly speak now, who later at the time of need will not suffer to the death!" … "But not I, my loved lord,"' Offa went on in a lower voice. "Not I, my ring-giver, my protector. Ride back to this burg we shall both, whole to our halls, or fall both in battle, swelter together in our wounds at the place of slaughter."[109]

The oath Offa swears is the same one mentioned in *The Battle of Maldon*, bringing forward the suicidal loyalty of Offa as a retainer. The suicidal loyalty is not further expanded upon, which means that Clarke takes a more neutral approach to this ideal. No emphasis is put on the suicidal part of the retainers, although their oaths are mentioned during the battle itself. For the intended audience, it makes sense the suicidal loyalty is not discussed since it is somewhat of an inappropriate topic.

The flight of Godric

Torolv witnesses the battle from afar and notices which soldiers desert the fight. As in *The Battle of Maldon*, Godric, son of Odda, is one of the main perpetrators. Before the battle, Godric had boasted about his ability to fight: "He had pushed through from a distance where he had stood with his two brothers. All were members of the earl's household, taking their turn as bodyguard. Now he vaunted his bravery and theirs for all to hear. "We sons of Odda will kill our number! Each shall account for more than Alfwine!""[110] Godric claims that he and his brothers will be great in the upcoming battle. Yet, he flees during the actual battle which Torolv witnesses:

> The mare passed by the edge of the wood and Torolv could see the man's face, sweating and horrible, beneath the crooked helmet, and it was not Brihtnoth's. Godric, of the great boasts, Godric the traitor, had taken his lord's mount, had forsaken his

[109] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 128.
[110] Ibid., 128.

> mead-giver who gave him so much, and was flying to the fastness of the wood to save his life.[111]

Torolv sees Godric and his brothers run off and after the battle has finished, goes after them. Because he has chosen to remain loyal to Brihtnoth, Torolv wants to take the horse back to the settlement. Once he arrives back at the settlement, Torolv relays Godric's hiding spot and a party is set up to get him. Therefore, Godric's betrayal is shown to have consequences in *Torolv the Fatherless*. Yet, the other soldiers who deserted are not mentioned. Instead, the character of Godric is exaggerated to be the main aggravator. Clarke has simplified the idea of betrayal and put the blame on a singular character, which is similar to how an adaptation of *Beowulf* can portray Unferth. As Anderson notes on Robert Nye's *Beowulf* adaptation: "It is the character of Unferth who is most notably expanded by Nye, who turns him into the villain you love to hate."[112] Both these works have taken the character of the traitor and dramatized them. In doing so, Clarke has simplified the idea of betrayal by portraying Godric as the representation of the notion for the intended audience. Thus, *Torolv the Fatherless* spends more time on Godric as the figure head of the betrayal specifically rather than portraying a lot of soldiers abandoning the fight like in *The Battle of Maldon*.

Byrhtwold's maxim

In *Torolv the Fatherless*, there are multiple references to Byrhtwold's heroic maxim. Not only does the character Brihtwold utter his famous lines, but Clarke also named chapter 20 "HEART SHALL BE BOLDER" and introduces the idea that the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* is a member of Brihtnoth's court, in this case the character named Edgwine. First, Brihtwold chants his famous lines during the fight just like in *The Battle of Maldon*:

> The wiry, agile little man lifted up his voice as if he called his hounds to the kill, he chanted words which the English would long remember; his fierce, rhythmical cry pierced the noise of battle: "Will shall be harder, heart shall be bolder, courage shall

[111] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 141.
[112] Anderson, "Treatments of *Beowulf* as a Source in Mid-Twentieth-Century Children's Literature", 213.

> the more wax as our might wanes. Here lies our ealdorman, all forhewn, our dear lord in the dust: ever may lament he who now from this weapon play thinks to withdraw. I am old in years, now, I will not go from here, but I will lay me by my lord, beside so loved a man I intend to lie!"[113]

Brihtwold dies in battle after he finishes his speech. Clarke puts emphasis on the age of Brihtwold, calling him "wiry". This description results in a contrast between not only the younger soldiers and the older retainers in the story, but also between the older retainers and the young Torolv. The description also evokes the image of the older soldier simply wanting a last bit of glory, which contrasts the image of young retainers being pushed into an early grave. Torolv himself is not present when Brihtwold speaks his heroic words, which means that the author found them necessary to incorporate to inform the reader. The difference between the old and young age further demonstrates how right Brihtnoth was when he told Torolv he was too young to participate in the fight. Torolv hears these words when they are incorporated into the poem by Edgwine, who is assigned the role of poet of *The Battle of Maldon* in the fictional setting of *Torolv the Fatherless*. The poet had help from a survivor of the battle called Frith. This emphasis on the heroic maxim really paints the image that the author wanted to stress the heroic image that is assigned to the Englishmen who fought in the battle.

