BRIDGING THE GAP: FINDING A VALKYRIE IN A RIDDLE

Jennifer Culver, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Robert Upchurch, Major Professor
Nicole Smith, Committee Member
Jacqueline Vanhoutte, Committee Member
David Holdeman, Chair of the Department of English
Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

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While many riddles exist in the Anglo-Saxon *Exeter Book* containing female characters, both as actual human females and personified objects and aspects of nature, few scholars have discussed how the anthropomorphized "females" of the riddles challenge and broaden more conventional portrayals of what it meant to be "female" in Anglo-Saxon literature. True understanding of these riddles, however, comes only with this broader view of female, a view including a mixture of ferocity and nobility of purpose and character very reminiscent of the valkyrie (OE *wælcyrige*), a figure mentioned only slightly in Anglo-Saxon literature, but one who deserves more prominence, particularly when evaluating the riddles of the *Exeter Book* and two poems textually close to the riddles, *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the only two poems with a female voice in the entire Old English corpus.

Riddles represent culture from a unique angle. Because of their heavy dependence upon metaphor as a vehicle or disguise for the true subject of the riddle, the poet must employ a metaphor with similar characteristics to the true riddle subject, or the tenor of the riddle. As the riddle progresses, similarities between the vehicle and the tenor are listed for the reader. Within these similarities lie the common ground between the two objects, but the riddle changes course at some point and presents a characteristic the vehicle and tenor do not have in common, which creates a gap. This gap of similarities must be wide enough for the true solution to appear, but not so wide so that the reader cannot hope to solve the mental puzzle. Because many of the riddles of the *Exeter Book* involve women and portrayal of objects as "female," it is important to analyze the use of "female" as a vehicle to see what similarities arise.

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INTRODUCTION

Few scholars have looked at considerations of "female" in the riddles, tending to focus instead on human female figures, such as the female Welsh slave or the noble lady, but ignoring the riddler's choice of personifying certain inanimate or natural elements as female, and how that contributes to an understanding of gender characteristics and expectations.[1] Behind these "female" elements lies a figure who is powerful in her own right, protective, fierce, and has great capacity to love. The idea is very reminiscent of the valkyrie (OE *wælcyrige)*, a figure mentioned

[1] Ruth Wehlaw *"The Riddle of Creation": Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 99-101. Wehlaw examines the sexual innuendo in riddles and how that reflects male/female relationships by evaluating the women's role within riddles. Joyce Hill "'þ{t wæs Geomuruldes!': A Female Stereotype Reconsidered" in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey (eds.) *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 235-248. Hill believes that the household, as the heart of society, contained much symbolism for woman in Anglo-Saxon England, and while she argues that there are a lack of sources to help reexamine the stereotypes about women, she does not look into areas such as the riddles. Christine Fell's *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) agrees that some of the stereotypes about women in this time period are superficial, but does not look to the riddles that portray "female" in a different light in her work. She mentions the riddle about making dough as a glimpse into the daily life of the more typical Anglo-Saxon woman, p. 50. She also examines the cuckoo riddle as reinforcement for the picture of motherhood during Anglo-Saxon England, advancing the notion that fosterhood, the sending of a child to the wife's family or another family to raise in order to further cement ties of peace and allegiance, may have been more popular than once thought, p. 81. Jane Chance's *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986) discusses the Riddle 75 ("I saw a woman …") and claims the solitary figure is an *ides*, or noble woman who contains much wisdom. She also examines the riddle-like nature of *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, even noting the use of the word *giedd,* which can translate as riddle, but does not look further into the riddles to explore ideas about "female." Edith Whitehurst Williams' "What's so New about the Sexual Revolution? Some Comments on Anglo-Saxon Attitudes toward Sexuality in Women Based on Four *Exeter Book* Riddles" in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey (eds.) *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 137-145, like Wehlaw's book, examines the sexual innuendo in the riddle and focuses her assessment of women's roles in the riddles to the female human actors within the texts. Whitehurst Williams' other article, "Annals of the Poor: Folk Life in the Old English Riddles" *Medieval Perspectives* 3 (1988): 67-82 outlines how the nature of the riddle object parallels the social degree of those associated with it, so that a churn would be used by a poorer woman and a cup born by a lady. She does not move into a discussion, however, of images that are portrayed as female that do not fit social degree as neatly. Marie Nelson in "The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles" *Speculum* 49 (1974): 421-440 also uses the "churn" riddle (like Fell) to illustrate the use of women in riddles as vehicles for objects that make sense to a woman's role. While Nelson does look to some of the uses of riddles developing a female perspective, such as the "death" riddle (39), she does not extend her work to discuss what this means to the concept of "female." Elena Afros in "Linguistic Ambiguities in some Exeter Book Riddles" *Notes and Queries* 52 (2005): 431-437 discusses lack of attention to gender in the riddles and specifically gender switching, but does not provide consideration regarding gender roles for these anomalies, only that it is unique to the Anglo-Saxon riddle and not seen in Latin riddles of the time or before.

only slightly in Old English literature.[2] Using the Riddles of the *Exeter Book*[3], particularly 39, 80, 31, 66, and 5[4], I will argue that the valkyrie image is not only present in the mindset of the culture and the author. Bringing awareness of the valkyrie figure to the discussion of what is considered "female," not only provides a solution to a much-contested riddle (Riddle 72), but also to two poems textually close to the Riddles in the *Exeter Book*, *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the only two poems with first person female speakers in the Old English corpus, are given new depth. *Wulf and Eadwacer*, one of the more enigmatic poems, receives a new reading with a valkyrie speaker, an interpretation which clears up some complications within the poem and presents a speaker who is being forced to confine herself to a more standard role for women in this time period, that of mother. Within *The Wife's Lament*, an understanding of the valkyrie qualities and roles aids when the female speaker consistently frames her speech in the role of retainer and lord, much like a male thane would do. Because a valkyrie serves in a retainer role to the god Woden, a new perspective of woman as retainer and not wife arises, and allows for questions to be raised about how a woman and/or wife, much like a thane, believed she had similar expectations from her lord, such as that of safety and sustenance.

First, I will discuss the *Exeter Book* and show why the book and its riddles are relevant to the discourse of how "female" was reflected in the literature from particularly the later Anglo-Saxon period, including the background of Exeter and history of the manuscript. An introduction to the Exeter riddles follows, detailing what riddles have to offer to the discourse of

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[2] Fell and Helen Damico in "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature" in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey (eds.) *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 176-192 both detail valkyrie evidence in Anglo-Saxon literature.

[3] The *Exeter Book* is classified as Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS.3501.

[4] Craig Williamson's *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) is the main text of reference, and the riddle numbers come from Williamson's sequencing, which is altered from Krapp and Dobbie's edition in the *Anglo Saxon Poetic Record* slightly because Williamson argues that some of the riddles should actually be combined.

understanding culture through their presentations of both mundane and significant objects with their use of metaphor to show how seemingly unrelated items are actually quite similar. Then I will overview the conventional and more prudent portrayals of female and what evidence we have for the knowledge of valkyrie in the Old English literature and culture, including the women figures in the riddles and other texts of the *Exeter Book*. Following this analysis of more expected female roles, I will provide a close reading of the riddles mentioned above, specifically discussing how the riddles enhance the idea of female by naming objects as female yet listing some qualities about this "female" which do not follow the standard roles of women noted in the discussion above. Although the subjects of the riddles are not female, they are clearly personified as such within the riddle, illustrating with the terminology of riddle, specifically the vehicle (main metaphor used throughout the riddle), tenor (possible solution), and gap (areas of difference between the vehicle and tenor), to study how the idea of "female" must be expanded for these riddles to work, because without a broader definition of "female," the gap between the tenor and vehicle is too wide, making an attempt at solution almost impossible. With this understanding in mind, I will propose a new solution to Riddle 72 with a rereading of the poem immediately preceding the riddle collection and originally thought to be one of the riddles, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and a poem inserted between the riddles, *The Wife's Lament*.

THE *EXETER BOOK* AND THE RELEVANCE OF RIDDLES

While the authorship of the *Exeter Book* is unknown, and the dates of the manuscript cannot seem to be narrowed down any more narrowly than 970-990, the *Exeter Book* reflects much about the Anglo-Saxon culture of its time. The manuscript was donated by Bishop Leofric, who died in 1072, to Exeter cathedral.[5] The manuscript has been damaged in several places, including in sections where the riddles are contained.

As the home to the second largest collection of books in its time, second only to Canterbury, Exeter cathedral's expansive library stood in stark contrast to its poor surroundings of the village of Exeter during the creation of the manuscript.[6] In earlier times, Exeter appeared to be in rapid development, with the establishment of a mint in the 890's and its own monastery founded in 932 by Æthelstan,[7] who listed Exeter cathedral as home to about a third of his substantial list of relics, making Exeter an important location.[8] Another indicator of the importance of Exeter is that King Edgar likely had Sidemann tutor King Edward there after Sidemann became abbot after the monks came to Exeter with the Benedictine reforms in 968. Exeter was not to remain a flourishing city, however. In August of 1003, King Swegn burned churches and libraries in Exeter area as an act of retaliation for Æthelred murdering his sister, and this may explain some of the damage done to the *Exeter Book*.[9]

While the *Exeter Book* was written around the time of the Benedictine reform, it appears to be more of a syncretic expression of the period before, during, and after the reform movement

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[5] Ibid., 3.

[6] Patrick W. Conner's *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth Century Cultural History* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1993), p. 20 covers a detailed textual history of the *Exeter Book*.

[7] Ibid., 23. At the time of the establishment of the mint, Asser, author of the Alfred biography, was in charge of Exeter. Asser, like Leofric, also donated books to the cathedral.

[8] Ibid., 25.

[9] Ibid., 21. Conner believes that the town of Exeter had to have been perceived as a town of promise for Swegn to use the resources to burn it down.

in literature, truly living up to what Leofric described as "one large English book in which everything is wrought in verse."[10] Some of the poems may be been composed and/or collected before the compilation of the manuscript, but appears by the hand that only one scribe composed what we have of the *Exeter Book*. While the *Exeter Book* is only one manuscript, it does have three distinct divisions. Patrick Connor cites reasons for these divisions not only because of differing content, but also because of evidence such as paper quality.[11] Connor believes that the final gathering of the book, or final "booklet" of the book was actually likely to have been written second because of the contents, which include the riddles.

This section of the *Exeter Book* appears to reflect a community in transition and in anxiety. Because of that, there is an interesting selection of poems containing both vernacular settings and subjects and the more "monastic" post-reform poems centered more on penitence and salvation.[12] The imagery in the poems show a blend of secular values and social elements with the monastic. Some of the issues that blend both the secular and monastic within this section are issues of crisis. In a time of raids and uncertainty whether or not raids would continue, this selection of poems encourage the reader to move towards self reflection, as the speakers of poems such as *Deor* and *The Wife's Lament* yearn for relief and deliverance from

[10] Michael D. C. Drout *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), p. 225. Drout tends to agree with Conner's assessment of the compilation of the manuscript, and believes it reflects a time of capturing tradition while trying to shape how new traditions of the Benedictine Reform should reflect in the culture. He does this by looking specifically at the wisdom poems.

[11] Conner., 148-150. Conner goes into great detail in this section of his book to prove his theory that each gathering of the book may have been its own booklet that was later put together around the eleventh century. While he has evidence, as noted above, for why the three sections seem to be distinct from each other in noticeable, but subtle, ways, he does not have evidence for these three "booklets" being distinct and then later compiled to make a whole.

[12] Ibid., 161. Conner classifies the "Clerical" or more secular (as in non-clerical in message and/or theme) poems in this section as: *Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Husband's Message, The Ruin,* and *The Wife's Lament*. The "Monastic" poems are: *The Descent into Hell, Almsgiving, Pharaoh, The Lord's Prayer I, Homiletic Fragment II, Homiletic Fragment III, Soul and Body II, Judgment Day I, Resignation A,* and *Resignation B*. The riddles, classified as such, are in two sections of the book, with Riddles 1-59 immediately after *Wulf and Eadwacer*, then another version of Riddle 30, Riddle 60 and Riddles 61-95 after poems such as *The Wife's Lament.*

their sources of oppression.[13] Other poems from the Exeter Book but not in the selection of study that also reflect the idea of apprehension and being alone would be *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. With this encouragement to self reflection, the riddles exist, also encouraging the reader to look at the world in a new way through their synthesis of forging together two seemingly unlike objects, causing the reader to see new attributes in both the solution and the object used as a metaphor to both disguise the solution and provide hints for understanding, and celebrate the culture by presenting the reader with riddles from the mundane (with solutions such as a churn) to the heroic (with solutions such as a shield).

[13] Eugene Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 163. Green believes that these poems should be read in concert with homilies from men such as Wulfstan and Ælfric to show multiple perspectives on the raids and how to deal with them.

RIDDLES AND THEIR RELEVANCE IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Within the *Exeter Book*, and even within this section of the book, the riddles are unique. One reason for the uniqueness of the riddles is the fact that the riddles of the *Exeter Book* are the only ones written in the vernacular[14], West Saxon more precisely with some Anglian elements. Latin riddles were written and produced in the Anglo-Saxon culture, particularly from Aldhelm and with some attributed to Bede, showing an interest in the genre. The Exeter riddles, however, seem also to be unique in origin, for the most part.[15] At least half of the riddles contained in the manuscript have little similarity to the Latin treatment of the subject, if the Latin riddles even discuss the subject.[16] Given the significant damage to the last portion of the *Exeter Book*, Stanley Greenfield posits that there may have been more riddles, as the typical collections, from Aldhelm of the seventh century or Tatwine in the eighth, had one hundred riddles in their collections.[17]

The riddler of the *Exeter Book* may have wanted to create more of a mental exercise and challenge to the reader than his Latin-based predecessors, because unlike the Latin riddles, the riddles of the *Exeter Book* have no titles and no solutions, making all solutions presented in translated texts the conjecture of later scholars. In many Latin riddles, the solution would be the

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[14] D.G. Blauner's "The Early Literary Riddle" *Folklore* 78 (1967): 49-58 explores early form of riddles, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon period. Blauner seems to believe there was more of a Latin influence to the Exeter riddles than Greenfield and Williamson do, but also feels that many have a distinct, original feel.

[15] Stanley Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 205. Greenfield cites the only riddles to have a distinct Latin influence as the ones with mostly acknowledged solutions of "Bookworm" (47), "Reed-pen" (60), "Fish and River" (85) "Coat of Mail" (35), and "Creation" (40), using the Krapp and Dobbie numbering. Greenfield also disagrees with Conner and Williamson and believes that the Exeter riddles have multiple authors and range in dates of composition from the eighth to the tenth century. While some of the other riddles may have had a similarity to Latin riddles because of similar subject matter, these are the only few seeming to be copied from or significantly derived from Latin riddles, leaving the rest to be original.

[16] Frederick Tupper, Jr., "Originals and Analogues of the Exeter Book Riddles" *Modern Language Notes* 18 (1903): 97-106. Tupper's exhaustive work with the riddles reveals the following: 39 riddles unconnected to the Latin in theme and treatment, eight fragments with no clue or origin, six with similar Latin subjects but different treatments, eighteen with slight similarities to Latin riddles (but Tupper cites this may be from the fact that the solution is a similar subject and nothing more), and seven based so directly on Latin texts that Tupper believes they must have been translated or reproduced from the Latin text.

[17] Ibid., 205

title to the riddle, which then makes reading the riddle more of an exercise of the mind into analyzing the use of metaphor more than a game to solve.[18] Without the solution, or even a title for guidance, the riddle becomes an exercise in ambiguity, giving the reader, likely other clerics and monks, no direction or encouragement, and offering only the use of metaphor, paradox, and most often personification to prompt the reader to a solution.

With the added ambiguity that a lack of title or solution brings, the main metaphor and comparison in the riddle needed to be considered viable or credible to the reader, lest the reader get frustrated and quit the mental exercise or "literary game." The riddles in the *Exeter Book* provide this, by showing snapshots of Anglo-Saxon social life rarely seen in other, more heroic pieces.[19] Because of the shift in focus, these snapshots, ordinary objects from hall life and nature, take on a new dimension, as the poet brings a sense of mystery and complexity to common objects such as a key,[20] by animating the object and using personification and metaphor to create a comparison between the mundane object and another familiar aspect of Anglo-Saxon life, such as the role of the lady.[21] In the end, as Nigel Barley stated, the riddle dissolves barriers between classes to show us that "the grid we impose on the world is a far from perfect fit," and not the only grid available.[22]

The anthropomorphic characteristics within the riddles of the *Exeter Book* are also not indicative of more classical riddles, but is a powerful device, creating a "disguise" for the subject of the riddle into something human-like that the reader could understand. This use of disguise

[18] Williamson, p. 21.

[19] Ibid., p. 25.