Conclusion

In sum, *Torolv the Fatherless* engages with the heroic values portrayed in *The Battle of Maldon* specifically through the character of Torolv. The young boy is the first to present the reader with his own desire for glory and a lord. He idealised the idea of pirating as a Viking, which resulted into his view of Ali as his lord. Ali's gift-giving also contributed to solidifying Torolv's view of him as a perfect lord, although it is brought forward that gift-giving comes with the danger of jealousy. By bringing up jealousy, Clarke connects to the younger

[113] Clarke, *Torolv the Fatherless*, 146-7.

audience, who most likely have felt jealous themselves about gifts intended for others. When Torolv was left behind in England, he looks for a new lord and finds Brihtnoth's hall. After he gets adopted into Brihtnoth's court, Torolv also starts viewing him as an ideal lord. Brihtnoth is not concerned with *ofermod* at all, and instead stresses the importance of a fair fight. As the intended audience is children, the emphasis on fairness holds a better message than prideful fighting. While at Brihtnoth's court, Torolv receives gifts from him and learns about the retainers, for example how Godric boasts and Offa's loyalty to Brihtnoth. When the Vikings arrive to raid, Torolv swears his oath to Brihtnoth due to his desire to participate in the battle, not only to show his loyalty, but to also earn his own glory as proof of his maturity. Although Torolv is not allowed to fight, he sneaks out to view the battle from a distance. The battle at Maldon is narrated fully, mostly following the original poem. The reader is informed of the flight of Godric and his brothers, causing others to follow suit. Yet, Godric's betrayal is the one mentioned most explicitly since Godric is portrayed as the main villain due to his abandonment of the fight. The other traitors are not really mentioned. Clarke's portrayal of Godric simplifies the notion of betrayal by pining it onto a singular figure. Clarke also incorporated Brihtwold's heroic speech, which is reproduced by the Edgwine who becomes the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* in the story. As an adaptation of the Old English poem, *Torolv the Fatherless* changes the ideal of desire for glory and simplifies the contrast between loyal and disloyal through the betrayal, oath-swearing, and gift-giving being attributed to specific characters.

CHAPTER 4 – ANNO DOMINI NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-ONE

The Storyteller is a collection of stories of which "Anno Domini" is the final story, written in the form of a narrative poem consisting of 'two voices' – the adapted story and original lines of *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The book was published in 2008, but "Anno Domini" had been performed earlier by the author, Krista V. Johansen, together with the poet John Ferns in 1994, at which point the poem was called "On Þissum Geare".[114] Johansen is a Canadian author. She states in the "Foreword" that she was inspired by Tolkien's *Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son*, specifically the thought of the ordinary people (foot soldiers) being involved and having to die for their lord's pride. The intended audience, as stated on the cover of *The Storyteller*, are adults and older teens. The events of *The Battle of Maldon* are narrated from the first-person plural perspective and interjected by translated lines of the Old English poem and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It follows the same timeline as the original poem, using the translated lines as additional context to the situation at hand.

"Anno Domini" has a narrative voice that uses 'inclusive we' to group the normal foot soldiers together with the audience. This particular choice emphasises the idea of Johansen about how the common people had to partake in the fight. By grouping the audience, who are (most likely) all regular people, with the soldiers in the story, she relates the experiences of the battle to the audience in order to make the story more immersive and emotional. Moreover, the 'inclusive we' introduces a fourth group to the story of *Maldon* that is not mentioned in the original poem: the foot soldiers. In the Old English poem, there are three main groups: Byrhtnoth the lord, the oath keepers, and the oath breakers. Johansen adds the

[114] K.V. Johansen, "Foreword," *The Storyteller and Other Tales* (Sackville: Sybertooth Inc, 2008), 7.

fourth group of the foot soldiers to her own adaptation of the Old English poem in order to introduce a new perspective on the events of the story.

In this chapter, I will go over the heroic values as they are portrayed in "Anno Domini". First, I am going to investigate the heroic glory of Byrhtnoth. Secondly, I will consider the suicidal loyalty and the flight of the soldiers. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss the ideal of gift-giving. Lastly, I am going to explain how Byrhtwold's maxim is incorporated into the story and how it ties back with Johansen's intention of portraying the foot soldiers' participation in the battle.

Pride and glory

Pride and glory are key terms used in Johansen's poem, specifically to describe Byrhtnoth. The general is called "Pride of Essex. Hero of the East Saxons. Byrhtnoth, ealdorman, noble man."[115] This positive description of Byrhtnoth signals to the reader that the leader of the Anglo-Saxons already has a reputation as an achieved warrior. After describing Byrhtnoth as the 'Pride of Essex', Johansen emphasizes the negative connotations of the word *pride*: "Pride was the sin of Lucifer, the sin of the Garden, pride in the self's own strength."[116] By linking the *ofermod* of Byrhtnoth to the pride of Lucifer and the sin of Adam and Eve, Johansen changes the idea of Byrhtnoth pride from positive to negative, showing how pride is a detrimental characteristic of Byrhtnoth.

Following this introduction of Byrhtnoth and his pride, Johansen inserts translated lines from the original poem into her own poem (The bold lines are translated lines from the original poem, the other lines are from Johansen's own poem):

[115] K.V. Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," *The Storyteller and Other Tales* (Sackville: Sybertooth Inc, 2008), 98.
[116] Ibid.,98.

Then the earl began in his pride to allow too

much land to the hateful people.

We draw back. They cross unhindered, shrugging at

cold water, minds ahead, stomachs tight as ours.

Only God knows who will be able to control

the battlefield.[117]

The way in which Johansen has translated these two lines supplements her own interpretation and contribute to the sentiment that Byrhtnoth's mistake is his pride and that God is also important to the narrative. Through the first translated line, Johansen, once again, stresses Byrhtnoth's mistake being due to his pride.

Johansen paints Byrhtnoth's prideful desire for a glorious battle in an even more negative light by contrasting it to the religious phrase 'Glory to God'. She does so by having her narrative voice ask the following rhetorical questions after the first reference to God: "More glory to Him if we give up our advantage? Or more glory to Byrhtnoth?"[118] The narrator of the poem poses the rhetorical question of why Byrhtnoth gave up the tactical advantage, which is answered by mentioning his pride. Byrhtnoth's pride is disapproved of in the story through religion. The glory is meant for God alone, not the earl. Byrhtnoth's *ofermod* was what led him to make the decision of granting passage to the Vikings. Johansen adds the religious phrase "Glory to God" to her adaptation, which expands the formerly established link to religion in her own poem. This addition of glory to God compared to Byrhtnoth adds another characteristic to Byrhtnoth, that being selfishness. Moreover, this addition is an innovation of Johansen that enhances her own adaptation of the Old English

[117] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 98.
[118] Ibid., 99.

poem as the original did not mention such a comparison between Byrhtnoth and God. All in all, Byrhtnoth is portrayed in "Anno Domini" to have sinned by allowing his pride and desire for glory to cloud his judgement.

Suicidal loyalty and glory

"Anno Domini" engages with the loyalty of the oath keepers by portraying the suicidal loyalty as a positive trait that is intertwined with earning glory. Suicidal loyalty is portrayed as an idealised notion and has become an expectation of the retainers: "Let the dead guard the dead, loyal thegns lie with their lord, shielding him."[119] The loyal followers are expected to remain next to their lord to continue their servitude to him by shielding the lord's body. However, protecting the body of their lord is not the most important part of the retainers' loyalty. Indeed, the most significant aspect of the suicidal loyalty is the earning of glory: "To fall by your lord, there's a way to undying memory, eternal name."[120] Johansen specifically emphasises the contrast between dying and undying. In death, there is eternal life for the loyal retainers as they do not truly perish forever. The retainers earn their glory through dying alongside their lord, which leads to eternal remembrance. This idea already parallels Byrhtnoth's own desire for glory, which is compared to the sin of pride. The only discernible difference between the two manners of earning glory is that Byrhtnoth's desire for glory is his own choice in battle, whereas the retainers only are able to earn glory by making a glorious choice. The desire for glory is thus connected to the ideal of extreme loyalty for the soldiers, valuing loyal death in glory above surviving.

Johansen juxtaposes the suicidal loyalty with the flight of oath-breaking retainers by stating it is better to die even without being remembered than to be remembered for fleeing: "Still, it is better thus, to fall and be forgot in falling. Better not to be remembered fleeing,

[119] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 101.
[120] Ibid., 101.

reviled across the ages."[121] Instead of the honour connected to the suicidal loyalty, shame and revulsion are connected to deserting, which is in-line with the Germanic norm as observed in the original poem. Johansen describes the flight of Godric and his brothers as shameful: "Godric, Godwine and Godwig. They fled, to their father's shame, their mother's dishonour, Godric riding the earl's horse. Some followed, seeing the earl retreat, thinking the day was done, not knowing he lay in the mud and the horse ran masterless under an oath-breaking thief."[122] Godric's thievery not only broke his promise to his lord, but he also deceived other soldiers in following suit. In other words, the brothers have made errors that qualify them to be exemplified as shameful men. This image complies with the heroic code the Anglo-Saxons Richard Abels discusses two law codes about deserters losing their possessions and loyal thegns being allowed to pass down land and property to their kin in relation to Godric's betrayal in *The Battle of Maldon*:

> Together they offer a "curse and a blessing" respectively upon those who, like Maldon's Godric, shamefully break their vows of loyalty, thereby forfeiting their claim to life and property, and those who, like Byrhtnoth's loyal thegns, die fulfilling their oaths, thereby confirming their status as thegns and their right to hold their lands and pass them on to their children.[123]

Godric and his brothers have denied themselves the only way of earning glory, so instead their names are called out to call eternal shame onto them, which also affects their family, hence Johansen calling out the dishonour to the family of the three brothers.

Johansen reinforces the stark contrast between honourful loyalty and shameful flight by introducing the personal motivations of a group of warriors that is not mentioned in the

[121] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 101.
[122] Ibid., 102.
[123] Richard Abels, "'Cowardice' and Duty in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval Military History*, ed. Clifford J. Rogers, Kelly Devries, and John France (Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 45.

original poem: the foot soldiers. The narrative voice implies that, for this group, the decision to stay and fight is motivated by more than the shameful act of breaking an oath: "And what of us, we who elect to stay, caught by comrades' eyes, by women's shame, by pride or lack of chance?"[124] The soldiers' reason for staying is partially due to the shame they would face from everyone around them. In other words, they feel peer-pressured to continue fighting. Moreover, the foot soldiers are concerned with how their families would view them if they deserted the fight. Shame/dishonour proves to be one of the significant motivators for soldiers to continue their fight.