[20] Robert Dinapoli "In the Kingdom of the Blind, The One-Eyed Man is a Seller of Garlic: Depth, Perception, and the Poet's Perspective in the Exeter Book Riddles" *English Studies* 5 (2000): 422-455.

[21] Ibid., p. 447.

[22] Nigel Barley "Structural Aspects of the Anglo Saxon Riddle" *Semiotica* 10 (1974): 143-175. Barley, as the other scholars mentioned above, believes the riddle was a social form of literature that should not be seen as imported from the Latin.

and unexpected treatment of the subject allows the riddler/poet to explore deeper issues, such as cosmology and dynamics of spirituality, without the formal structures expectations of treatment of subjects in the post-Benedictine reform movement, which tended to focus on need for penance.[23] Given the late tenth century origin, the riddles capture some of the residual tension between the pre-Christian, namely native Germanic, and non-native Christian portrayals of nature and other cultural ideas.[24]

The poems in the *Exeter Book*, including the riddles, center around the idea of classifying or categorizing different elements of the world, and this attempt to organize and sort the cultural elements including aspects of hall life and the natural world is what makes the unique riddles of the *Exeter Book* a comfortable fit within the other works of the manuscript.[25] Many scholars debated on the beginning of the riddles in the collection. Some argued the poem now called *Wulf and Eadwacer* was actually the first riddle because the poem shares qualities of the riddles which immediately follow, including a lack of title, ambiguous speaker, the use of the word *giedd*, which means riddle to describe within the text to describe itself, and use of kennings for names. Other poems also seem to contain riddles, such as the identity of *Deor* or *Widsith* and whether or not *The Husband's Message* is a part of *The Wife's Lament*.[26] Whether it is a list of events, such as in *Deor*, or places, such as in *Widsith*, or making an abstract object human-like to show that object in a new light, such as in various riddles, the need to classify reflects the need to understand and create order in a chaotic world. The comparisons of seemingly completely

[23] Dinapoli, p. 423. Dinapoli sees the riddles as an attempt to convey "visionary poetics" versus the "rational truth" expected in Augustinian tradition.

[24] Ibid., p. 423. Dinapoli sees a sense of nostalgia for a past, mostly oral, culture through riddles such as Riddle 17, showing writing connected with acts of violence and a pen as spears. He also cites Riddle 47 (bookworm) as showing the fragility of the written word, versus the strength and endurance of the oral tradition that had been in place before Christianity took root with its Latin focus on the written text.

[25] Ibid., 99.

[26] Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 100.

disparate items make the reader question how well he/she truly understands either.[27] While the boundaries of each category (man, nature, etc.) remain fixed, their borders are playfully nudged by the riddler. For example, the Riddle 14 ("Anchor") is presented below:

	Often I must struggle against waves and against wind fight	Oft ic sceal wiþ wæge winnan ond wiþ winde feohtan,
	At the same time accomplish against that strife, when I depart to visit	somod wið þam sæcce fremman, þonne secan gewite
	Earth by counseled waves; to me, that home is foreign.	eorþan yþum þeaht; me biþ se eþel fremde.
	I am strong in that strife if I become still;	Ic beom strong þæs gewinnes gif ic stille weorþe;
5	If failure comes to me, they are stronger than I,	gif me þæs tosæleð, hi beoð swiþran þonne ic,
	And the slitters soon put me to flight.	ond mec slitende sona flymað:
	[they] desire to bear off that which I must protect.	Willað oþfergan þæt ic friþian sceal.
	I prevent them [from] that if my tail endures	Ic him þæt forstonde, gif min steort þolað
	And may stones strengthen me against [them]	ond mec stiþne wiþ stanas moton
10	And firmly hold. Ask what I am called.[28]	fæste gehabban. Frige hwæt ic hatte.

Here the tenor, an anchor, is disguised as a warrior. Because of the vehicle of a warrior fighting against strong odds, the anchor's work struggling against the shore to stop a ship is seen in a more heroic way. Likewise, the concept of battle and struggle is enhanced, as in this case it no longer pertains to physical combat but also to struggling against nature. If struggling can extend to nature, other aspects of life could be portrayed as a battle as well, thus opening the idea of what "battle" and "struggle" could be.

The genre of riddle, as a dialogue between reader and author, demands a social context. The audience of the riddle, then, likely other clerics and monks within the cathedral, must tap into several familiar contexts including life in the hall, heroic literature, or a piece of folklore.[29]In the "anchor" riddle above, the heroic context is used, and, instead of removing that context, the riddle encourages the reader to continue to see more in both anchor and fighter by

[27] Ibid., 101.

[28] This translation is my own. The original text can be found on page 77 of the Williamson text.

[29] Nelson, p. 421.

merely ending with something such as, "Say what I am."[30] By comparing unlike things, such as anchor and a fighter, the riddler brings forth what is similar to both of them, and shows that common ground exists where originally one might not have noticed, inviting the reader to look beyond the "What am I?" and seeing both anchor and fighter with a broader perspective.[31] Because of the ambiguities present, especially the lack of provided titles, there is not necessarily more than one solution to any stated riddle.[32] The comparisons are broad enough to invite several possible choices, displaying a more connected world than the reader may have originally comprehended. While scholars support the solution of "anchor" to Riddle 14[33], other riddles have either a list of possible solutions or no stated agreed upon solution at all, such as Riddle 72 to be discussed below.

As seen with Riddle 14, riddles can provide a unique basis for cultural study. The "anchor," presented in a heroic context, illustrates how items can be elevated by placing them in a battle scenario, as the anchor struggles against the bottom of the ocean to take hold and dig into the ground and stop its ship. The riddle remains a unique source for this study of culture, as it depends on metaphor and personification more than other forms of poetry, creating multiple opportunities to compare objects from the hall, the battlefield, or from mythology. Just as the fighter is used as a vehicle to disguise the anchor, female images are utilized throughout the riddles of the Exeter Book as vehicles for a variety of tenors, including animals and forces of nature. Examining how the Exeter Book uses female imagery as vehicles will broaden the

[30] Elli Kongas Maranda's "Theory and Practice of Riddle Analysis" *The Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 51-61 discusses the issue of what the riddle asks the reader to consider.

[31] Ibid., 54.

[32] Barley, p. 151. Barley believes that because solutions are tied to many translations of the riddle that the reader has preconceived notions of what each riddle is, which turns the reading of the riddle into a different kind of exercise and limits the mind to fewer possibilities.

[33] Williamson, p. 178.

perspective of female, just as the “anchor” riddle broadens how both the anchor and the aspect of struggle are viewed. First I will discuss the more conventional views of women, such as wife and mother, and how they are reflected in the riddles before moving into the riddles portraying female images in unconventional ways, forcing the expansion of the idea of “female” for the riddle to be understood.

PRESENTATIONS OF "FEMALE" IN ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Portrayals of women in the *Exeter Book* demand an understanding of how women were perceived during the Anglo-Saxon period, or their use as vehicles within the riddle will not be understood. Women are used within the Exeter Book both in human form and as anthropomorphized forces of nature or concrete objects. Like the anchor riddle shown above, many of the riddles are set within a heroic frame, making the female characters typically wives or mothers. Within the context of the hall, another popular context for riddles, women were vehicles for items used often, such as a cup or churn.[34] Hall life dominated heroic poetry in Old English literature. In the other poems, the hall appeared either literally or metaphorically in the text, reminding the reader how the hall remained a focus for the life of the Anglo-Saxon people.[35] In that setting, the woman as gracious noble woman, *ides*, or mother remains the most prominent role for the female.[36] In this context, the woman's power was seen as informal, using her role as the heart of the household to wield influence in important matters, especially matters involving succession.[37] The one image that seems to combine the ferocity of open defiance with the care and protective aspect combined with a sense of nobility, is the valkyrie, and her presence in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture will be reviewed in the following section.

With female characters existing in many forms in the riddles of the *Exeter Book*, both as actors in the riddle and as the comparative vehicle to disguise the subject, an understanding of how the increased presence of the valkyrie image deepens and expands the notion of "female" in

[34] While the riddles also contain women in roles such as slaves (such as in Riddles 50 and 47) and women who are sexual beings (such as Riddles 59, 23, and 43 – about eight to ten in all), they are not the focus of this paper.

[35] Hugh Magennis *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 35.

[36] Ibid., 108.

[37] Hill argues that a lack of sources and decidedly antifeminine bias hinders the true development of the historical Anglo-Saxon woman, p. 235.

the riddles, more commonly discussed perceptions, such as wife and mother, should be addressed, as well as a look at where those female figures appear in the riddles. Female voices rarely occur in Old English poetry, as much of the poetic works convey predominantly heroic themes and situations.[38] Many of the female images within that heroic style corresponded to roles women were expected to play within the heroic framework, namely as wife, lady of the hall, and mourning mother.

One of the images of female that has evolved from the study of Old English literature is the image of the *freoðuwebbe*, or peace weaver. Although the word only appears in the corpus three times[39], it carries a great deal of weight in the later scholarly perception of what an ideal female role was to be, namely a wife traded to forge a political alliance or mourning mother whose peace-keeping efforts fail[40]. The *Maxims* of the *Exeter Book*, a collection of gnomic lines of wisdom placed earlier in the manuscript detailing the ideal actions of the societal roles during the time, states:

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[38] Patricia Belanoff's "Women's Songs, Women's Language: *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*" in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 193-203.

[39] John Sklute's "FreoΔuwebbe in Old English Poetry" in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 204-210, details the contexts of each mention. The word appears in *Widsith* (which is in the *Exeter Book*), *Elene*, and *Beowulf*. In *Widsith*, the term refers to Ealdhild, the historical wife of the king of the Ostrogoths, Eormanric, as she is about to be wed, p. 206. In *Elene*, the term refers to an angel who appears to Constantine, sent to "weave" together peace between God and man, p. 205. In *Beowulf*, the term refers to Offa's queen Thryth (also known as Modthryth or Cynethryth), who becomes peaceful and lady-like after marriage, p. 205. Also in *Beowulf*, Weltheow is referred to as a *friΔusibb folca*, or peace bond of the people, which appears to be a synonym to the peace-weaver.

[40] Sklute argues that the term comes to symbolize more about women and wives than just the political alliance now, and instead represents any wife's job to make peace by being a figure who invites, or weaves, amnesty and friendship and constructs bonds of good will, p. 208. He also argues that the scarcity of use in actual texts implies that the term was likely not commonly used in the Anglo-Saxon period, p. 204. Carol Parrish Jamison's "Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges" in *Women in German Yearbook* 20 (2004): 14-29 argues that women used to ensure piece in such ways were typically nobility and was expected to work in passive ways if she were to embrace her role. Chance believed the peace-pledge role led into the mother role, which cemented the bonds between people. She argues that this peace-bride mother is the "ideal" for Anglo-Saxon times, p. 1.

A woman belongs at her embroidery,
Words spring up around a wide-going
Woman. Often men slander her with woe,
Men speak of her with hate.
Often her face is darkened.[41]

Here the gnomic lines portray a woman weaving both literally, with her embroidery, and figuratively with her words. The conflict between her and the people of her surroundings, noted in the last few lines, represents the constant struggle a peace bride would have trying to belong in a foreign land. She would have limited tools at her disposal, but her words and her gifts would be key to her success.

The weaving element of the word "frith weaver" contains much of the expectation of that role, as the woman was to "weave" the "frith," or good will, in her community. Even the words for woman *wif* or *wifman* etymologically are connected to the aspect of weaving.[42] The same *Exeter Book* maxim implies that the woman should be at her embroidery, which is a task involved with weaving and thread.[43] Grave finds for Anglo-Saxon women often include spindle whorls and other aspects associated with the task of weaving and sewing.[44] The "frith," or good will, the woman was to weave by becoming a wife was an important component to the Anglo-Saxon culture, because it contained the only element focusing on peace in a structure that glorified heroic battle and war. The Bosworth-Toller dictionary contained five columns of words

[41] Drout translation, p. 275. Drout argues that wisdom poetry, which can include riddles, deserves consideration in study of culture and tradition because it possesses "cultural authority" (p. 250) and assumed, along with aspects of the reform movement (part of which was occurring during the writing of the *Exeter Book*) that these words would be returning England to a formal era of grace and improving on continental models at the same time.

[42]Fell, p. 39, discusses the role of the frith-weaver as well, and Fell believes that the role is portrayed in a very superficial light because it does not reflect the complexity of the role or its importance to the social system of the time.

[43] Ibid., 40.

[44] Ibid.

beginning with *freoðu*, showing its prominence in the language.[45] Depending on circumstance, this task of weaving good will could be quite onerous. As she used both gifts and words of welcome and friendship to connect the inner and outer communities, the woman had important tools at her disposal.[46]

How a woman entered a tribe as a peace weaving wife was also an important consideration. Capturing a woman from a well established tribe could be the way for a new tribe to gain legitimacy, and occurred throughout the area from the migration times forward.[47] The marriage rite had many parallels to the entry into the warband, including feasting, processions, and the presentation of gifts. The groom's family would have seen the bride as a threat for some time, especially if the tribes uniting did not get along, because she would still have ties to her family.[48] To instill and assimilate her into her new tribe, rites that mimic initiatory rites for the warband were in place, which included capturing her, cutting her hair, a purification bath, new clothing and shoes, and a shared meal after being carried over the threshold.[49] She repays the husband and his family, as reciprocity was important in this culture, with a child and by taking on the role of peace weaver among her new kin.

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[45]Chance, p. 3. Chance agrees that the peace making queen was the ideal image of the Anglo-Saxon female, although one usually accompanied by tragic happenings, making the reader question whether or not the woman was able to do all that she has been set up to do, as many examples end in tragedy and death.

[46] Sklute, 208. Sklute did not believe that the term implied giving up a woman to marriage with another tribe, particularly a hostile tribe, as much as it did the work of the woman once married and, mainly, in a position of authority in a hall.

[47] Michael Enright's *Lady with a Mead Cup* (Portland, Four Courts Press, 1996) details the role of lady throughout Germanic society, specifically with all the symbolism of bearing the cup in hall. Enright spends much of his focus on the Anglo-Saxon period, mainly *Beowulf* and the role of Weltheow.

[48] Ibid., 75. The bride's family loses a member but is given gifts and an alliance in the sense of reciprocity, but the groom's family has an addition to the family, which may not have always been welcome.

[49] Ibid. As mentioned, gifts were also a part of this, and the bride's gift would remain hers alone. She could gift from that hoard independently and use it to invest in projects at her will. She also could leave it to others as she saw fit after death.

The woman's weaving of peace can also be seen in a more literal sense, as the lady of the hall must "weave" back and forth and bear drink in an act which reinforces the hierarchy of the members in the hall. Along with the gifts and kind words, there is much evidence of the woman bearing drink, often in a ritualistic way to the people of her tribe. As the household is in the purview of the woman, seen in her duties and in the keys at her waist, the setting of the table and presentation of food would fall to the woman. She could, then, use that table to reflect her opinion of status, both of her husband and his friends, showing that while the power may be seen to be held by men, the women controlled the symbols of that power, which she could manipulate and arrange to show her commentary on situations.[50] She would also adorn herself accordingly, making herself also a reflection of the wealth and vitality of the tribe.[51] Again, the *Maxims* of the *Exeter Book* describe hall life with the following:

81 The king shall with money purchase a queen,	Cyning sceal mod ceape cwene gebicgan,
With cups and rings; both must	bunum ond beagum; bu sceolon ærest
First be good with gifts. The spirit	geofum god wesan. Guðsceal in eorle,
Must be in an earl, to grow in courage,	wig geweaxan, ond wif geþeon
And the woman to thrive in love	leof mid hyre leodum, leohtmod wesan,
With her people, be cheerful-minded,	rune healden, rumheort beon
Hold counsel, be roomy-hearted with	mearum ond maþmum, meodorædenne
Horses and treasures, at the mead-	for gesiðmægen symle æghwær
Company, before companion-protection	eodor æþelinga ærest gegretan,
Always at all times, go first to greet	forman fulle to frean hond
The noble one, first fully to the lords hand,	ricene geræcan, ond him ræd witan
Know counsel, and know advice	boldagendum bæm ætsomne.
For him, the owners of the homestead both together.	
124 Each mouth needs food. Meals must	Muþa gehwylc mete þearf,
	mæl sceolon tidum gongan.
Take place on time. It is right for gold	Gold geriseþ on guman sweorde,
To be on a man's sword, the beautiful	sellic sigesceorp; since on cwene
Victory-blade; treasure on a queen; a	god scop gumum;
Good poet for the men.[52]	

[50] Ibid., 51. Enright gives a more Germanic illustration, where the woman served half a table of food to a husband (in front of guests) who had just given away half of what he had.

[51] Monica Potkay *Minding the Body: Women and Literature in the Middle Ages* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997), p. 33.

[52] Drout, pp. 276-77.