Loyalty and oath-swearing

After the flight, the remaining soldiers are once again said to be deserving of eternal fame and then give a "noble speech." These speeches are said to "remind us [soldiers] why we fight when hope is gone."[125] These encouraging speeches are made by the same retainers as those in *The Battle of Maldon*. Offa's speech from the original poem is inserted into the story. He condemns Godric and his brothers for their flight. He is followed by Leofsunu in the words of Johansen: "Leofsunu too, brandishing spear, recalls a vow that he would never flee battle. Now he betters it, swears to advance seeking vengeance for the death of his lord. He, too, will have no word of derision carried to his home, he will never wander lordless in dishonour."[126] The oath-swearers are concerned with the shame/dishonour that comes with deserting. When Offa is dead, he is yet praised for keeping his oath: "Offa is dead, the bold maker of speeches, dead and mangled in the dirt. But take heed, all, he kept his vows; he died beside his friend, his lord."[127] Johansen specifically mentions that these noble speeches and vows are praiseworthy characteristics of the retainers. Their speeches are what elevates them above the

[124] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 104.
[125] Ibid., 103.
[126] Ibid., 104.
[127] Ibid., 105.

level of other soldiers, since those were concerned with how they would be perceived if they were to flee, whereas Offa and Leofsunu (among others) focus on fulfilling their oath and function.

Johansen goes out of her way to emphasize the ordinary soldiers and their cause. While they have some concerns on how they would be perceived if they were to flee, they also have a clear idea of why they are fighting: "We have vowed nothing, no mead-hall boasts bind us here. Yet see where we stand and die beside them [retainers such as Offa]. Recall, it is our herds and homes that they defend, beside their own."[128] Indeed, the foot soldiers are not anything special compared to the retainers and their lord and they are aware of this fact. Instead, they commit themselves to the battle because without winning, the foot soldiers would lose their regular lives. The narrator even discusses how much more the foot soldiers are concerned about their family than attaining victory: "What prize in all this when it has been forgotten, was victory ours or no, did our wives sleep safe that night, were the Hours kept undisturbed?"[129] Johansen really hammers home the fact that regular people had to participate in the fight, which is what struck her about *The Homecoming*. This addition differs from the original poem, in which no foot soldiers are mentioned. Johansen emphasises how the regular soldiers suffer and get slaughtered due to the sin committed by their lord, Byrhtnoth's pride.

Gift-giving

"Anno Domini" shows a similar approach to the idea of gift-giving as the original poem. While no gifts are received during the text, a reference is made to Byrhtnoth giving gifts to his retainers: "Byrhtnoth's men, his by right of fellowship, his by bread and mead and gifts of gold, by horses, hawks, and hounds. So a lord wins his men's hearts, and so their blood is

[128] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 105.
[129] Ibid., 106.

owed him."[130] Ultimately, the gifts contribute to the divide between the retainers and the regular soldiers. It stresses the fact that the soldiers themselves had gained nothing from Byrhtnoth before he made the decision that led to their defeat. The gifts play no significant part towards the soldiers and are therefore important to the narrative. They exist as the antithesis of what binds them into the battle. Instead of Byrhtnoth as the lord enforcing his rule and claim on the retainers to lead them into the fight, the soldiers do not fight for him. They focus on their own motivations to bolster themselves in the battle.

Byrhtwold's maxim

On the last page of "Anno Domini", which incidentally is the last page of *The Storyteller*, Byrhtwold's saying is brought up as a motivator for the soldiers. The text states that it is "to set against the terror and the horror and the glory of the day."[131] Byrhtwold's speech is then cited as the translation of the Old English poem: "Thought must be the sterner, hearts the keener, courage the greater, as our strength lessens."[132] The 'inclusive we' states that that thought is to help them fight against the negative image they have formed of the fight due to their own diminishing numbers. Yet, the speech of Byrhtwold does nothing to change the tides. The soldiers are also aware of that fact, as stated in the text: "Victory denied, defeat forgotten. Who will remember or care, once the women have wept and the monks have recorded? How many unnamed, with the few now recalled? In the dust, it does not matter."[133] Evidently, the encouragement of Byrhtwold's speech does not change the minds of the soldiers. They are sure of their own defeat; the speech only helps them regain a clear image of their goals: protecting their homes. This sentiment is one that would resonate with the

[130] Johansen, "Anno Domini Nine Hundred and Ninety-One," 102.
[131] Ibid., 106.
[132] Ibid., 106.
[133] Ibid., 106.

intended audience since they, as regular people, would connect to the idea of not earning glory. Thus, Johansen's use of Byrhtwold's maxim invokes the opposite of heroic desire.

Conclusion

In sum, "Anno Domini" is a reproduction of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* with an added category not considered in the original poem: the foot soldiers. Byrhtnoth's pride is portrayed as a sin, which not only introduces a religious aspect to the story, but also provides commentary on the severity of Byrhtnoth's error. The desire for glory is portrayed as a negative trait, since Byrhtnoth endangers others with his prideful decision and leads to his own death. This choice leads to the retainers also giving their lives in the battle. Their suicidal loyalty is not only praised, but it is actually expected that retainers fight and die in battle alongside their lord. This expectation also has to do with the pride of the retainers themselves and their own desire for glory. Consequently, the flight of Godric and his brothers is described by Johansen as a big betrayal, bringing shame to their family. Their flight and the retainers' dedication to their lord are contrasted with the reasons why the regular soldiers are fighting. They decided to stay because they did not want to be shamed for fleeing and they wanted to defend their homes. Their motivation versus the motivation of the retainers is one of the big differences between the two groups. Additionally, the fact that retainers owe their loyalty due to the gifts from Byrhtnoth constitutes as another difference since the regular soldiers do not have any reasons to follow Byrhtnoth other than defending their own environment. Byrhtwold's speech reinforces this idea of the dedication towards their homes and families. Overall, Johansen put significant effort into portraying the plight of the regular soldiers and their role in *The Battle of Maldon*, not only as a way to bring a new perspective of the battle, but also to connect to the audience to explore the emotional value.

CHAPTER 5 – *AT MALDON*

The author J.O. Morgan is a Scottish poet who reimagined *The Battle of Maldon* into a Present-Day English narrative poem recounting the fight – *At Maldon*. The poem was first published in 2013 and it describes the original fight in 991, but the author has incorporated anachronisms that are recognisable to the contemporary audience. An example of the anachronisms is the portrayal of the invading Viking force as businessmen, relating their desire for *Danegeld* to the idea of door-to-door salesmen as they go around pirating. Moreover, the anachronisms often lead to a more emotional or sympathetic portrayal of the English characters, such as Byrhtnoth, who is portrayed as an old relative watching over younger children play-fighting. Stephanie Russo states on anachronisms in historical fiction: "Anachronistic historical fictions ask us to accept that nothing about the past can be known with any certainty, and so the past becomes a creative space in which to exercise the imagination and experiment with different ways of understanding the past."[134] Overall, *At Maldon* follows the battle itself as mentioned in the original poem, which shows that Morgan used the historical background of the source text and transformed it with anachronisms (among other things) to understand and convey the history through a different lens. In this chapter, I will distinguish the four heroic themes as established in Chapter 1 in *At Maldon*. First, I will go over the heroic ideal of desire for glory of Byrhtnoth. Secondly, I am going to discuss the flight of Godric and other soldiers. Thirdly, I will investigate how the retainers are loyal through oath-swearing and gift-giving. Lastly, I am discussing Byrhtwold's maxim and its portrayal in *At Maldon*.

[134] Stephanie Russo, *The Anachronistic Turn: Historical Fiction, Drama, Film and Television* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 37.

The desire for glory

In the poem, Byrhtnoth is not mentioned to desire glory when he confronts the Vikings. Instead, Morgan puts emphasis on the age of Byrhtnoth. He is described to have "cobweb hair"[135] and is simply called "old Byrhtnoth."[136] Nevertheless, the earl is eager for the fight. As retainers around him start to fall, Byrhtnoth "shakes off his old-man-mantle, / rediscovering the warrior beneath."[137] Even though Byrhtnoth rediscovers his passion for the fight, he is still an old man. Byrhtnoth is portrayed as a grandfather watching over the two retainers next to him, Aelfnoth and Wulfmaer, who skip around playing with wooden swords. They all die next to each other. By portraying the earl not only as an old man, but as a grandfather type figure who watches over his retainers like grandchildren, Morgan shows Byrhtnoth to be a caring lord. This interpretation is strengthened by the lack of mention of Byrhtnoth's pride while the Vikings are negotiating their *Danegeld*. The only hint at the ideal of desire for glory is the earl rediscovering his fighting spirit.

Although Byrhtnoth himself is not described as being prideful, there is a mention of his pride in the poem. An old man, who can be understood to be a retainer of Byrhtnoth, states: "'Don't worry if they say you were too proud, / or that your best was not near good enough."[138] Morgan does acknowledge that people have said that Byrhtnoth was too proud in his decision. Decidedly, the author wanted to bring forward a different interpretation of the earl. While the pride and desire for glory are removed from the focus of the reader, Byrhtnoth is presented with other traits, which are more positively interpreted. Byrhtnoth is old and caring and even his pride is not part of his character. Therefore, Morgan has removed the

[135] J.O. Morgan, *At Maldon* (London: CB editions, 2013), 15.
[136] Ibid., 19.
[137] Ibid., 20.
[138] Ibid., 57.

faults from Byrhtnoth's personality and does not blame Byrhtnoth for the defeat of the English.

The flight of Godric and other soldiers

Immediately after Byrhtnoth's death, *At Maldon* narrates Godric abandoning the fight and is not condemned for his flight. He is described to have been waiting for the time to leave:

> Just as a designated driver
>
> hangs about outside the theatre,
>
> checks his watch from time
>
> to time, so Godric, groom
>
> to Byrhtnoth's great white horse,
>
> lingers at the battle's back end.[139]

In this verse, Godric is not a fighting retainer like in the original, but he tends to Byrhtnoth's horse. Godric's role is reduced from a fighter who flees to someone who watches over Byrhtnoth's horse. He had not participated in the fight at all, as he is described as having to wait for his lord to return – "a designated driver". He gives the reason for his flight: "'No use in seeing it through to the end / now the principal player is gone.'"[140] Godric sees no point in the fight because Byrhtnoth is dead. If his job is merely the caregiver of the horse for Byrhtnoth, and Byrhtnoth has been killed, Godric's job is finished. His desertion is not portrayed as a betrayal, which means the severity of his choice is reduced in *At Maldon*. Godric returns the horse to the stables at the castle and returns home:

[139] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 30.
[140] Ibid., 30.

And in his lodgings Godric sits.

And in his lodgings Godric sleeps.

And Godric sweats his life into his job.