Along with the drink bearing, noted here in the lady's greeting of nobility, first to the lord, and then to give good counsel and light hearted words with company of the hall, with words considered to possess a kind of prophetic, magical ability.[53] As the *Maxim* quote showed, her role passing the horn was pivotal. She used her movements and order of passing to reinforce the social order of the hall, first presenting to the lord, then his men, bonding all together with her weaving motions.[54] Words said during ritual drink contained a sense of more importance than words in other situations, and this included the wise, magical words of the lady.[55]

The lady of the hall exists in the riddles of the *Exeter Book* in a variety of forms, some as the actual female figure and some as an anthropomorphized object. One of the smallest riddles, Riddle 73, may imply the sad, noble lady of the hall. With only two lines of text and a line of runes in between, the last line of text being, "Ic ane geseah idese sittan.," or "I saw a woman sitting alone," the word for woman is *idese*, implying nobility and wisdom.[56] The portrayal of the noble lady continues with Riddle 61, the "glass beaker," as the instrument containing liquid is depicted as very female. It reads:

	Often I shall bring joy to men in the hall	Oft ic secgan seledreame sceal
	And fairly succeed when I am carried forth,	fægre onþeon þonne ic eom forðboren,
	Glad with gold, where men drink.	Glæd mid golde, þær guman drincað
	While to me in the chamber	Hwilum mec on cofan cysseð muþe
	he kisses me with his mouth,	
5	A good capable man there we two are,	tillic esne þær wit tu beoþ,
	To embrace in his hands and with * * *that embrace	fæðme on folm[….]grum þyð
	Work his will, * * *	wyrceðhis willa[….]ð l[….
	* * * fuller than when I come forth	….] fulre þonne ic forðcyme
	_____	[…….]
10	Nor may I conceal * * *	Ne mæg ic þy miþan [….

[53] Enright, 17. Enright documents a warlord/sibyl/warband relationship from early tribal times in the Germanic structures, quoting from Tacitus and others how women were valued for their wisdom and ability to see into situations.

[54] Ibid., 10.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Many solutions are posited for this riddle, mainly because of the runic letters in between the only two lines of text. Some include piss, hound, and elk. Chance supports the solution of elk (3).

	* * * in light	….]an on leohte
	_____	[……..]
	Likewise is soon * * *	swylce eac bið sona [….
	* * * betoken what me to * * *	..]r[.]te getacnad hwæt me to[….
15	* * * man, when our pleasing was	….]leas rinc, þa unc geryde wæs.

As discussed above, a woman bearing a cup of some sort was a standard motif and reflects the woman as a person binding community together with presentation of drink[57]. Here, in line 4, the beaker is adorned with gold, as women are often described, and comes to a chamber where a man may kiss her. The beaker also brings joy to the hall, as the lady is supposed to do, and this joy is seen as success in her eyes, implying that she sees her task as one to create joy.

Establishing and maintaining peace between two tribes, or even two warring families, lied in the production of children as a tangible representation of the unity of both houses, leading the woman from role of wife to role of mother. As a mother, another important role seen for the Anglo-Saxon female, the woman was primarily to be seen as a nurturer, not only for her children, but, if a leader, for all her tribe. Her nurturing and sustaining of the tribe through mediation, gift giving, bearing of drink, and hosting important gifts portrays her as a woman who has some influence in the public and political spheres of her world.[58] The figure of "mother" would be used to describe the Church in homilies by Wulfstan.[59] Some queens of the period would even enter monasteries after having children and become an abbess, which would create for her the role of "spiritual mother" for her people as well.[60]

[57] Riddle 76 "horn" and Riddle 9 "cup" convey similar elements, including the presence of a noble lady and the importance of the cup/horn itself.

[58] Stacy S. Klein "Centralizing Feminism in Anglo-Saxon Literary Studies: *Elene*, Motherhood and History" in David Johnson and Elaine Treharne's *Readings in Medieval Texts: Introduction to Old and Middle English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 149-165.

[59] Ibid., 154.

[60] Ibid., 155.

From the heroic perspective, the role of mother was narrower. She typically gained identity solely through the results of her sons in battle, either celebrating with his victories or mourning and weeping from his death. Her voice as mourner showed the mother as the nurturer as well, because it was her job to voice the collective grief of the community after tragedy occurred.[61] From the *Exeter Book* alone, twice in the *Fates of Men*, another piece of gnomic selections illustrating precepts of Anglo-Saxon life and times, the image of mother characters are portrayed mourning the loss of a child by violent death.

Motherhood and images of a mother exist in several of the riddles of the *Exeter Book* and in various situations. Riddle 13, for example, the riddle of the "fox" or "badger" portrays motherhood in an anxious time. It reads:

	My neck is bright and my head fallow,	Hals is min hwit ond heafod fealo,
	Sides as well. I am swift in going,	sidan swa some. Swift ic eom on feþe,
	And carry battle weapon. Hairs stand on my back	beadowæpen bere. Me on bæce standað
	As well as on my cheeks, tower over two	her swylce swe on hleorum; hlifiað tu
5	Ears and over eyes. I step my toes	earan ond eagum. Ordum ic steppe
	In green grass. To me is sorrow decreed	in grene græs. Me bið gyrn witod
	If someone discovers me hidden,	gif mec on hæle an onfindeð
	A bloodthirsty warrior in the house where I inhabit,	wælgrim wiga þær ic wic buge,
	A building with my children, and I remain there	bold mid bearnum, ond ic bide þær
10	With a youthful family. When the spirit comes	mid geoguðcnosle. Hwonne gæst cume
	To my doors, his death is decreed;	to durum minum, him biþ deað witod;
	Because I shall take my children from their home	forþon ic sceal of eðle eaforan mine
	Timidly fare out, flee to save them	forhtmod fergan, fleame nergan.
	If he is following me entirely	Gif he me æfterward ealles weorþeð --
15	And bares his breast – I expect it is not dear of his	hine breost berað – ic his bidan ne dear,
	Cruelty in the room –	reþes on geruman --
	not that I consider that counsel	ne ic þæt ræd teale --
	But I shall boldly fore-pay (proceed)	ac ic sceal fromlice feþemundum
	And through steep hills construct streets	þurh steapne beorg stræte wyrcan.
	Easily I may save the noble's souls	Eaþe ic mæg freora feorh genergan
20	If I must lead my family	gif ic mægburge mot mine gelædan
	In a secret way through a burrow	on degolne weg þurh dunþyrel
	Favorite and familiar; I then will not need to	swæse ond gesibbe; ic me siþþan ne þearf
	Fear the murderous dog's war.	Wælhwelpes wig with onsittan.
	If that malignant enemy by a narrow way	Gif se niðsceaþe bearwe stige
25	Seek me on my track, not lack him	me on swaþe seceþ, ne tosæleþ him
	In that hostile road of battle meeting	on þam gegnpaþe guþgemotes,

[61] Ibid., 158.

Since I reach the summit through the hill	siþþan ic þurh hylles hrof geræce
And through violence strike war-darts	ond þurh hest hrino hildepilum
To the hated enemy whom I long fled.	Laðgewinnan þam þe ic longe fleah.

In this riddle, the woman is behind the door, inside the house, and anxious about the guest wanting to come in. First she feels grief for her impossible situation (line 6), then fear for her life and the life of her young children (line 11). Finally she fights, because she has no other recourse: no one is going to come to save her (lines 26-29). While the solution is a fox or badger, the vehicle is a woman because it demonstrates how even the most noble woman can fight like an animal for her children when no hope is present.[62]

Motherhood continues to be advanced in various ways throughout the riddles, moving from a frightened mother defending her children to a woman taking on the role of mother to frightened children, as seen in Riddle 7, the "cuckoo" riddle[63]. Here the protective aspect of the role of motherhood is shown to non-biological children, which may be exploring the role of fosterage, a practice in which children are given to either extended family members or family to raise in order to further cement alliances.[64] It reads:

	On this day for me I give up the dead	Mec on þissum dagum deadne ofgeafun
	My father and mother;	fæder ond modor;
	not even when my soul was born,	ne wæs me feorh þa gen,
	My life inside. That still began for me one	ealdor in innan. Þa mec an ongon,
	Very faithful kinswoman to dress with covers,	welhold mege, wedum þeccan,
5	Cherished and cared for, protecting garment	heold ond freoþode, hleosceorpe wrah
	As honorably as she covered their own child,	swa arlice swa hire agen bearn,
	Until I was under her lap – so my fates were –	oþþæt ic under sceate –
		swa min gesceapu wæron --
	Once unrelated became increased souls.	ungesibbum wearð eacen gæste.
	That woman of peace fed me afterwards	Mec seo friþe mæg fedde siþþan,

[62] Ibid., 203-204.

[63] Another riddle involving motherhood shows the earth portrayed as a "mother," the standard mother of heroes, in Riddle 33. In this riddle, the earth gives birth to the "coat of mail," (the most agreed upon solution) but this is only a passing reference, as the figure of the brave child is without a doubt the subject of the riddle. In this case, the reference to mother is as if to create a sense of lineage, which typically was done through the father in heroic poems. The child demonstrably steps away from female connections such as those concerned with weaving, instead to associate with warriors and battle.

[64] Fell, p. 81. Fell cites this riddle as one reason that fosterage may have been more popular in Anglo-Saxon culture than once originally believed.

10	Until I grew up, could make Farther journeys; she had her own, the less, Sons and daughters, just as she did me.	oþþæt ic aweox, widdor meahte siþas asettan; heo hæfde swæsra þy læs suna ond dohtra, þy heo swa dyde.

The riddle is in first person from the point of view of the child, called an orphan, as the child describes the nurturing of the mother figure. The word used for the female is *friðemceg*, a protective woman. The use of *frið*, however, implies the inherent role of women as a symbol of peace. In this role, the mother does create a sense of peace, blending two families in one home and giving hospitality and happiness to a child who appears to have none.

For the sake of her children and people, as noted in Riddle 13 above, a woman could fight and defend as well as nurture and weave peace. To protect what she considered hers, a woman counted first on her voice to save her. Her voice could be used to encourage and incite that community, keeping them from appearing cowardly, thus maintaining the image of a proud people. In this role, often called the role of the *Hetzerin*, the woman does not weave good will but provokes conflict and influences opinions in a voiced and often antagonistic way.[65] She does this by taunting the men, forcing them into action. While mainly in the sagas, there is Anglo Saxon evidence of this female figure, a woman who goads others into action that she, as a woman of that culture, cannot take herself.

Few female characters are openly outside the norms of female behavior in Old English texts.[66] Instead, possibly because of the older beliefs regarding women as prophetic and almost sacred, many Anglo-Saxon readers might have found portraying actual female characters as negative to be counter-intuitive to what is known about women.[67] This more negative portrayal, a presentation of a female who creates or perpetuates the conflict of the piece, is in stark contrast

[65] Enright, p. 42.

[66] Magennis, p. 117. He notes that the only two come from *Beowulf*: Grendel's mother and Thryth.

[67] Potkay, 32. Potkay also believes that this idea was heavily damaged over time.

to the peace weaver, who would be trying to eliminate any conflict.[68] An example of a historical woman of the Anglo-Saxon England from the eighth century would be CuneΔryΔ, who had such a negative reputation, that legends of her persisted long into the time of the construction of the *Exeter* manuscript. While certainly a powerful figure (she was the only queen to have coins imprinted with her name), she was also feared. It was said that she instigated the murder of Æðelbert of East Anglia, among other bad deeds such as malicious gossip.[69] This is not to say that other women did not carry out deeds for personal motivation, but many females in literature discover a way to achieve their goals within the norms of accepted behavior, like that of the *Hetzerin*, or instigator. The closest example of the Hetzerin in the riddles may appear in Riddle 18, the "sword" riddle. It reads:

	I am a wonderful creature, shaped in battle	Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, on gewin sceapen,
	To my beloved lord, as it more beautifully adorns	frean minum leof, fægre gegyrwed.
	And my mail coat is variegated. Also bright rest	Byrne is min bleofag, swylce beorht seomað
	Wire around that death-gem who the ruler gave me	wir ymb þone wælgim þe me waldend geaf,
5	That guide me to wandering while	se me widgalum wisað hwilum
	Also to battle. When I bring wealth	sylfum to sace. Þonne ic sinc wege
	Through the bright day, the handiwork of the smith,	þurh hlutterne dæg, hondweorc smiþa,
	Gold through the dwelling. Often I a man	gold ofer geardas. Oft ic gæstberend
	Kill as war weapon. A king adorns me	cwelle compwæpnum. Cyning mec gyrweð
10	With treasure and silver	since ond seolfre
	and becomes with me in hall	ond mec on sele weorþað;
	Not one to refuse praise in words, in manner tells	ne wyrneð wordlofes, wisan mæneð
	Mine for a crowd where they drink mead	mine for mengo, þær hy meodu drincað,
	And hold me in restraint, while allow again	healdeð mec on heaþore, hwilum læteð eft
	To travel weary in space shake,	radwerigne on gerum sceacan,
15	Valiant in battle.	orlegfromne.
	Often I, the other one of the two, injure	Oft ic oþrum scod
	fiercely at the hands of a friend.	frecne æt his freonde.
	I am outlawed far and wide,	Fah eom ic wide,
	a weapon's curse. I believe myself not a need	wæpnum awyrged. Ic me wenan ne þearf
	that avenge my child in slayer to a soul.	þæt me bearn wræce on bonan feore,
	If to me a hostile's battle attacks each one;	gif me gromra hwylc guþe genægeð;
20	Not become that family enlarge	ne weorþeð sio mægburg gemicledu
	My child, I who after born,	eaforan minum þe ic æfter woc,
	Unless I lordless must depart	nymþe ic hlafordleas hweorfan mote
	From that holder who gave me rings.	from þam healdende þe me hringas geaf.

[68] Ibid., 55.

[69] Fell, p. 90. This is in contrast to Queen ÆΔelflæd of Mercia, who built fortresses, won back districts from the Vikings, and was seen as the "most famous queen of the English" by many foreign countries.

	For me it is henceforth decreed if I obey the lord,	Me bið forð witod, gif ic frean hyre,
25	Make battle, so I hitherto did	guþe fremme, swa ic gien dyde
	My lord in thanks, that I shall lack	minum þeodne on þonc, þæt ic þolian sceal
	Procreation. I against a bride must not	bearngestreona. Ic wiþ bryde ne mot
	Have a marriage, but this sport is	hæmed habban, ac me þæs hyhtplegan
	Yet refused to me of old from in	geno wyrneð, se mec geara on
30	Bond placed; because I shall use	bende legde; forþon ic brucan sceal
	In celibacy a hero's wealth.	on hagostealde hæleþa gestreona.
	Often I with ornaments anger a stupid wife	Oft ic wirum dol wife abelge,
	Lessen her will to obey; she speaks insults to me,	wonie hyre willan; heo me wom spreceð,
	Clap and obey with her hand, revile me with words,	floceð hyre folmum, firenaþ mec wordum,
35	Evil chants. I will not heed this,	ungod gæleð. Ic ne gyme þæs
	Battle * * *	compes [.....]

Here the subject of the riddle, the sword, describes the affect of its actions, namely killing the men the live to the women of the hall. The woman is left to rant, curse and only voice her feelings, unlike the sword who can take more direct action. One of the effects of successful battle is certainly to leave broken hearted women at home, left only to cry and curse at the hopelessness of their situations. Her words include "evil chants," implying a supernatural power to her words. As noted above, the words of women were considered significant, particularly during times when she bears a cup or horn in the hall. The ability to curse, however, depicts a woman who can enact change in future events with her words. This is not typically the purview of the ordinary woman, creating a need for a female figure who has the ability to curse and the ferocity to want to curse. It is here that a hint for the need for the valkyrie arises, and this need continues in the riddles that follow. An introduction to the valkyrie figure must appear first in order to better understand where and how she appears in riddles and poetry from Anglo-Saxon texts.

EVIDENCE OF THE VALKYRIE IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

The valkyrie, an image more well defined on the European continent, contains different connotations by region and time period. Old Norse literature tends to have extreme views of the valkyrie: she is either a fierce creature or a benevolent and noble protector.[70] The "darker dream woman" who arrives for the hero "covered in blood" in the early thirteenth century *Gisla Saga* reflects the fierce side of the valkyrie figure in Old Norse texts, for example, while the more beneficial depiction of the valkyrie may be the heroines such as Sigrún from the Eddic lays, dated approximately from the early eleventh century, portraying a noble woman who is caught between her loyalty to her brother and loyalty to her new husband.[71] Like the *ides* figure in Old English literature, a noble woman who carries more weight with her name than what a human lady could handle with her wise words and light-hearted bearing, the valkyrie, part human, part supernatural and a very powerful figure, could arrange and manipulate the destiny of others as well as act as a mediator with a deity.[72]

Both sides of this valkyrie figure exist in Old English literature, but the references are scant and easily missed. The word for valkyrie in Old English, *wælcyrge*, typically refers to creatures associated with slaughter, as seen in its use in glosses from the eighth to tenth centuries, which includes the time of the writing of the *Exeter Book*[73]. The modern *A Thesaurus of Old English* cite *wælcyrige* as a witch or sorceress as well as with the Furies under the

[70] Damico, p.176.

[71] Ibid., p. 177,181.

[72] Ibid., 176.

[73] According to the search through the Old English Corpus though Antonette di Paolo Healey's (ed.), *The Dictionary of the Old English Corpus in Electronic Form*, November 2004, http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:3151/o/oec/about.html Dictionary of Old English Project, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, the *Latin-Old English Glossary* in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III includes a gloss of *wælcyrige* with "Allecto," "Herinis," and "Bellona," all Furies. From Aldhelm, *wælcyrige* is glossed, according to the Napier 1900 *Old English Glosses*, with *gydene* "goddess." In addition, The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS.32 and British Museum MS glosses the word with "Tisiphona," the name of the Greek Fury that stood for "avenging murderer."

"classical gods."[74]Valkyries, or "choosers of the slain," decided the fates of warriors, even to the point of naming kings and bestowing power to them.[75] The valkyrie Sigrdrifa, a more famous example, from the Eddic lay of Sigurd lay asleep, cursed with a sleep thorn by Othin because she chose a king to survive a battle and become a hero that Othin wanted to die. When Sigurd awakens her, she offers to teach him various mysteries including success in battle.

Aside from the glosses, the word *wælcyrian* is used in Wulfstan's Homily "Sermo Lupi ad Anglos," (c.1014) as a female figure associated with witches (*wiccan*) and murderers. Wulfstan lists a wide array of sins, sins committed by both the Vikings and the English naming figures such as murderers and wælcyrige as ones perpetrating such sins and causing the dangers and hard times the culture is facing, particularly from Viking invasions, which Wulfstan sees as a direct result for the nation's sinful behavior. Reading this text almost as a penitential, one can see the call to repentance permeating Wulfstan's message.[76] Wulfstan in this sermon attempts to shame his audience into repentance by citing humiliating examples the English have suffered against the Vikings, including rape and beating. In Wulfstan's sermon, the Viking threat is used more for imagery's sake than as an actual enemy, because the point is to look inward at the sins of the nation, not outward, for blame. Therefore, the use of the word *wælcyrian* may carry some ambiguity as to context. He includes the female figure in a list of very human perpetrators and out of the other Germanic contexts.[77] From this, it appears that Wulfstan is using the term

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[74] Jane Roberts and Christian Kay. *A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), v. I, p. 659, 663.

[75] H.R. Ellis Davidson's *Myths and Symbols of Pagan Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 93-94. Davidson recounts the Norse and Anglo-Saxon images of the valkyrie, including the famous Brynhild of the Volsungasaga. She believed it was a pervasive figure in literature and art by the tenth century.

[76] Alice Cowen, "Byrstas and bysmeras: The Wounds of Sin in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*," in the Townsend text, p. 197.

[77] Mary S. Serjeantson in "The Vocabulary of Folklore in Old and Middle English" *Folklore* 47 (1936): 42-73 glosses *wælcyrige* as similar to female practitioners of witchcraft as well as mythical choosers of the slain and counterparts to classical figures such as Venus, Allecto, and Bellone.

wælcyrian to refer to a certain kind of female image that was recognizable in his time, a female committing heinous acts along the lines of murder or witchcraft.

Not too much later, the *Laws of Cnut* used the word *wælcyrian* in a letter to his people dated around 1020 in a very similar way, associating the *wælcyrian* with murderers, fornicators, and slayers of kinsman as well as witches (*wiccean*), seemingly confirming the concept that a valkyrie image persisted for some time. It appears that both Cnut and Wulfstan preserved or perpetuated the more negative connotation of the valkyrie image, that of the fierce woman who ride on wolves and collect the dead from battle. Wulfstan might have wanted to focus on the more negative side of the valkyrie, as the valkyrie is certainly a pre-Christian female image.[78] The negative aspect persisted with the *Beowulf* codex, as the valkyrie figure is associated with Gorgons in *The Wonders of the East*.[79]

The word *wælcyrian* may have transferred in time over to only the negative female image, while anonymous female benevolent figures still retain some connotations of the valkyrie. Helen Damico and others have argued, however, that the benevolent guardian image of the valkyrie may have also persisted, but became anonymous in texts such as the charms, where the women are galloping in to the aid of the speaker.[80] In both the "Sudden Stitch" charm and the "Bee" charm, hordes of women appear to provide aid[81]. For the "Sudden Stitch" charm, the women come to the aid of one who may have suffered from an apparent attack from a supernatural creature. The "Bee" charm bids the "victorious" women to settle into the land,

[78] Davidson and Damico both detail the presence of the valkyrie in pre-Christian Germanic and Norse literature, and, as noted above, it may be that the negative portrayal of the valkyrie in some texts is an attempt to denigrate the image of the powerful and fierce female, as it does not fit well into the Christian structure.

[79] This reference is noted in the search of the Old English Corpus and, slightly, in Damico.

[80] Damico, p. 178.

[81] Ibid.

thereby bringing help to those around them. [82]Queen Gunnhildr, wife of Eirik Bloodaxe and Queen of York, commissioned a poem containing valkyries after Eirik's death, which was around 954, describing the valkyries not as vengeful Furies, but as noble ladies, preparing to serve drink to the newest resident of Valhalla, Eirik[83].

Valkyrie as drink bearer exists also in archeology, furthering evidence of the female figure in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons and connecting to the previous riddles describing women and drink. The Gosforth cross (c. 920-950) in Cumbria and a stone at the church in Sockburn on Tees (c. tenth century) in Northumberland portray a valkyrie-like figure, with the latter showing her as a cup bearer, much like the lady of the hall.[84] The Weland image of the Frank's casket (c. 650) from the Northumberland area also contains an anonymous woman bearing a flask or container for drink, hidden behind some ornaments. This is likely to be Weland's valkyrie-bride, as she is the only other prominent female in the story outside of Beodhild, the main female figure in the panel, an allusion to a recognizable tale during the Anglo-Saxon period, based on the references to Weland in various texts.

The allusion to the Weland myth may be one of the more powerful, if elusive, arguments for reconsideration of the prominence of the valkyrie image in the Anglo-Saxon mindset. Allusions to Weland exist in several sources. From the *Exeter Book*, *Deor* and *Waldere* both refer to the tale. Alfred switches out the name Fabricus to Weland in his translation of Boethius and then describes him as a famous and wise goldsmith.[85] His aptitude as a smith derives from his story, in which Weland and his brothers see three valkyrie maidens out of their swan skins by

[82] Ibid.

[83] Fell, p. 144.

[84] Ibid., 145.

[85] H.R. Ellis Davidson "Weland the Smith" *Folklor*e 69 (1958): 145-159. Davidson cites all references to Weland and also traces the legend of "Wayland's Smithy," which has convincing parallels. She also connects Weland to stories about Wade.

a river. Each brother pairs up with a valkyrie maid, and they all live happily for some time, until the valkyries are ready to return to their roles as choosers of slain in battle. Weland decides to wait by the river for his valkyrie's (named Swanwhite) return, but is abducted by a nearby king for his talent as a smith. To keep Weland within his kingdom and working, the king, Nidud, hamstrings Weland and puts him in a wheeled chair. To exact revenge, Weland managed to kill Nidud's sons and mount their skulls in silver as a present to the king. He also raped Nidud's daughter Beodhild. Once he felt avenged, Weland rose in the air on wings he crafted.[86]

Weland's skill as a smith is clearly the most prominent image of Weland throughout the Anglo-Saxon Corpus, including a mention in the poem *Beowulf*. What happens to be elusive in the search for information about valkyries is the fact that the valkyrie portion of the Weland story, the initial portion of the story in which Weland and his brothers encounter valkyries by Wolf Lake with their swan-skins nearby and stay with them for seven years, is absent from the pictures and poetic references. Both *Deor* and the Franks casket focus on the aspect of suffering and revenge, the latter part of the tale in which Weland, captured by a king while waiting for his valkyrie bride, is maimed and forced to work in the smithy and seeks revenge. While the image of the valkyrie appears to be present on the Frank's casket, the wronged daughter is the more prominent of the two female figures.

The valkyrie image, while not obscure, certainly requires more searching and analysis than the more prominent mother or wife images of women, yet it is an important image to include in all that can be "female," as clearly the valkyrie woman represents a ferocity, power, and battle association not readily available to the other female images of the time. I will show in the close reading of the next four riddles how qualities of the valkyrie not only add to the

[86] Brian Branston's *Lost Gods of England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 12-14 detail the basics of the Weland myth and explain their importance of the myth to the understanding of the Frank's casket.

understanding of the riddles, but are necessary to the understanding of the riddles, because without the valkyrie presence in what is “female,” the image of women as mainly passive wife and mother cannot sustain the metaphor. If the vehicle cannot sustain the metaphor, the ambiguities would be too great and there would be little hope for solution.

DELVING DEEPER INTO THE RIDDLES: FIVE RIDDLES AND FIVE NEW POINTS OF VIEW

Before trying to understand how the riddles expand the idea of female, it is important to understand how riddles work. For if we understand how riddles work, we begin to realize how the comparisons are necessary for the solution (or solutions) to become apparent to anyone attempting to solve the riddle. The riddles that follow begin with riddles describing water. The first riddle, Riddle 80, the longest and most complex of the water riddles, lays out the female vehicle of the riddle immediately, associating water with motherhood. From there, the riddle describes the characteristics of water as if describing a woman, but without the valkyrie image, the description appears to be too contradictory, because without the valkyrie, the combination of ferocity, beauty, and desire. Following Riddle 80, Riddle 39 is discussed, as Riddle 39 appears as a miniature form of Riddle 80. Even though both describe water as female and Riddle 39 has many similarities to Riddle 80, the unique aspect of Riddle 39 lies in the use of "darkness" imagery, an imagery the valkyrie can help interpret. Water riddles continue with two riddles about icebergs, Riddles 31 and 66. Both riddles remain consistent with water as female, and both offer clues that demand a valkyrie image for better interpretation, including battle and magic references. Finally, Riddle 5, known as the "whistling swan" riddle, concludes this section. A bird closely related with water, the swan riddle also contains valkyrie imagery. This final close reading will segue into the next section, a section in which the valkyrie is suggested as a proposed solution to Riddle 72, a riddle also involving a bird, this time as the vehicle of the riddle.

Typically, no matter what the subject, riddles are first defined by type, either imaginative or narrative.[87] According to Williamson, the imaginative riddles convey the subject from a first

[87] Williamson, p. 25-26.

person point of view, with lines such as "I am." The use of first person personifies the riddle, creating a sense of being in even the most inanimate of objects. The object describes himself or herself, which provides the ability to see those objects from a different point of view.[88] Narrative riddles can still have a first person voice, but the subject is not the speaker. Instead, the riddle is conveyed through description, such as "I see," or "A creature is…" The object of the riddle still may be anthropomorphized in some way. Both types of riddles employ ethopoeia, an imaginary monologue with the speaker being a fictitious character.[89]

Once the riddle's type is determined, the reader can then begin to attempt a solution by trying to understand the nature of the comparison, which functions as a metaphoric vehicle to illustrate how both share similarities which provides a common ground basis to begin the process of solution. Williamson cites several classifications of comparisons that riddles can make including biomorphic (comparing the subject to a living being too ambiguous to narrow down), zoomorphic (comparing the subject to an animal), anthropomorphic (comparing the subject to a person), phytomorphic (comparing the subject to a plant), comparing the subject to an inanimate object, creating multiple comparisons, providing a list of details, creating family relationships, using cryptomorphic codes (such as runes), and using erotic imagery for innuendo (as mentioned above).[90] Of these, Williamson notes that the anthropomorphic riddles are the most favored by the poet on the grounds of the sheer volume of times the poet uses the device, which gives the subject of the riddles not only human characteristics but gender, furthering a connection between the reader and the object.

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[88] Nelson, p. 425.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Craig Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle Songs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 12-23. Williamson also includes "neck riddles," which are riddles created literally to avoid beheading and "tricky questions," but notes these are not common in the *Exeter Book*. He also notes that personification is used more in the Anglo-Saxon riddles than in the Latin riddles of the time period.

Even armed with this much information, more is needed to understand the structure and integral pieces of the riddle in order to be successful in solving the word puzzle. As noted above, the riddler did not leave solutions or even titles to go by, unlike previous Latin riddles. This may encourage readers then and now to take more pleasure in trying to solve the riddle or even to find multiple solutions to the riddle than to intellectually exercise the brain and see how the titled solution fits the metaphor held within the text. Ambiguity is the central device of the riddle[91], but the reader has to understand how and where the ambiguity works to be successful. Without the ambiguity, the answer would be easily revealed, but with too much ambiguity, the reader would become frustrated. This ambiguity shows the reader that nothing is completely as it is literally seen, and that most of the time the audience only knows as much about the subject of the riddle as the reader felt he or she needed to know, such as that a chalice is for drinking or a sword for fighting and forging the fame of the hero, ignoring nuances or elements that might challenge preconceived notions.[92]

The solution to the riddle, the tenor, is disguised by the riddler creating a metaphor, known as the vehicle. For the riddle to make sense, there must be grounds for comparison. This common ground, the area in which the tenor and vehicle are similar, forms the basis of much of the riddle. The common ground is what makes the disguise of the metaphor possible. Yet, the two objects, the vehicle and the tenor, are not exactly the same. The gap describes the characteristics that separate the vehicle from the tenor and create a sense of paradox.[93] With this setup, the riddler must choose the tenor and the vehicle carefully, combining multiple frames of

[91] Nelson, p. 424.

[92] Nelson, p. 440. Nelson sees the ambiguity as validation for the fact that there is not just one truth to the riddles, and, at times, not just one solution.

[93] Williamson, *Feast,* pp. 19-23. Williamson also noted that clashing metaphors within the same riddle can also create a gap or conceit within the riddle, deepening the ambiguity.

reference from all areas of life[94] to create unsuspected comparisons that challenge the ideas held about both tenor and vehicle.

After setting up the vehicle for the riddle, the poet would then begin to list several details and characteristics both share, establishing the common ground. The gap would reveal the paradox near the end of the list of details, and often the name of the vehicle is listed again, creating the appearance of a frame, a common technique also seen in the Latin riddles.[95] As the vehicle was typically a personified form, the personification emphasizes the humanity of the tenor of the riddle. The frame would also produce a sense of finality to the piece.

Many of the riddles that appear to be expanding the idea of "female" do so because of this idea of common ground. As will be seen in the analysis below, without expanding the idea of "female" from a view primarily seen as lady, wife, and mother to include a wider presence of the valkyrie-like figure, because if, for example, the woman as lady of the hall and the chalice is too disparate, the reader cannot have a hope to solve the riddle, as the riddle depends upon the comparison to guide the reader to a solution. Without a believable comparison, the area of difference between the tenor and the vehicle is too large to maneuver, even given the need for some ambiguity. A valkyrie-like image of women bridges the gap of what is characterized as female, because it adds ferocity, a more heroic-like power, and a connection to birds, specifically the swan. Many of these riddles which appear to have a wider gap than the ones mentioned in a previous section involve water, whether the water is the tenor of the riddle or an integral part to that tenor, possibly because the valkyrie was connected to the swan, an animal who dwells on the water, as noted above in the Weland myth. In all the riddles that follow, the benefit of the

[94] Nelson, p. 421. Nelson argues that the audiences had to be aware of all the frames of reference for the riddles to work. This would include the heroic world of *Beowulf* and everyday life in a real hall, something often not poetically described.

[95] Ibid., p. 426.

valkyrie qualities are explained in detail, beginning with the longest riddle involving water, Riddle 80.

Riddle 80

One of the many riddles without a direct analogue[96], Riddle 80 is a narrative riddle, so the water does not speak herself. There is no clear speaker, and the water is referred to as *wiht*, a living creature[97], which may provide a sense of objectivity to the poem and a more authoritative voice than using the common first person technique seen in many riddles, as it provides distance and credibility, because someone else has seen this "creature" and has returned to report about it.[98] The poet uses both anthropomorphic and familiar classifications to describe water, mainly with the female characterization of mother. The valkyrie attributes aiding in creating more common ground between water and female in this riddle include the valkyrie's ferocity and greed combined with a lady-like persona filled with beauty and well adorned. Unfortunately, many lines of the text are damaged, particularly at the end, which makes being ultimately conclusive quite difficult, but the riddles are not necessarily meant to be completely conclusive even when presented in complete form. The riddle reads as follows:

One creature is wonderfully born upon the earth,	An with is on earþan wundrum acenned
Wild and fierce; has a strong course,	hreoh ond reþe; hafað ryne strongne,
Grimly roars, and fares by ground.	grimme grymetað, ond be grunde fareð.