And Godric marries, loves, tries fatherhood.[141]

His abandonment of the battle of Maldon has positive results and Godric gets to live a long life as he is described to have grandchildren: "And his grandchildren crowd him, / try to dig out his account of the battle."[142] In the end, Godric dies of old age. Morgan has removed the negative consequences that come with deserting the fight. Instead, Godric gets to live out the rest of his life and achieve happiness. Nevertheless, the author has retained the moment in which Offa sees and comments on Godric's flight: "'And should I ever meet the man that baulks … / And should he swear he never had a choice…"[143] Offa is angry that he not only saw Godric ride off, but that a considerable number of soldiers followed him. Yet, he does not mention Godric tricking the soldiers as in the original poem. Even though Offa criticizes Godric, he is the one who experiences the happiest outcome of all of the characters in the poem. Because the poem is an adaptation for a modern audience, who have different heroic ideals than the Middle Ages, they would consider more than only the heroic actions of characters in battle. Moreover, modern generations have frequently protested against war and military actions. Therefore, they are more likely to sympathise with Godric and his dissatisfaction with the battle and support his flight.

[141] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 31-32.
[142] Ibid., 32.
[143] Ibid., 38.

At the end of the poem, Morgan narrates how the consequences of Godric's flight affect the other Godric, who had chosen to continue fighting. He is maltreated by other warriors who mistake him for the Godric who fled:

'Is that not the man who played on his fiddle

and lured half our army away?'

…

'Is that not the man who slit the earl's throat

then rode his prized white horse to market

and sold it for dogs' meat and glue?'

…

'Is that not the man …'

As this Godric's cheeks are wetted,

first with tears, then with blood.

'… who smuggled coastal maps and tidal charts …'

As this Godric is knocked down

by a blow to the head

intended for somebody else.

'… and cut new keys to give our town up to the Danes?'[144]

[144] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 59-60.

The Godric who fled has left a severe impression on the others. So much so, that the other Godric gets mistaken for the one who fled and is thus assumed to have betrayed Byrhtnoth. A number of rumours have already spread about him, which show how severe Godric's betrayal and flight are viewed in the setting of *At Maldon*. Morgan left the consequences of Godric's betrayal for the end of the poem and shows how badly Godric's flight was actually received by the others. Overall, the Godric who fled did not face the consequences of his deeds, which the Godric who fought was subjected to instead.

When Godric takes off, other soldiers follow him. As they see Godric get ready to leave, the soldiers prepare to follow: "an impromptu crowd / breaks off from the battle."[145] They have the same reason as Godric for abandoning the fight: Byrhtnoth's death. The flight of these warriors has little to do with their cowardice, which is left out of the poem, and instead it is due to their lack of commitment to the cause. With the earl gone, the soldiers without personal ties to Byrhtnoth do not feel compelled to continue the fight:

> And in trotting form the scene he [Godric] does not notice
>
> his own wedge-shaped wake of deserters,
>
> who take this stately exit as a cue,
>
> sneaking back in silence to the town,
>
> and, who, without a parting word, peel off
>
> from the group, each man to his home,
>
> all front doors bolted, curtains drawn.[146]

[145] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 30.
[146] Ibid., 31.

The soldiers all return to their houses without any consequences. Although the poem does not narrate the rest of their lives like with Godric, there are also no negative consequences mentioned for those who deserted the fight. The retainers themselves, however, talk down upon the soldiers' flight. Aelfwine states: "I'll not flee the field, / will not seek solace in my comfy home."[147] Thus, the Germanic ideal is upheld by the retainers, as they condemn the cowardly flight and show what they think to be true heroism by dedicating themselves to the battle. All in all, the soldiers who flee are only criticised by the retainers who end up dying. Therefore, the poem itself holds no negative sentiments towards the flight of soldiers, only specific characters in the story.

Suicidal loyalty and oath-swearing

Morgan describes the retainers Offa, Leofsunu and Aelfwine as "local heroes in the making."[148] They drink together before entering the battle and talk about their commitment to their lord and the fight. Aelfwine leaves as the first one. While he fights, he talks about how he will not flee to his house like the other soldiers.[149] Aelfwine's loyalty manifests in his distaste for the soldiers who fled. After him, Offa goes into battle and is described to fight and recites his promise to Byrhtnoth:

> 'Our promise was the homecoming parade.
>
> How with the top down, side by side, we'd wave.
>
> …
>
> 'Our promise was that every wound inflicted
>
> on your body would be dealt as well to mine.

[147] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 36.
[148] Ibid., 35.
[149] Ibid., 35.

How we would lie down, side by side, and wait,

for the skies to fade to black,

for our souls to drain and dissipate,

mingled in the soils of our land.'

…

'Our promise was to never be apart.

From the moment our mothers laid us side by side

we understood

that one should not have to endure

without the other,

that hale and heartiness means nothing

if at last you come home empty-handed.'[150]

While he gets struck down, Offa reminisces about his promise to Byrhtnoth, who from this promise appears to be a close childhood friend. Offa repeats his promise three times, each time rephrasing and detailing more of the promise. It echoes the speech Offa holds in the original Old English poem, specifically the sentiment of returning together or dying alongside each other. Overall, Morgan emphasises this oath by breaking it up into three parts, each one beginning with the words "our promise was." Moreover, the loyalty of Offa is shown through his commitment to the promise he had made.

[150] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 50-1.

After Offa leaves for the battle, there is Leofsunu. He also displays suicidal loyalty through his speech:

‘To die out on the field is better

than to limp back lordless

with my tail between my toes.’