[96] Williamson*, Feast*, p. 212.

[97] Afros, p. 431, notes that gender and noun usage does not make for good clues for interpretation in the Exeter Riddles, because the poet appeared to use genders interchangeably, without much notice to consistency with gender or syntax. Eirka von Erhardt-Siebold in "Old English Riddle No. 39: Creature Death" *PMLA* 61 (1946): 910-915 argues that the use of the word with is an important distinction, mainly because it immediately connotes a living creature versus an inanimate object. This is with Krapp and Dobbie's numbering and is not the same Riddle 39 that is discussed below. Also, Serjeantson, p. 46, believes that *wiht* contains supernatural connotations and illustrates the many times *wiht* is placed with supernatural elements such as *yfel*.

[98] Howard, p. 64. Howard posits that the riddler may want to give a sense that the authoritative voice is the voice of God describing an aspect of creation in a more complex way than mortals would initially see.

	She is mother to many great creatures.	Modor is monigra mærra wihta.
5	Beautifully traveling, she hastens ever;	Fæger ferende fundað æfre;
	Deep is her grasp. To no others may she	neol is nearograp. Nænig oþrum mæg
	Make known her appearance, words and manner,	wlite ond wisan wordum gecyþan,
	How various are power wherever kinds,	hu mislic biþ mægen þara cynna,
	Ancient creations; father all watched over,	fyrn forðgesceaft; fæder ealle bewat,
10	Beginning and end, as well as son,	or ond ende, swylce an sunu,
	Great Creator's child through * * *	mære meotudes bearn þurh[….]ed
	_____	ond þæt hyhste mæ[….]es [.]æ[….
	_____	……] dyre cræft[..
	_____	……
15	_____	.]onne hy aweorp[……..]
	_____	..]þe ænig þara [……..]
	_____	….]fter ne mæg [……..
	_____	….] oþer cynn eorþan [….
	Nor may another kind on earth there than was before	……] þonne ær wæs
20	Beautiful and pleasant * * *	wlitig ond wynsum [……..]
	She is mother to mighty power,	Biþ sio modder mægene eacen,
	Wonderfully supported, food loaded,	wundrum bewreþed, wistum gehladen,
	Hoards adorned, dear to heroes.	hordum gehroden, hæleþum dyre.
	Power is increased, might manifested;	Mægen bið gemiclad, meaht gesweotlad
25	Beautiful is honored by wondrous things.	wlite biþ geweorþad wuldornyttingum.
	A pleasant, glorious gem is resting proud upon her,	Wynsum wuldorgimm wloncum getenge,
	Yearning after purity and bountiful,	clægeorn bið ond cystig,
	she is from mighty skill;	cræft eacen;
	She is dear to happy, useful to poor,	hio biþ eadgum leof, earmum getæse,
	Free, strange. Bold and strong,	freolic, sellic. Fromast ond swiþost,
30	Greediest and greedier - she treads ground -	gifrost ond grædgost— grundbedd trideþ--
	That which was growing under the sky	þæs þe under lyfte aloden wurde
	And seen through the eyes of mankind's children.	ond ælda bearn eagum sawe.
	So that her glory weaves	Swa þæt wuldor wifeð
	the world children's might,	worldbearna mægen,
	Although to clever lives * * *	þeah þe ferþum gleaw * * *
35	By the wise man's spirit wonders of the multitude.	mon mode snottor mengo wundra.
	This one is harder than Earth, wiser than heroes,	Hrusan bið heardra, hæleþum frodra,
	Readier than gifts, dearer than gems;	geofum biðgearora, gimmum deorra;
	It adorns the world, increases fruits,	worulde wlitigað, wæstmum tydreð,
	Extinguishes sin; * * *	firene dwæsceð; * * *
40	Often outside it enshrouds as one clothing	oft utan beweorpeð anre þecene,
	Wonderfully adorned over people,	wundrum gewlitegad geond werþeode,
	That amazes men across the earth,	þæt wafiað weras ofer eorþan,
	That may push many * * *	þæt magon micle ….]sceafte.
	Is strewn by stones, * * * by storms,	Biþ stanum bestreþed, stormum ….]
45	Timbered wall * * *	....]len ….]timbred weall,
	_____	þrym[……..]ed
	Touches ground	hrusan hrineð, h[……..
	_____	……]etenge;
	_____	oft searwum biþ [……..
50	By death no longer feels,	……..] deaðe ne feleð,
	_____	þeah þe [……..
	_____	….]du hreren, hrif wundigen,
	_____	[…….]risse.

	Word-hoard reveal to heroes * * *	Hordword onhlid hæleþum ge[….
55	* * * reveal words	….]wreoh, wordum geopena,
	How various are the powers there.[99]	hu mislic sy mægen þara cy[….]

Common ground between water and female appears in readily apparent instances throughout the poem so that it is clear the vehicle of this riddle is female. The first concrete instance connecting water to female is the familial association with motherhood. Water is called "mother" in line four above. She is even associated with motherhood in the sense of mothering a "great" brood in the same line. The word used for "great" in this line, *mærre*, connotes nobleness, excellence and magnificence[100], which is very much in keeping with the stereotypical mother of a hero, as discussed earlier. The idea of motherhood appears again in line twenty one, and again the association is that she is mother to something "mighty." In this case, the word used is *mægen*, which connotes more of a symptom of power and force than great in the sense of noble or famous. The subtle gap between the water and the standard Anglo-Saxon mother would be that this mother is mother to many great *wihts*, or creatures, instead of only one type of being.[101] The supernatural connotations are less confusing when the valkyrie image is brought into the equation, as the valkyrie qualities of determining fate and other magical abilities help create an understanding of a powerful woman. That alone, though, would not be enough of a gap

[99] The full text riddle translations are my own, based on the Williamson texts. The * * * reveals words Williamson could not transcribe or interpret from the manuscript. The _____ reveals whole lines of unintelligible words, or lines with only a word or two that cannot help with meaning because the context is lost.

[100] To get further connotations of words in translation and analysis, Jane Roberts, Christian Kay, and Lynne Grundy's *A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) was consulted.

[101] Williamson believes that this idea of water as being the producer of many creatures may have come from Pliny, a popular read in this time period, who stated in his *Natural History*:

> There is nothing stronger than water – it is lord of all things. It swallows land, destroys fire, climbs into the land where it rules, choking the life-quickening spirit with its blanket of clouds, shaking out thunderbolts and waging its own civil war in the world. What can be stranger than water standing in the sky? Not only can it rise, it can suck up schools of fish, even stones, lifting a weight not its own. Water also falls back to earth to become the source and spring of all things. (Williamson, *Feast*, p. 212)

What is interesting to note, is that Pliny portrays water as a "lord" with more male associations. The riddler may have been inspired by Pliny's perspective, but certainly developed his own perspective.

to force the reader to expand the idea of female, so the reader must proceed through the poem. Much damage at the end of the poem makes it hard to discern if the poet was going to refer to water as mother again at the end of the poem to create a frame-like structure.

The deep grasp/clutch of the water in line six of the riddle also benefits from an understanding of valkyrie characteristics. The word, *nearograp*, connotes a close grasp and taking hold of something. The emphasis is closeness and depth, something implying a hold close to the chest, without malice implied. One is reminded of the cuckoo riddle, Riddle 7 cited above, with the foster mother nurturing a new brood. Here there is no evidence of savagery, as the word is to grasp not seize, such as *clyppan*, or grasp violently (*nydgrap*) or grasp with hostility, as if to seize a foe (*feondgrap*). This is reminiscent of the valkyrie grasping the slain from battle and taking the hero to Woden's hall. The term deep continues the widening of the gap between woman and water because the depth refers to the ocean, the place where water runs deepest and remains a place of mystery. In fact, one of the names of the waves, the daughters of Ran, Germanic goddess of the sea, a fierce figure capturing sailors in her net, is Greep (Old Norse for Grasper).[102]

As the riddle progresses, the woman's qualities become more complex and seem to contrast with each other at times, as the riddle moves from a deep grasp to a creature who yearns for purity and extinguishes sin, which appears antithetical. As the tenor of the riddle, water can serve all of these purposes. Its yearning for purity can reflect the use of water to cleanse, both in the healing sense and in the sense of baptism. In both cases, water is used to make someone more pure than before, either spiritually or physically. Water as a device for extinguishing sin can appear in the form of ordeal, as water was used in more than one way to prove guilt or innocence

[102] Edith Whitehurst Williams "Hwa mec stæΔþe? The Quest for Certainty in the Old English Storm Riddle" *Medieval Perspective* 14 (1999): 265. The "Grasper" wave seems to also play a part in the "Storm" riddle.

of a crime. One valkyrie connection is the valkyrie ability to choose the slain and determine who would fall in battle. Another piece of common ground arises from women in positions such as abbess, or spiritual mother, a position of much influence. How she would extinguish sin remains vague, as the text does not elaborate on what or how this process of extinguishing sin takes place, but instead is part of a listing of details that include adorning the world, increasing fruits, and being ready with gifts (37-39). All of the other aspects of this list are consistent with the picture of the Anglo-Saxon lady. This position, of a woman seen to be yearning for purity, could be another source of common ground, as it contains both the essence of nobility of the lady and the spiritual component, so in this section of the riddle, many images of "female" are needed to create understanding.

As "woman" is the vehicle for this riddle, the riddle continues to employ "female" in its references to beauty and adornments. Water travels beautifully in line five. The word, *fæger*, connotes not only beauty or fairness and also does not connote any source of the beauty other than from the object itself. If the poet had wanted to associate beauty with another divine source, it could have been *heofonwlitig*. If the poet wanted to create an earth-bound beauty, *woruldfægernes* would have been a better choice. Instead, beauty stands alone, as water does in this riddle, independent. Indeed, water is even referred to as free in line twenty-nine. As in many medieval texts, to portray the creature as beautiful also connotes a more positive response in the reader, versus the hideousness of a troll, for example. Beautiful is noted again in line twenty, connected to pleasant, but damage to the text makes it unclear as to whether or not this refers to water.

Also connected to the more standard presentations of female is her association with weaving, a reference which includes both human and valkyrie characteristics. There is a gap here

as well, though, as this weaving is not actual embroidery or cloth making. Instead, water is said to weave the might of the world's children in line thirty-three, which connects water to the very female supernatural figures representing fate, such as the Norns of Germanic mythology or the valkyries in the sense that they decide the fate of the heroes in battle. Here, however, the gap is not unexpected, as water has a natural force to it that all can recognize. Yet this weaving connotation segues the analysis to further ambiguities within the poem that cause the reader to question how much he or she knows about water and the idea of "female."

Woven between the standard image of "female" lies characteristics that cannot be understood without including the qualities of the valkyrie in the perception of what is "female," beginning with the word "fierce." Water is noted as wild and fierce in line two of the poem, right before the connection with motherhood discussed above. Accompanied with this sense of fierceness is the idea that she roars grimly in line three while she fares by ground. All of these terms seem opposite to the presentation of the Anglo-Saxon lady described above. Yet, this is too much just to create the paradox needed for the riddle. The gaps needed to "get" the differences between water and female need to be smaller, like the ones noted above. This demands the reader reconsider how much words like "fierce," "wild," and "grimly roars" can be applied to the noble lady.

The word used for fierce, *reþe*, further anthropomorphizes the water from the *wiht* it is referred to in the first line, because it is a fierceness that describes living things. The choice word also reflects strength but not unnecessary force. This is not *sliþan*, which would imply savageness, or *unatemedlic*, a violent man. Even *grimme* furthers the notion of fierce, but not savageness, as *frēcne*, which does have a savage element to the word. To include a larger presence of the valkyrie would certainly narrow the gap between what is expected of "female"

and how water is described, as the valkyries are noted to be fierce creatures, but not savage. While not listed in any Old English corpus by name, their Old Norse names included Hrist (shaker), Raðgrið (counsel-truce), Sigrdrifa (victory urger), Skjalddis (shield dis), and Brynhild (bright battle).[103] Despite the kennings for names, even the more individual valkyrie figures such as Brynhild were renown for strength and ferocity.

Accompanying ferocity in the traits that are seemingly not a match for "female" is the trait of greed. Line thirty states that water is greediest and greedier along with being bold and strong. Greed is seemingly the antithesis of the qualities of a lady of the hall. Greed implies hoarding the jewels and rings that are supposed to be moved about in a gifting culture. The implication of greediness in the picture of the female seems antithetical to the lines mentioned previously when she adorned the world (38). The generosity of water is also noted when it is said that water loads food (22), adorns hoards (23), and useful to the poor or wretched (28).

The first time the term is used, the word in the text, *gifrost*, implies greed in the sense of desire, rapacity and ravenousness. While the idea of coveting is certainly there with rapacity, more present is the idea of desire and the idea of insatiability. The second word, *grædgost*, also has connotations of desire, eagerness, and eating a large amount. Here one envisions not necessarily the idea of coveting merely to keep something, but having an insatiable desire for something and/or an insatiable need to consume.

Common ground must be met between what is seen as "female" and water with the trait of greed, either in the form of coveting something, having great desire, or feeling an insatiable need to consume in order to maintain the vehicle/tenor relationship contained within this riddle. Water can be seen in all of these aspects, with the tide bringing back to the ocean bits gathered

[103] Andy Orchard *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (New York: Cassell, 1997), p. 193-194.

from the shore, undertows pulling objects (and people) into the depths, and floods and other strong natural forces moving into the shore and beyond. Where the aspect of "female" is, however, is harder to determine, which makes it harder to find the gap in the riddle and appreciate the differences. Earlier discussions of the riddles show presentation of female desire from the actions of women characters. From the Germanic mythology we have the figure of Ran, a greedy goddess of the deep who collects and pulls many into her wide nets, but there is no evidence of Ran in Anglo-Saxon literature. The valkyrie brings more to this picture as well. The valkyries were seen by some of the scavengers of the battlefield, riding wolves and choosing the slain much like the wolves and ravens popular in Anglo-Saxon battle imagery.

By giving the valkyrie image more prominence in what can be seen as "female," the common ground between woman and water is greater and the gap narrows to an understandable level. Restoring the valkyrie image advances an image of a woman with ferocity, desire, and independent strength to what defines "female." The valkyrie lessens the gap of meaning, showing how a fierce female can also be a mother and lady. With this, the water riddle becomes more internally consistent to the main vehicle that is woman.

Riddle 39

Riddle 80 provided an image of "female" that expanded the portrayal of a woman from lady, wife, and mother to fierce grasper, desirous lady, and strong mother, which suggests inclusion of a strong and fierce woman, a valkyrie, as necessary in building a complete understanding. Riddle 39, a condensed version of Riddle 80, contains similar imagery. The idea of motherhood begins this riddle as it does with Riddle 80. Riddle 39 advances the valkyrie image with the references of "darkness," a word connoting both a dark shade and evil. It reads:

* * * renewed,	* * * edniwu;
That is mother of many kinds	þæt is modder monigra cynna,
Of the best, of the darkest,	þæs slestan, þæs sweartestan,
Of the dearest of the children of men	þæs deorestan þæs þe dryhta bearn
To possess joy over the earth's surface.	ofer foldan sceat to gefean agen.
We may not at all live on earth	Ne magon we her in eorþan owiht lifgan
Except that we use what her children make.	nymðe we brucan þæs þa bearn doð.
This is to be considered by each of the nations,	Þæt is to geþencanne þeoda gehwylcum,
By learned men, what creature she is.	wisfæstum werum, hwæt seo with sy.

As with Riddle 80, the tenor of the riddle is water with the main vehicle of the riddle being a woman, specifically a mother. The mother image in this riddle also comes early in the riddle, in line two. The common ground between water and mother, that both produce and nurture creation, remains consistent with the riddle above and with the standard ideals around mother hood. Again, the gap lies with the nature of offspring. As in Riddle 80, water is the mother of many kinds, which marks a distinction from a typical woman mother.

Another, consistent image with "female" is the concept that water is dear, treasured, and necessary. Line six of the poem clearly states that it is not possible to live without water and what she produces for humanity. The word *brucen*, use, connotes eating and drinking as the method of using, versus manipulating an object like a tool.

This gives the reader a clue to the true tenor of the riddle, but also connotes the association with female and preparation of food and delivering of drink, as valkyries are depicted in both archaeology and literature as bearing drink, from the evidence noted above.

In line three of the riddle, the apparent contradiction begins to widen between woman and water, as the object is not only described as a mother of many kinds, she is a mother of the "best" and the "darkest" and the "dearest." While "best" and "dearest" does not pose a problem, as water is certainly necessary, the word "darkest" in between the positive words creates pause. The word, *sweartestan*, not only means dark but also carries the connotation of evil. Water can certainly be perceived as the cause of best and worst. From nurturing springs to hurricanes, water

is associated with great need and much anxiety. Connecting women to the idea of darkness, a darkness connoting evil, seems contradictory, too contradictory to hold up the metaphor. An image of "female" must exist in Anglo-Saxon culture which includes an element of "darkness" for this riddle to remain viable, and the valkyrie does this.