…

And no one could brand me as idle

if counted as one of the dead.’[151]

Leofsunu, like Aelfwine, condemns the flight of the soldiers and displays the opposite behaviour by committing to the battle till his death. The three retainers mentioned above were described as heroes in the making, which corresponds to the original Old English poem as the retainers were respected soldiers. Above all, these three retainers value their loyalty to Byrhtnoth utmost, which is why they use the flight of the soldiers as motivation for themselves.

Important to note is the way the retainers are described compared to the soldiers that fled. Offa, Aelfwine and Leofsunu were said to be “local heroes in the making.”[152] This phrase can be interpreted as the retainers having yet to earn their glory, or it is foreshadowing that they will not become full-fledged heroes since they die in the fight. The three retainers, Aelfwine, Offa, Leofsunu, judge Godric and the other soldiers for fleeing. Yet, this Godric is the only character who can say: “yet many men / owe their long lives to me.”[153] For a modern audience, saving other people’s lives is the most recognisable heroic act, as it is reminiscent of

[151] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 39.
[152] Ibid., 35.
[153] Ibid., 32.

contemporary hero movies from entertainment companies such as Marvel or DC. The three retainers never mention saving someone's life, nor do they give up their lives to save another person. It would then seem as if Godric were a hero for abandoning the fight, which leads others to follow him. Yet, Godric's flight led to rumours being spread about him, which affected the other Godric who did fight till his death. Therefore, the idea of a hero is more complicated in *At Maldon*. J.O. Morgan shows different sides to heroic behaviour all the while engaging with the same ideas about heroic retainers as the original Old English poem.

Gift-giving

At Maldon does not discuss gift-giving as a way to establish and uphold social relationships between a lord and a retainer, nor does it engage with the idea of the retainers owing Byrhtnoth loyalty because of the gifts they would have received in the past. There are only two references to gifts. The first one is the English and the Vikings shooting at one another: "while, every-so-often, carefully considered gifts / are exchanged across the divide."[154] Both sides consider a tactical approach to exchanging blows before the Vikings cross the waterway. Morgan's use of the words of gifts here gives the impression of equality, as both parties are able to keep up with each other. The other reference to gift-giving is when Byrhtnoth is fighting and he thinks of rewarding Eadweard after the fight: "'Thank God for level-headed Eadweard; / when this is done he shall be dressed / with rows of shiny buttons, coloured string.'"[155] While it is unknown whether the two had a close relationship before the fight, Byrhtnoth's desire to reward Eadweard with new clothing and let him spend time with his daughter. The gifts are not something to establish a relationship of loyalty and service, but they are a reward. Therefore, the ideal of gift-giving is not a significant part of *At Maldon*.

[154] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 11.
[155] Ibid., 21.

Byrhtwold's maxim

In the poem, there is no mention of Byrhtwold or his speech. Instead, there is focus on other characters, such as an old man and the Godric who does not flee. In the place of the heroic maxim, Morgan describes an old unnamed warrior:

> an old master picks through the mess,
>
> draped in a graduate gown, his sword
>
> a bright ruler, ready and eager to punish the upstarts;
>
> dismissing their childish attacks with a swish of the wrist.[156]

He is described as an old master, which complies with the image of Byrhtwold. The old man speaks about Byrhtnoth, who is dead at this point:

> 'Don't worry if they say you were too proud,
>
> or that your best was not near good enough;
>
> we'll get our go at winning next time round,
>
> and let no man think we were ever soft.'[157]

The man sympathizes with Byrhtnoth and clearly has a personal relationship with him. They would fight together again, which means that the old man is one of the retainers of Byrhtnoth, loyal till the end. The old man gets killed after this statement, exhausted from the fight he gets stabbed by spears. The ideal of loyalty is part of this man's identity, as he has continued his dedication to Byrhtnoth and his cause. The old man even mentions the pride of Byrhtnoth and does not condemn it, instead he states he would fight with his lord next time as well.

[156] Morgan, *At Maldon*, 56.
[157] Ibid., 57.

Morgan's choice to vaguely mention a figure resembling Byrhtwold removes the authority that comes with Byrhtwold's maxim. Instead of calling upon tradition to encourage the fight, the old man accepts the situation and expresses the desire for victory the next time.