Valkyries, in Old English glosses, were connected with darkness, and seen as similar to the Furies of other mythologies and creatures filled with much wrath and evil intent, as noted in the glossed evidence above. While this was not their only connotation, as the Weland myth and other instances noted above prove, a valkyrie image contains what is both dear and dark. With the valkyrie figure having the complexity to hold dark and dear, the gap in the riddle narrows to a more reasonable and believable limit. For if the valkyrie image is included, what is "female" now expands to include what is "best" and "darkest" and "dearest." Then the vehicle of woman can sustain the riddle.

Riddle 31

As with Riddles 80 and 39, Riddle 31 pertains to water but in its frozen state as an iceberg. Riddle 31 continues the previous connections to motherhood and also revives the elements of ferocity seen in Riddle 80. Riddle 31 continues to advance the need for inclusion of the valkyrie image because it includes battle imagery and the act of cursing. Riddle 31 reads:

	A creature comes to sail after the wondrous wave;	Wiht cwom æfter wege wrætlicu liþan;
	Beautifully called from the throat to land,	cymlic from ceolan cleopode to londe,
	Sounded loudly – her laughter was gruesome,	hlinsade hlude—hleahtor wæs gryrelic,
	Fearful to the countryside. Swords were sharp;	egesful on earde . Ecge wæron scearpe;
5	She was fierce, slow to battle,	wæs hio hetegrim, hilde to sæne,
	Bitter of battlements. She digs into ship walls	biter beadoweorca. Bordweallas grof
	Plundering hard. A hateful curse she bound!	heardhiþende. Heterune bond!
	She spoke cunningly	Sægde searocraftig
	about the nature of herself:	ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft:
	My mother is a kind of woman	Is min modor mægða cynnes
10	Of the dearest from which my daughter,	þæs deorestan þæt is dohtor min

Pregnant, has grown, so that it is known to men	eacen uploden; swa þæt is ældum cuþ,
Among the folk, that she on the earth must	firum on folce, þæt seo on foldan sceal
Stand in every land by each kindness.	on ealra londa gehwam lissum stondan.

Common ground in the standard sense of "female" is immediately present. The creature is known to call out to land beautifully in line two. This is resonant with the woman's use of voice both to join people together and verbalize the mourning of a community as noted above. Calling out in sound, as if in song, gives the impression of the lady, especially with the sense of beauty.

As well as beautiful, the iceberg places itself within a matriarchal structure, as water has been consistently been presented as a mother in Riddles 80 and 39. In line nine, the water is given voice, which is unique to the water riddles thus far, and states that her mother is her daughter. It is a contradictory statement at best, but understandable when the iceberg solution is proposed and the statement is placed in perspective of the water cycle. As Barley states, this gap of understanding shows that "physical processes are reversible but not physiological ones."[104] The mother-daughter connection establishes that both figures are female, solidifying the vehicle as female in all of its forms.

Water becomes more and more valkyrie-like the more it becomes like ice and less like liquid. Not only is she also seen as fierce, which was attributed to water in Riddle 80 and discussed fully above, which is valkyrie-like, the iceberg has a harder, frozen edge and displays gruesome laughter as she bitterly perforates ship walls. Here the more negative connotations associated with valkyrie become more apparent. There is no sense of the valkyrie as ale-maiden and protector here. Instead, the valkyrie figure shows the shrieking battle maiden who inspires fear as she flies into battle and chooses the fate of the winners and heroes.

[104] Barley, p. 162. Barley uses this riddle to illustrate the riddler's use of paradox as the negation of a truism.

The iceberg's power to curse and bind, as seen in line eight, also provides common ground with the supernatural powers of the valkyrie. In the minds of popular culture throughout the Middle Ages, including the Anglo-Saxon period, cursing was seen as an effective tool against a variety of concerns such as theft and poor treatment.[105] Cursing appeared to be more prevalent in women than men, according to Thomas, because it reflected a lack of ability to enact change in other ways. Because women were seen to be powerless in ways other than using words, her words carried more weight and, at times, were believed to have a magical ability.[106] Often curses were uttered by women who felt ostracized or disenfranchised in some way, because the curses would stem from a feeling of frustration at her lack of ability to do anything else within the bounds of society.[107] The valkyrie figure is already outside the bounds of society, as she lives not as human or goddess, not princess or ale maiden. Instead, her power resonates from being in this liminal place, a place where her words would be weighty, as in "Sigrdrifismal," when the valkyrie Sigrdrifa teaches Sigurd the mysteries she knows, which include the power of her words. By bringing forward the valkyrie image, the fierceness, sense of bitterness, and ability to curse becomes included in what can be "female," and the gap between woman and ice narrows, making what is left of the riddle is easier for the reader to solve.

Riddle 66

Riddle 31 includes battle imagery, which clearly connects to the valkyrie. The other "iceberg" riddle, Riddle 66, removes the battle imagery from the short text of only three lines

[105] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 604. Thomas details the magical practices and purposes for magic, then explores how changes in religion, society, economics and law caused a lessening belief in magical practices.

[106] Ibid., p. 675.

[107] Ibid.

and instead focuses on the power of transformation. Its use of "wonder" connects this riddle to Riddle 80 and the image of the valkyrie. Riddle 66 is another narrative poem, where the speaker of the poem sees something wondrous. Like the other riddles above, this riddle uses anthropomorphism and the vehicle of "female" to disguise the tenor. It reads:

I beheld the creature traveling on the way;	Ic þa with geseah on weg feran;
She was greatly adorned by wonders.	heo wæs wrætlice wundrum gegierwed
Wonder turned into wave:	Wundor wearð on wege:
Water became bone.	wæter wearð to bane.

Looking at both iceberg riddles together, the iceberg seems to have different treatments. Here, the iceberg characteristics focus on a more standard view. She is "adorned," as most noble ladies of the time would have been. The gap appears in the objects adorning the female figure, as she is adorned by wonders. The word, *wundrum*, appears many times throughout the riddles involving water and means wondrous or marvelous, which also connotes a strange and possibly terrible origin. The word carries an interesting mixture of awe and admiration, versus other choices that would have celebrated just the marvelous, or even hint at miraculous, such as *wræclic*. The poet also, through word choice, does not connote a sense of mystery, such as in the word *rynsic*, or something unheard of, such as in *ungefræglice*.

In this riddle, the word *wundrum* helps emphasize the gap, showing that this female figure demands a mixture of admiration and awe, just as her wonders that adorn her would indicate. These wonders then turn into wave, which would be the positive aspect of water as a nurturing and sustaining element. This positive aspect then turns into ice, called bone, another anthropomorphizing feature, which connotes hardness. The ice contains the more negative aspect of the water, as an iceberg could be deadly, as could an ice storm.

Looking back at all four poems involving water, *wundrum* or a word stemming from it occurs six times, four times in Riddle 80 and twice in Riddle 66. This word, encapsulating both

wondrous and terrible, hints of the existence of the valkyrie. No other female figure contains both extremes so well, incorporating fierceness and nobility, supernatural powers and beautiful adornments. The valkyrie image, because of all it contains, helps narrow the gap and expand the common ground between the vehicle of woman and tenor of water in some form, making the riddle easier to solve for the reader.

Riddle 5

Another riddle also benefits from the inclusion of the valkyrie in the idea of female, and that is the riddle of the "whistling swan," or Riddle 5. The valkyrie-swan connection, as stated before, is more obvious, as valkyries in poems and stories have turned into swans or used swan feathers to fly. There is also an obvious connection between swans and water, as that is their home. It is the only one of the bird poems with such an obvious water connection. The riddle for the "whistling swan" reads:

	My dress becomes silent	Hrægl min swigað
	when I tread upon the ground	þonne ic hrusan trede
	Or inhabit that house or swim in water.	Oþþe þa wic buge oþþe wado drefe.
	At times over heroes' dwelling I lift up	Hwilum mec ahebbað ofer hæleþa byht
	My ornaments and this high sky	hyrste mine ond þeos hea lyft,
5	And then I bear far and wide cloud's strength	ond mec þonne wide wolcna strengu
	Over the folk. My ornaments	ofer folc byreð. Frætwe mine
	Whistle loudly and sound melodiously,	swogað hlude ond swinsiað,
	Sing clearly, when I am not near	torhte singað, þonne ic getenge ne beom
	To flood and land, a traveling guest.	flode ond foldan, ferende gæst.

If indeed swan is the solution, the riddler is already demanding that the reader think outside of the typical perspective, because *swan* is a masculine noun. This is an imaginative riddle type, with a first person voice and an anthropomorphized subject and female disguise. The image of female is apparent from line one with the mention of a dress. This immediately establishes common ground with that of a woman. The gap, however, is also established early

with the references to the gown staying silent as the speaker swims in water in line two and as the speaker flies over the homes of heroes in line three.

The speaker also refers to ornaments, which also connects with standard views of what is "female." Here, the ornaments lift with the speaker as she flies and make noise, whistling over the folk and making melodious sounds. The ornaments, combined with the use of voice-like qualities in the sense of singing, portray qualities of the Anglo-Saxon woman of the hall. Adornment shows the speaker is likely a noble lady and reflecting wealth in her movements and dress. Flight by use of the adornments is directly tied to song in the riddle of the swan[108], and the description of the feathers as *frætwe*, a highly wrought gem metalwork, and *hyrste*, which connotes richly decorated armor, also becomes more understandable when the battle-clad image of the valkyrie is included in the idea of what is free and "female."

The choice of the verb *singan*, however, begins to broaden the gap. *Singan* implies not only singing but also recitation, like the incantation of a charm. Here the hint of supernatural qualities of voice subtly underscore the already act of flight and musical ornaments. Another connotation of *singan*, is to sing with the voice of a bird.

Another verb used for the ornaments is to "sound," *swinsian*, which connotes making a type of melody. This is combined in the same line with the ornaments' ability to whistle loudly, *swogan*, which implies a sound of a roaring, rushing, noisy sound, combined with the word *hlude*, meaning loud, which only adds volume to an already loud verb. The loud, melodious roar with a sense of incantation from the voice of a bird seems contradictory at best, but when the valkyrie image is included in the mix of what is "female," a woman who can shapeshift into a bird, both sounds can come from the same creature. Indeed, the idea of various sounds showing

[108] Dinapoli, 434. He connects the sound of flight to the "ripple" of silver chain mail.

shape shifting as well as the with changeability of the swan has been recognized before.[109] The valkyrie can roar in battle or sing in a hall, and it is fitting for her to do either. That the swan incorporates both sounds reflects all that is within the power of the valkyrie.

The last line portrays the image as a "guest." The word, *gast*, connotes not only a guest, but can also be used to discuss a soul or spirit, as in the modern idea of a ghost. *Gast* typically pertains to spirits or souls that appear in a visible form.[110] This is also seen in Riddle 41, in which the soul and body is described as a guest and host.[111] As the valkyrie is a supernatural figure, the reference to her as some kind of spirit would be appropriate, and not as large a gap as a flying woman. Overall, the valkyrie image adds much to the "swan" riddle, narrowing the gap between concepts of "female" and "swan" by producing images of flying, battle clad women who can shapeshift into the form of a swan.

In all, the valkyrie image brings ferocity, flight, and a place in battle for women. This expands our view of women from the more conventional roles of mother and wife and creates a view of women that more completely serves as the vehicle of the fiddles above. Because of the presence of valkyrie-like qualities in the riddles described above create a place for the valkyrie, specifically within the context of the riddles of the Exeter Book. This valkyrie presence in the riddles above leads to the possible solution of an ambiguous riddle, Riddle 72, with valkyrie as the tenor.

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[109] Ibid., p. 434. Dinapoi does not suggest the valkyrie image, as his focus is looking at echoes or signs of a preceding oral culture.

[110] Serjeantson, p. 50.

[111] Williams, "Quest," p.264. Williams also notes the guest/ghost possibility in Riddle 1, when a "ship of guests" is described.

A RIDDLE SOLVED: RIDDLE 72 AND THE VALKYRIE

Riddle 72 has been deemed "uncertain" by Williamson and others, mainly because the scholars cannot agree on a set solution that fits all of the details within the riddle. Possible solutions have included water, siren, soul, ship, sun and swan.[112] I believe that "valkyrie" as a solution to this riddle contains an answer that addresses all elements of the riddle, thus making it a credible tenor. Because so few of the Exeter riddles have a classical origin, it seems more likely in this case to look within the Germanic culture and mythos for a solution than a more classical one. It is said that a true solution to a riddle is correct if it accounts for all elements in the text and corresponds to some aspect of life familiar to the Anglo-Saxon riddler and reader.[113] The valkyrie fits all of the details and could easily be a possibly for the tenor of this riddle. The riddle reads as:

I was a young maiden, a grey-haired queen	Ic wæs fæmne geong, feaxhar cwene,
And a unique, glorious hero in a certain time;	ond ænlic rinc on ane tid;
I flew with birds and swam among waves,	fleah mid fuglum ond on flode swom,
Dove under wave dead with fish	deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum,
And stepped on earth – had a living spirit.	ond on foldan stop—hæfde ferð cwicu.

Because of the connections with the valkyrie both to the water riddles and the riddle of the "whistling swan," with the valkyrie's ferocity, battle connections, and shape shifting ability, I believe that valkyrie should be added to the list of possible solutions to Riddle 72.

The young maiden and grey-haired queen can both be valkyrie images.[114] They reflect the valkyrie as a noble figure and as an alluring figure, one someone such as Weland would fall

[112] Marcella McCarthy in "A Solution to Riddle 72 in the Exeter Book" *The Review of English Studies* 44 (1993): 204-210 explains why some solutions, such as ship, do not fit all of the clues without being forced. She posits the solution of sun, because it has masculine and feminine terms in Old English and is described as a warrior. The sun also has the sense of renewal.

[113] A.N. Doane "Three Old English Implement Riddles: Reconsiderations of Numbers 4, 49, and 73" *Modern Philology* 84 (1987): 243-257. Doane believes the poet is at fault if this cannot be the case, and that every element of the riddle needs to be perceived as a clue.

[114] Both Williamson texts cite this list of possible solutions in the index.

in love with as detailed in his story, the story of the master smith who fell in love with a valkyrie as noted above. Line two, however, has been more difficult for readers, as the "hero" term has a masculine gender. Here is where gender creates a gap for the reader, as a woman cannot be a man.

The valkyrie have also been called by nouns with masculine gender by historians such as Saxo,[115] because the valkyries perform duties more associated with what is considered "male," such as participating in combat against heroes and warriors. The riddler may have felt that referring to valkyries with a male noun would be a distinct hint, making a gap from what is typically expected of women, to incite and mourn, and what is not directly typical in Anglo-Saxon society. The female of this riddle shows strong contrast, for example, to the woman of the fox/badger riddle noted above who fights only when it is clear that no aid is coming. Instead, this is a female figure fighting because she is stepping away from what is expected of women and moving into the world seemingly reserved for men, the world of heroes.

A valkyrie, as one who can shapeshift into the form of a swan, remains consistent as the riddle moves from hero status to a figure who can fly and swim in line three. "Swan" was already a proposed solution to this riddle, as noted above, so the other form of the swan, the valkyrie, would be a next step in solving the puzzle.

Valkyries, supernatural creatures, associated with heroes and men, are connected to the water through their form as swans and, indirectly, through their connection as those who serve drink to fallen heroes in Valhalla. The final line of the riddle moves from the water to the earth, as the creature steps onto the ground and is said to have a living spirit. Because of the association with water and the various forms this creature can take, the answer of "sirens" has been a

[115] Damico, p. 179 notes this "ambisexual" element to the valkyrie image may be because the figure is seen, at times, to have the body of a woman with the soul of a man or warrior.

purported solution to Riddle 72. The valkyrie is a better fit because of the heroic element the valkyrie brings and because it is more consistent with the native Germanic mythology.

Through the riddles, the valkyrie-like qualities of "female" appear several times, bolstering the valkyrie image from random allusion to a more prominent place in the definition of "female," standing beside lady and mother. From this new understanding, a rereading of poems lying textually alongside the riddles in the *Exeter Book*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, follows. With each poem, the female speaker benefits from the valkyrie presence in the Anglo-Saxon perception of "female."