Conclusion

To conclude, *At Maldon* puts emphasis on the different perspectives from the retainers of the original poem. The flight of Godric is explored through different viewpoints, such as a more heroic one when Godric says his flight saved others who went with him and the tragic end of the other Godric who got blamed. J.O. Morgan also uses anachronisms to connect these different interpretations to more personal feelings. The retainers comment on Godric's flight – Aelfwine, Offa and Leofsunu all comment on the soldiers' abandonment of the fight and vow for themselves to do better. Moreover, Offa upholds the same oath as in the original Old English poem, which means he would die with Byrhtnoth on the battlefield. Byrhtnoth himself is not portrayed to be a prideful man. The only mention of Byrhtnoth being proud is in the speech of an old master, who presumably is meant to represent Byrhtwold. Instead, emphasis is put on his old age. No references to gift-giving are made as a way for Byrhtnoth to bind retainers to himself. The ideal of gift-giving is instead developed more as a reward from a lord, without a pre-established exchange mentioned in the poem. Nevertheless, Byrhtnoth was close to some of his retainers. Examples are Offa, who swore an oath to die alongside his lord, and Byrhtwold. Portrayed as an old man, Byrhtwold does not hold his heroic speech like in the original poem. Rather, he is thinking of Byrhtnoth, reassuring him that they would win their next fight together. The author shifted the heroic nature of the speech to a more sentimental and reflective one, which conveys a more genuine connection to modern readers.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I investigated the heroic values portrayed in *The Battle of Maldon* and in four modern adaptations of the Old English poem to answer the research question: "How do modern adaptations of The Battle of Maldon interpret and translate the heroic values of the original poem?" The four aspects of heroism I identified in *The Battle of Maldon* to investigate within the adaptations are the desire for glory (and the excessive desire for glory: *ofermod*), oath-swearing and gift-giving as forms of loyalty, the flight of soldiers, and Byrhtwold's heroic speech. The modern adaptations were each investigated for their incorporation of these four themes. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son* engages with the heroic values from two different perspectives. Totta and Tída discuss their positive and negative perceptions of the desire for glory, the condemning of the flight of the soldiers and the loyalty of the retainers. The two differing opinions reflect the discussion of scholars surrounding *The Battle of Maldon*. Pauline Clarke's *Torolv the Fatherless* portrays a young boy engaging with the different heroic values, such as his own desire for glory and receiving gifts from lords. Yet, the other heroic values are still shown through the battle itself, such as the flight of Godric and the oath-swearing extending to suicidal loyalty among the retainers. K.V. Johansen's chapter "Anno Domini" in *The Storyteller* adds a fourth category to the three known groups in *The Battle of Maldon* (which are Byrhtnoth, the loyal retainers and Godric who flees), namely the "regular people" – the foot soldiers. This new group narrates the story in "Anno Domini", bringing their own interpretation of loyalty and pride. Lastly, J.O. Morgan's *At Maldon* uses anachronisms to add recognisable characteristics to the existing characters in the original poem. The poem focuses for the majority on the personal interpretations of the four heroic values.

There are some noticeable similarities among the four adaptations. First and foremost, the two texts from the 20th century – *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* and *Torolv the Fatherless* – both assign within their own story the role of the poet of *The Battle of Maldon* to one of their characters. Tolkien implies that his character Totta goes on to compose the Old English poem, and Clarke narrates how the character Edgwine starts to come up with lines for the Old English poem. Thus, both authors incorporated the Anglo-Saxon poet, known as the scop, into their fiction.[158] Secondly, all adaptations incorporate new elements into their retellings: two perspectives on the event, the life story of a boy, a new group to offer insight into the event, and anachronisms to add a different perspective for the audience. All adaptations consider the flight of soldiers and engage with Godric as a traitor. The flight can thus be seen as an integral part of the original poem, carrying significant importance to the sentiment of the negative outcome of the battle. Additionally, the four works also portray some form of loyalty, at minimum through oath-swearing from the retainers such as Offa. Once again, loyalty (contrasted by the flight of Godric – his disloyalty) is thus of utmost significance to the story of *The Battle of Maldon*. The incorporation of these two values means that each work engages with the morality behind the heroic values since the two contrast each other. The image of heroism is therefore strongly connected to loyalty in the adaptations.

The four adaptations all denote a different approach to adaptation. Each has extrapolated the heroic themes and the authors shaped them differently to fit into the different stories. The two adaptations of the 21st century have the form of a narrative poem, while the two earlier adaptations have different forms: a play and a prose text. Apart from the approach

[158] The incorporation of the Anglo-Saxon scop is a motif also used in other Old English adaptations. It also occurs in adaptations of *Beowulf*, as discussed by Giuliano Marmora in "Reshaping the Anglo-Saxon Scop," *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Älteren Germanistik*, 83:3 (2024), 291–319. https://doi.org/10.1163/18756719-12340302.

to the form, the authors also made distinct choices when incorporating the heroic values. Both Tolkien and Morgan spent little time on gift-giving, while Johansen uses the absence of gift-giving as a way to identify the fourth group she introduces into the narrative. Only Clarke has her protagonist engage with gift-giving and noticing this ideal around him. Another heroic value that is incorporated to differing degrees is the excessive desire for glory of Byrhtnoth. Tolkien elaborates on Byrhtnoth's pride by relating it to the lord's desire to be sung about by minstrels. Clarke has left out the aspect of pride, instead portraying Byrhtnoth as an advocate for a fair fight. Next, Johansen takes the idea of ofermod and connects it to the religious pride of Lucifer and sin. Morgan only refers to the pride after Byrhtnoth's death, not during his decision of letting the Vikings pass the waterway. Overall, these different authors took these approaches to make the story palatable towards their intended audience.

Although I investigated the adaptations for the heroic values from *The Battle of Maldon*, further research can be conducted into how adaptations of the Old English poem interact with the source text. First and foremost, other adaptations of the poem can also be considered for their incorporation of the heroic values. My research considered four adaptations, which may not be fully representative of all adaptations of *The Battle of Maldon*. Additionally, other features of the source text may be considered for the way in which they get adapted into modern texts. Research can focus specifically on the portrayal of heroes and how this idea has evolved over time. While *The Battle of Maldon* is not often considered for adaptations, other Old English works may have been used for modern adaptations. Investigations into how the heroic themes are incorporated into modern adaptations of other works shed light on the modern perception of not only the source text, but also heroism in the eye of a contemporary audience.

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