MOVING BEYOND THE RIDDLES: HOW UNDERSTANDING THE VALKYRIE CAN EXPAND THE FEMALE IN *WULF AND EADWACER* AND *THE WIFE'S LAMENT*

Wulf and Eadwacer and *The Wife's Lament* comprise the only two poems in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Corpus with a female voice. The female speaker of both poems conveys much sorrow regarding her state, yet with each poem there is something that the valkyrie image can add, producing a deeper understanding of each work. As *The Wife's Lament* already has much scholarship detailing valkyrie-like connections with the speaker of the poem, I will merely extend the arguments in existence.[116] Less work in this area has been done with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and I hope to offer a new interpretation of this poem, using the valkyrie as one of the main characters, showing how this resolves some issues within this enigmatic text by illustrating how a valkyrie as speaker sheds light into the ambiguities of relationships between characters, identification of characters, and the role of the female speaker of the poem, including the source of her sense of exile.

The Wife's Lament contains language of a lord/retainer relationship, the language a lord and thane would use to describe a relationship more than husband and wife would. A valkyrie, as a retainer of sorts in Woden's hall helps clarify how a woman can serve in a hall as a figure other than wife or mother. While the poem is called *The Wife's Lament* by scholars (like the riddles it has no title), the valkyrie figure illustrates how a wife can also expect the same conditions in a tribe from a lord as any thane, specifically pertaining to needs of sustenance and safety.

Both female speakers of *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* find themselves geographically separated from the ones they love. Both rely on the use of first person pronouns

[116] William C. Johnson "*The Wife's Lament* as Death Song" in Martin Green's *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983): 69-81.

to bond with the audience in a way unique to the female voice.[117] In *The Wife's Lament*, the female speaker has been outcast by her husband's kin after they sent her husband away, to isolate him as well. I translate the poem as:

	I utter this riddle full sorrowful,	Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
	My self's journey. I may say	minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,
	What misery I suffered, after I rose up,	hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox,
	New or old, not at all more than now.	niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.
5	Always I endured torment, on my wretched way.	A ic wite wonn minra wræcsiþa.
	First my lord departed from his people here	ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
	Over wide waves; I cried out at dawn	ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
	Where my prince's lands should have been.	hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
	When I traveled to depart – seek out service,	ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
10	A lordless wretch for my woeful need.	wineleas wræcca, for minre weaþearfe.
	This man's kin began to think that to divide us,	Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
	That we two would be apart in the worldly realm	þurh dyrne geþoht, þæt hy todælden unc,
	To live most loathly, and I grieved.	þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice
		lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade
15	My lord commanded me	Het mec hlaford
	take a dwelling in the woods	min herheard niman,
	I owned in this place few dear	ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
	Trusted friends. Therefore is my spirit sorrowful	holdra freonda. Forþon is min hyge geomor,
	When I found a suitable man for me,	ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde,
	Unhappy, sad spirited,	heardsæligne, hygegeomorne,
20	Mind hidden, a murder considered.	mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne.
	With blithe bearing, full often we boasted	Bliþe gebæro ful oft wit beotedan
	That nothing but death would separate us,	þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana
	Nothing else; afterwards that is reversed,	owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
	It is now as if it never was,	is nu swa hit no wære
25	Our love. I shall far and near	freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
	Endure my loved one's enmity.	mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.
	A person commanded me in a grove in the woods,	Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe
	Under an oak tree in the earth-grave.	under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
	Old is this earth-hall,	Eald is þes eorðsele,
	I am entirely filled with longing.	eal ic eom oflongad,
30	There is a dim valley, high mountain,	sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
	Bitter cities, grown over with briars,	bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne,
	Dwelling without joy. They often cruelly seize me	wic wynna leas.
		Ful oft mec her wraþe begeat
	With my lord's departure. Friends are on earth,	fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan,
	Dear living, grave guards,	leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
35	Then I walk alone in the dawn	þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
	Under the oak tree throughout these graves.	under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
	There I must sit the summer-long day,	þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg,
	There I may mourn my wretched journey,	þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas,
	Many hardships; therefore I may not ever	earfoþa fela; forþon ic æfre ne mæg
40	Give rest to my sorrow,	þære modceare minre gerestan,
	Not entirely of that longing	ne ealles þæs longaþes

[117] Belanoff, p. 200. She cites this as one of the reasons for classifying both poems as frauenlieder, a type of Germanic poem that focuses on a female voice expressing suffering for the separation by a man.

	which happened to me in this life.	þe mec on þissum life begeat.
	Always should a young man be sad minded,	A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
	Thought with a hard heart, also must have	heard heortan geþoht, swylce habban sceal
	Blithe bearing, likewise when sorrow	bliþe gebæro, eac þon breostceare,
45	A tumult of sorrows, should belong to himself	sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
	All his world joy should be a wide foe.	eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
	Far from folk lands my lover sits	feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
	Under a stony hill storm covered with hoar frost,	under stanhliþe storme behrimed,
	A lord weary minded, water flowing around	wine werigmod, wætre beflowen
50	In a dreary hall. My lord endures	on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
	That great sorrow, he is mindful too often	micle modceare; he gemon to oft
	Of a more joyful dwelling. Woe is that which	wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
	Shall await with longing a dear one.	of langoþe leofes abidan.

Like *Wulf and Eadwacer*, there was no title given to this text in the Exeter manuscript, creating more ambiguities than a translation with the title *The Wife's Lament* on a page would suggest. One ambiguity rests with the identity of the speaker, leading an earlier scholar to title the poem *The Exile's Lament* because of the wretched state described by the speaker.[118] While there is a reference to oaths in line 31, but it is unclear if the "boasts" referred to are actually marriage boasts. If true, the lines that follow appear to reflect a dissolution of that marriage, either through divorce or death.

The portrayal of wretchedness creates an elegiac tone which persists throughout the poem, with much emphasis on sorrow and longing, but the association of the female speaker with a wife seems to be because the condition the female speaker finds herself in seems to be unique to that of a wife, and a peace-pledge wife at that.[119] As mentioned above, the precarious role of peace wife did not always lead to positive results. Even if the woman attempted to forge bonds with her new community or family, that does not always mean that her efforts will be well received. In this case, it appears that her efforts were not well received and that, despite her

[118] Faye Walker-Pelkey "Frige hwæt ic hatte: 'The Wife's Lament' as Riddle" *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 28 (1992): 242-266. Pelkey argues that the title has directed many interpretations of this piece, sometimes in too heavy-handed a way. Pelkey cites Thorpe as the one who originally titled the text *The Exile's Lament*.

[119] Ibid., p. 246.

husband's warm feelings for her, the wife could not win over the rest of his family, as seen in their plot to divide the couple in line eleven.

Despite the hostilities of his family as woman of her hall, the wife would have carried much weight, both in symbolism and in practice, but this does not mean that her work was always successful, or that it is a role the woman wishes to accept. Other evidence supporting her role as peace wife exists, as the speaker cites oath between her and her husband and the hostility of his family can stem from the fact that she is new to the tribe. Historically, her options would have been limited to acquiescing to the situation and accepting the role of peace weaver in a new hall, establishing herself in a more enthusiastic manner and bear children who can help seal the peace between the two families, or be seen as a threat and plan to rebel.[120] Should she decide to rebel or take on her role with little passion, her actions would not only reflection on her, but on her entire family and the tribe that sent her.[121]

The speaker of this text has clearly failed in her task, but the consequences for this action are unclear without an understanding of the lord/retainer relationship and the language reflecting that special bond of understanding, as it reminds the reader of what she *should* have been entitled to expect – namely sustenance and safety. Some scholars believe that the "earth hall" the female speaker has been banished to is actually her grave.[122] The word grave is used several times in the poem, furthering this impression, implying that she has been killed with her words of an enforced confinement. Her grave is near an oak tree, which has connections in Germanic folklore and legend with burial sites.[123] The oak tree could be considered a marker for the liminal space

[120] Jamison, p. 14.

[121] Ibid., p. 29.

[122] Johnson, p. 70.

[123] Ibid., p. 72. Johnson cites that in Germanic tradition that the oak was considered a holy tree.

between this world and the next, noting where her body lies and where she is confined to walk and cry out her cares.

Our speaker also has a connection of movement with the dawn, as she cries out her story at dawn in line 7 and walks alone at dawn in line 35. Dawn, considered a liminal time and a time of change from the actions of the night into what is becoming for the day makes sense as a marker of time for her actions. William Johnson cites Raymond Tripp, Jr., who believed the speaker was a revenant from the ballad tradition, a figure forced to return to the grave at dawn and yearning for a reunion with another figure.[124] With liminal symbols marking time and place, it appears the speaker's voice stems from beyond the grave. Some see her voice as similar to the death song in Germanic legend, particularly Brynhild's death song in which, already dead, the valkyrie reflects on her younger life which includes being forced to be under an oak tree and refers to broken oaths.[125] Others see another parallel between *The Wife's Lament* and the valkyrie Brynhild because the speaker of *The Wife's Lament* curses or employs prophetic words in the final lines in a seeming refusal to live as the expected wife in a foreign hall.[126]

While the female speaker may not be a valkyrie, despite some similarities to the words of a valkyrie[127], she certainly brings to the poem the strength of will of a valkyrie figure. She begins to exert her strength through her voice and the stated expectation that someone will hear and respond to her with her choice of *giedd* to describe her speech.[128] The word *giedd*, while

[124] Ibid., p. 70.

[125] Johnson, p. 69, also sees connections between *The Wife's Lament* and the death songs of Gudrun and Sigrun as well.

[126] Jamison, p. 14.

[127] Desmond notes that one theory has even been posited that she is a minor heathen deity who has been cast off in the conversions and lamenting that she is being forgotten and dismissed.

[128] Chance, p. 84, notes that only twice is this word used specifically for non-public utterances, leading one to believe the implication here is that she is engaging speech with an audience.

meaning poem, riddle or song also carried the implication of mysterious speech.[129] If it is true the woman is dead, her speech qualifies as mysterious, but also prophetic because of the curse she utters at the end. Her assertion that she has the right to tell such a tale, followed by a description of the causes that brought her to this state, ends with a powerful curse, using language to shape her experiences, versus passively enduring her fate.[130] Indeed, rising from her grave at dawn and speaking at all shows that she will not accept her fate with resignation.

With a valkyrie-like voice, the speaker of the poem then recalls her story in very specific language meant to recall the promises and expectations inherent in the lord/retainer relationship. Scholars have noted the terminology used in the text before, but usually to note that referring to a spouse as a hlaford (lord) or leodfruma (prince or chieftain) was an interesting use of diction by the poet, considering the use of female voice, possibly to see herself in heroic terms.[131] Others have furthered this idea, noting that the female speaker is recognizing her subordinate role.[132] Because she has apparently failed in her role as peace pledge, she is removed from the kinship structure of the husband's tribe[133], making her an exile and one longing for reintegration in some form, much like the retainer from other *Exeter Book* elegies like *The Wanderer* seeking out a new oath structure.

Bringing the valkyrie image forward into more prominence, the lord/retainer language becomes more clear. As a retainer of Woden, the valkyrie performs her role in a non-marital position when she plucks heroes from the battlefield or serves drink in Valhalla, Woden's hall.

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[129] Ibid., p. 83.

[130] Barrie Ruth Strauss "Women's Words as Weapons; Speech as Action in The Wife's Lament" in Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe's *Basic Readings in Anglo Saxon England* vol. 3 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994): 335-356.

[131] Chance, p. 91. Chance sees the retainer language and the use of the term *wrecca* for the speaker as significant.

[132] Marilynn Desmond "The Voice of the Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy" *Critical Inquiry* 160 (1990): 572-590.

[133] Ibid., p. 582. Desmond believes that, unlike some of the other elegies, this one ends with no sense of consolation for the speaker. This may be because she is already dead.

Some valkyries, as the ones in the Weland myth, do marry and continue to serve in Woden's hall, illustrating how the valkyrie's obligation to Woden supersedes her obligation to husband, as a thanes first obligation was to his lord, because serving his lord well meant prosperity and safety for his whole family. At other times, such as in the case of Sigdrifa from the Eddic lays (to some the same as Brynhild), can disobey and be punished with exile, as she is punished with a sleep thorn by Woden for choosing the wrong king to win in battle.

As outlined above, archaeological evidence such as the Frank's casket shows images of the valkyrie serving in the hall by bearing the horn, an act which not only bonds all together in the hall, but places her within a context of that social realm as well.[134] The woman, be she valkyrie, queen, or wife, is acknowledging the man she is serving first as her lord and lord of the tribe. Had she performed this role of peace bride well, the speaker would have been acknowledging herself as his follower, a retainer with a unique role prescribed by gender because she is taking on the role of lady in the hall.[135] Because of actions which occurred before the poem's onset, it is clear that if she made any attempt to forge peace, her efforts failed.

To frame her experiences, the female speaker chooses to set herself within the heroic narrative, which resembles the valkyrie, who seems to move seamlessly between both the heroic roles of lord/retainer and the social and domestic roles of lord/lady of the hall. Her use of the word *hlaford*, her first name for her lover, emphasizes not only his role in the society, but also his obligation to her. If he accepted her into his tribe, as a wife or retainer, his job as *hlaford* would be to provide for her, as the *hlaford* connotes leadership in the sense of guardian of the loaf. With this word choice, she is showing the audience how utterly he has failed in this role.

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[134] Enright, p. 10.

[135] Ibid., p. 78. Enright continues by noting that the name *Weltheow* from Beowulf is one of the most "puzzling" names in the literary tradition because it carries the impression of servitude but is reflected in the character of a queen.

Her use of *hlaford*, provider, to refer to her lover in a somewhat mocking tone, as he certainly has not provided for her, continues with her next reference to her lover is to call him a *leodfruma*, which portrays leadership from the heroic perspective in a different light, and again calls into question his character. Here the lover is portrayed more in the sense of a *drihten*, a chieftain or prince. This word connotes the authority of rule, being victorious in battle, and being able to make sound judgments. Again her lord has failed her. In the lord/retainer relationship, the one this female is using to illustrate how her lord's misdeeds have affected her greatly, this man is not depicted as a leader. Despite what she perceived were his wishes, that nothing should separate them (lines 21-23), he allows the counsels or manipulations of kin to not only separate them (lines 11-12), but to possibly imprison him in other lands, as the end of the poem depicts him as also isolated and forced to be where he now resides, another form of "hall" much like the earth "hall" that is her grave (lines 49-50).[136] He has not proven victorious over his kin, as they have likely killed his wife, if she is indeed a spirit forced to rise at dawn to relay her story, and this could theoretically could start a war with her family or tribe. In sum, his chieftain qualities are sorely lacking.

As with the words above, the next term for her lord, *frean*, implies another facet of the lord/retainer relationship, further illustrating to any audience that the speaker was mistreated. *Frean* connotes rulership and lordship in an almost divine sense, as the word is used for Christ. As a retainer to a god, this name would be an appropriate one for a valkyrie to use with Woden. Here the term reflects the speaker's complete vulnerability, as she has placed her trust in a lord that took her away from all that was safe and sent her to a foreign land. It is also used for lord in the sense of husband. It is at this moment that the speaker illustrates that her lover, as husband

[136] Chance notes that his hall may have many parallels to hers, p. 93.

and lord both, fails her utterly, both as a retainer and wife, by his departure. He has sealed her fate with his leaving, allowing the plots of his kinsman to come into play and end not only her life, but the social bond their relationship reflected in the tribal structure. By not choosing a word that also reflects a husband-like sense until now, over half way through the poem, the speaker shows her audience that she can maneuver into both the heroic and domestic realm, make her point in both, and, in some ways, force the reader to identify with her plight no matter who is reading.

Her final reference to her lover is *wine*, a word connoting protector, lord as well as friend. She affords him more gentle phrasing as she speaks about his similar plight, for he has also found hardships from the deeds of his folk and, at least in her mind, is equally sorrowful for what has happened. Bringing more emphasis to the valkyrie qualities of the speaker helps readers understand how as a retainer in a hall the speaker can move so deftly between the roles of retainer and roles as wife, a woman brought to forge peace between groups and understanding the expectations and consequences of each aspect of her role.

The expectations of a woman as retainer continue in the poem Wulf and Eadwacer. With a valkyrie as speaker, the poem portrays the voice of a strong woman forced to remain confined in the more conventional role of mother, despairing her fate, and addressing at least one force she feels is responsible. The poem preceding the riddles in the Exeter Book has, at times, been considered a part of the riddle collection. Known as *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the poem is riddle-like in structure[137], with its lack of proper names and enigmatic situation, and also without a title. In fact, where the poem actually starts is also in debate, as there are no capital letters to separate the poem from the poem preceding it*, Deor*, and it shares similar content and the structure of a

[137] Anne L. Klinck "Animal Imagery in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and the Possibilities of Interpretation" *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 23 (1987): 3-13.

refrain. The proportion of capital letters also gives the impression that the two poems are linked in some way.[138]

Wulf and Eadwacer has been approached from various scenarios: an abducted woman returned to her kinsman, a peace bride in a poor situation, or woman calling out to her son, but none appear to be an exact fit. Some have even found correlations between the speaker's voice and the Northern stories of valkyrie women.[139] One thing that remains consistent in discussion of the poem is its elegiac style and female voice. This female voice is the voice of a valkyrie-like figure, exiled and alone from the man she loves.

While there is little debate that there is a female speaker of the poem, there is more debate about audience. Whether she is speaking to one or two men and what the relationships are between her and each man is certainly not conclusive. My translation of the poem is as follows:

To my people, it is as if one gave them a gift They will rend him apart if he comes threateningly	Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife; willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
It is not so with us. Wulf is on an island, I on another; Steadfast is that island, by fens bordered; Fierce are the men there on the island They will rend him apart if he comes threateningly It is not so with us. In my hopes, I followed Wulf's wide journeys When the weather was raining, I sat weeping When the battle bold his arms around me That was joy to me, yet it was harmful also Wulf, my Wulf – it was my hopes for you That made me sick, your seldom comings Sorrows my spirit – not starving for food	Ungelic is us. Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre. Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen. Sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige; willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð. Ungelice is us. Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode; þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt, þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde, wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað. Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas, murnende mod, nales meteliste.

[138] James E. Anderson "*Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Soul's Address*: How and Where the Old English Exeter Book Riddles Begin" in Martin Green's *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983):204-230.

[139] Sonja Danielli "*Wulf, min Wulf*: An Eclectic Analysis of the Wolf-Man" *Neophilologus* 90 (2006): 135-154. Danielli argues that the use of the word wulf connects the poem to Odin, the image of the outlaw, and words of the valkyries such as Signy.

Do you hear, luck-watcher?	Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer?
Our wretched child	Uncerne earne hwelp
A wolf bears to the woods	bireð wulf to wuda.
It is easy to slit	þæt mon eaþe tosliteð
what was never joined	þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
Our riddle together.	uncer giedd geador.

Her elegiac tone is clear, but the poem is more than elegy, and instead is a call to action. Certainly the speaker finds herself exiled, reminisces about better times, and gives a sense of what is becoming, all of which is elegiac[140], but she is also using her voice to question why she is in this place at all, not merely mourning her state, as Signy does in her Lament in the *Volsungasaga* because, like Signy, the speaker is calling out to a "wolf" figure who has put her in a tragic situation.[141] As a valkyrie-figure, her tone begins to contain more empowerment, her situation more mythic. Whether the valkyrie speaking is part human part supernatural or completely human is not as important to this contribution to the tone as the idea that she is a powerful female woman who can see nuances in her situation and inspire actions in the man (or men) around her to affect change. Her tone also gives the female speaker the status of nobility.

The valkyrie speaker refers to "Wulf" five times in the poem, making the wolf, an image connected to the valkyrie and Woden both, the dominant image in the piece, as valkyries were said to ride wolves, and Odin is said to have two wolves by his side.[142]. One of these "wulf" references may not be to the figure she addresses as "Wulf," as the image of a wolf bearing the child into the woods may be referring figuratively to another circumstance. The Wolfing race, mentioned in poems like *Beowulf*, was said to be from Odin and birthed a great hero, Sigurd. The

[140] Joseph Harris "Elegy in Old English and Old Norse: A Problem in Literary History" in Martin Green's *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983): 46-56. Harris connects the Old English elegiac poems with pre-invasion Germanic literary culture and poetry that was mainly associated with the dead. Harris believes *Wulf and Eadwacer* is the most archaic of the Old English elegies and closest to the heroic legend tradition.

[141] Danielli, p. 137.

[142] Ibid., p. 136.

Weland myth, a piece noted above as referenced in several pieces from the Anglo-Saxon corpus, places the setting for Weland seeing the valkyrie-bride at Wolf Lake. This looming wolf image reflects strong evidence to support a valkyrie speaker.

The wolf image also carries the connotation of outlaw, the term *wulfeshéafod*, which may be consistent with looking at a main figure of a religion passing away in popularity, as Woden is the audience for her words.[143] Also consistent with the tradition of portraying former deities as not deities at all, but forms of the devil,[144] *Wulf* glossed as devil as well as a malevolent person, which would further denigrate the image of Woden.[145] Words such as *weargberende*, which glosses as villainous, and *wearglic*, which glosses as wretched, help frame the association in the minds of the folk of wolf and criminal deeds. The wolf image was often used as a kenning for the cruelty and savage acts done in the heroic lays of pre-Christian times.[146] The consistent use of the animal comparison, along with words such as *dogode* (pursuing like a dog) dehumanizes the figure Wulf, shaping him in the readers' mind as no better than the animal itself.[147] One Anglo-Saxon sentence for an outlaw was to have the person driven away "as a wolf and chased so far as men chase wolves farthest."[148] The Wulf figure as an outlaw is supported by the description in the poem, as he is separated from the speaker geographically by an island, and there is the implication that forces are keeping them apart.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Whitehurst Williams "Hwa mec ræreʔ" , p. 258.

[145] Danielli, p. 136-137.

[146] Ibid., p. 145.

[147] Klinck, p. 11.

[148] Danielli, p. 147.

Using Wulf as a kenning for Woden explains many of the mysteries of the poem, particularly the separation between the speaker and Wulf.[149] In a polytheistic system, stories of gods interacting and affecting the fates of humans are quite popular, making the speaker's description of events plausible.[150] Wulf being assisted by friends in times of hardship refers to the other gods of the pantheon. It also would include the fallen heroes Woden and his valkyries have collected from battles, as noted in the poem composed at the death of Eirik. With Woden as Wulf, the geographical separation of the islands becomes a liminal separation as well. Most do not get to reach the realm of the gods except through death.[151] Others, like the valkyrie, must have a supernatural item to bear them. The valkyrie is trapped in the human realm, as the valkyrie in the Weland myth, and unable to leave this world for the realm of the gods and Woden's hall, Valhalla. The reason for this entrapment could be that she now has a child, as is mentioned in the end lines of the poem, or could be because she was abducted. As mentioned above, abduction of noble female figures was a practice bringing a sense of legitimacy upon the captor, a fact Weland knew, for example, as it helped him gain his valkyrie bride. Weland's valkyrie could not fly without her swan skins, and the speaker's method of leaving this place

[149] Audrey Meaney "Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence" *Folklore* 77 (1966): 105-115. Meaney's article is in response to an article by J.S. Ryan, who believes that there are many more residuals of Anglo-Saxon paganism than Meaney believes is verifiable. In her article, Meaney painstakingly reviews place names, archaeology, and other sources to show the prevalence of Woden specifically in Anglo-Saxon England. Aside from the day of the week (Wednesday), about eleven place names in England carry Woden's name in some way. He is also mentioned twice in Anglo-Saxon poetry, once in the *Exeter Book* within the gnomic verse as a maker of idols, and once in the *Nine Herbs Charm* magically defeating a snake. It is also believed that when the English heathens ransacked the Britons of Pevensey Castle in 491, that their slaughter of the Britons were dedicated to Woden. More germane to the valkyrie image, a likeness exists in the words *wælceasig*, a word for raven (in the *Exeter Book*), a bird highly associated with Woden/Othinn, and *wælcyrge*, showing a connection between the scavenger bird of the battlefield with the supernatural female.

[150] Whitehurst Williasms "Hwa mec rǣre?" , p. 262.

[151] Meaney, p. 115, notes that god of the death was an early connotation with Woden, versus the later image as leader of the Wild Hunt, which she believes was placed upon him later in a further attempt to demonize the deity in the minds and hearts of the popular folk.

may have been similarly impaired.[152] If the gap is truly liminal, then the boundaries and borders keeping the valkyrie apart from Woden would be quite substantial.

If *Wulf* represents Woden, and the speaker is a valkyrie trapped on earth, the identification of *Eadwacer* next needs to be explained in order to understand all of the characters involved.[153] Eadwacer is the person the valkyrie speaks to in the form of direct address. Others have posited that *Eadwacer* is a member of the female speaker's kin, a brother or maternal uncle standing protectively over her and ready to act on her behalf.[154] Some believe that both *Wulf* and *Eadwacer* are the same man, and that the female speaker is using *Eadwacer* as a kenning to describe what he lacks in an attempt to mock him. [155] I would like to extend that argument, and believe that *Eadwacer* is merely another kenning for Woden, the one-eyed god. The *wacer* in Eadwacer typically glosses as watcher or waker. It can also mean a watchful one and was glossed with the Latin vigil. The first part of the kenning *ead-* is harder to pin down, as it has a variety of possibilities, including wealth, luck, prosperity, and being in good standing.

I prefer luck because, to me, this interpretation encapsulates all of these attributes (wealth, good standing, etc.) and yet also contains the supernatural element of chance. With the Anglo-Saxons comes a more documented idea of sacral kingship, the idea that "king" is the

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[152] This would be especially true if Anderson is correct about the poem being an extension of Deor. Unlike Anderson, I see the voice of the speaker as more likely that of the valkyrie bride than of Weland's victim Beodhild.

[153] Another interesting and possible allusion in the kenning Eadwacer is Auðvakr, the first barbarian ruler of Rome. The Germanic version of the name, Audawakrs, is glossed as "watcher of wealth."

[154] Janemarie Luecke "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: Hints for Reading from *Beowulf* Anthropology" in Martin Green's *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983): 190-203 believes that *Eadwacer* is such a character. He compares the situation to the Finn episode in Beowulf, showing how an Anglo-Saxon woman could rely on the support of her family network when having problems with her husband. He sees one possibility for the female speaker as a peace bride. Luecke also believes that other interpretations are possible with this enigmatic poem as long as the reader maintains the focus of the powerful emotions the speaker is portraying in the piece.

[155] John F. Adams "*Wulf and Eadwacer*: An Interpretation" *Modern Language Notes* 73 (1958): 1-5. Adams believes that Eadwacer is an ironic reference to Wulf.

union and embodiment of all priestly and political function.[156] The king was also the embodiment of the "luck" of the tribe, and this luck was reflected in many concrete ways, such as battles won, gifts given, and the sense of presence or charisma seen in him.[157] As a sacral king, the king tied his "mana", source of power and fortune, to the line of kings before him all the way to one of the deities such as Woden.[158] Kings were selected from a pool of viable candidates, mostly in the ruling family, choosing the man they felt would be the "incarnation of the mystical powers of the whole community of the folk."[159]

Eadwacer as another kenning for Woden remains a viable possibility when also looked at the tradition for referring to Woden, because of all the deities in the Old Norse pantheon, Othin has the most kennings. Meaney offers evidence that this tradition may have continued in Anglo-Saxon England, citing the place names influenced by his aspect as Grim, particularly banks and dykes.[160] Woden as *Eadwacer,* Luck-Watcher, portrays him in a different sense than his *Wulf* aspect. The female speaker uses this term when referring to the child, and the fate of this child is certainly uncertain but appears to be filled with trials.

Even if Woden is both *Wulf* and *Eadwacer,* it is not clear whether or not Woden is there to hear the speaker. Unlike other cases of dramatic monologue, there is no hint in her speech of being heard, no sign of response within her words, and no expectation of result from her speech. It is my belief that she is using apostrophe, addressing Woden without knowing with certainty

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[156] William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 12.

[157] Ibid. Chaney also notes later that this is a change in kingly function from the druct-centered warband of tribes before and reflects a community-centered approach and idea regarding the functions and duties of king.

[158] Ibid., p. 15.

[159] Ibid., 16. Chaney continues to say that the Anglo-Saxon king was usually one whose "mana" and luck had already been proven in some form, such as battle. Evidence of selection of this type of kingship goes all the way down to the unanimous validation of Edward the Confessor.

[160] Meaney, p. 107.

whether or not he was there to hear, speaking out from her seclusion, hoping (as hope appears in several places of the poem) that he can hear her and change the fate that appears set for her and her child.

Without a set listener to her words, the use of first person plural in the refrain and in the last line of the poem, specifically the use of "us" and "our," adds ambiguity to character and audience. With the refrain, "It is not so with us," the reader pauses and questions who can really hear the exiled speaker's voice and whether or not she is truly alone or merely feels alone because she is unhappy and separated from Wulf. While she does directly address *Eadwacer*, that may not mean she is referring to the two of them. She has also called out to *Wulf*, in a sense, with lines such as "Wulf, min Wulf." It could be, then, that she is referring to him, speaking of the two of them as one despite the many obstacles in between them. I believe the "us" the female speaker refers to is, in fact, herself and her child, the "hwelp" referred to in line 16. Because of her situation, the child is also exiled. It is also likely that she only feels a bond with her child, as she does not like her current surroundings.

The choice of the word *hwelp* for the child continues the animal imagery noted above, which further isolates the characters from humanity. A *hwelp* can be the child of a beast.[161] The son of an outlaw has also been referred to as a *hwelp*.[162] In *Sigurðarkviða*, the valkyrie Brynhild refers to Sigurd's son as a "cub" of a wolf when inciting others to kill them both. Because of the animal connections, the child is seen to be "other" in the eyes of the mother, but it does not necessarily name Wulf as the father of her child. While Woden was considered founder of the

[161] Luecke, p. 199.

[162] Danielli, p. 137. This is seen in two Old Norse works, but, as scholars have noted, there are many similarities between this poem and Old Norse poems.

lines of kings, even in Anglo-Saxon England, until the late eighth century,[163] Wulf does not have to be the father of this *hwelp* for it to be seen as "other" with a valkyrie for a mother. The mother's identity with her child as two people feeling exiled in one place would also reflect what was seen in the tradition of the peace-bride, as the woman would be in sometimes hostile lands alone to forge peace between her kin and this new tribe. She portrays herself and her *hwelp* as seemingly friendless, secluded, and hopeless.

Despite her portrayal of misery and exile for herself and her son, the reality may be different, at least in the case of her child, especially if it is male. With her lineage alone, the child would be expected to have much potential and possibly be destined for heroic status. The allusion to a wolf stealing the child into the woods at the end of the poem may confirm her impressions about the destiny of the child. If the *Wulf* is Woden, it is possible that the wolf at the end is one of Woden's wolves, such as Geri and Freki.[164] One kenning for battle was wolf-forest,[165] so this line may allude to Woden eventually ordering the child to fulfill his destiny in battle, which could lead to an early death and hero's reception in Valhalla. Calling the child a "wretch" supports this view, as a wretch could also be used for heroes and those who deliberately exile themselves to gain glory or seek revenge.[166] In *Maxims*, it reads:

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[163] Meaney, p. 110. Meaney cites that during Offa's time names began to appear above Woden's in registries, making Woden seem more of an ancestral king than divine being. She also notes that Essex abstained the tradition of citing kingly lineages back to Woden throughout.

[164] The *Exeter Book* also contains wolf imagery. In *The Fortunes of Men* it states:

> To one it happens that the final letter
> Sadly comes up; there is suffering in
> Youthtime. The wolf, the hoary
> Heath-stepper, will eat him. Then afterward the mother will mourn.
> Such things are not man's to control. (Drout trans., p. 278)

[165] Danielli, p. 140. This was seen in the First Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer in stanza sixteen.

[166] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: The Fragment and the Episode*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983). p 64.

146	Friendless, an unhappy man takes with Him wolves as companions, treacherous Beasts. Full often his companion attacks him. Fear is for gray ones, the grave for the dead men. The gray one, the wolf, will lament for hunger, And it will circle the grave. Nor indeed will it Weep on account of the slaughter, For the men violently killed, but it always wants more.[167]	Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to geferan, felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð; gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men; hungre heofeð, nales þæt heafe bewindeð, ne huru wæl wepeð wulf se græga, morþorcwealm mæcga, ac hit a mare wille.

Woden's taking of the child into battle transforms the valkyrie from the strong, supernatural figure who has decided the fate of kings to the more standard Anglo-Saxon portrayal of the mother. She is now left to worry for the fate of her child, as other mothers must, and rail against a system that places her in foreign lands without the connection of kin or friend. As the poem shows the disintegration of god-like Woden to wolf and outlaw, it also shows the deterioration of the valkyrie woman to a common, all to human mother, stripped of special ability and left with uncertainty and exile.

[167] Drout, p. 278.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Restoring the valkyrie and valkyrie qualities of “female” into the Anglo-Saxon perceptions of what women and female characters could be demands rereading of many texts. As in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife’s Lament*, there are pieces of information and echoes from the pre-Christian past in many places, should one choose to look. Certainly in this section of the *Exeter Book,* women are given a rare chance to speak. Any tools and past images to help interpret these unique voices should be allowed to add to the understanding of both texts.

From the Riddles, the reader can see that “female” has to include more measures of power, strength, and will than usually thought from Anglo-Saxon texts. Without these nuances, brought by restoring the valkyrie image to the definition of what “female” could be, there is too much of a gap between the solution and metaphoric device, forcing us to see both in a new way and question how firm some boundaries and definitions need to be. I believe the riddles point us to a fading image of a woman, strong, independent, and free, a woman whose time passes before the text is finished, causing another reason to lament.

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