GENDER, POWER, AND LANGUAGE IN
ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Emma B. Hawkins, B.A., M.Div., M.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1995

Many Old English poems reflect the Anglo-Saxon writers's interest in who could exercise power and how language could be used to signal a position of power or powerlessness. In previous Old English studies, the prevailing critical attitude has been to associate the exercise of power with sex—the distinction between males and females based upon biological and physiological differences—or with sex-oriented social roles or sphere of operation. Scholarship of the last twenty years has just begun to explore the connection between power and gender-coded traits, attributes which initially were tied to the heroic code and were primarily male-oriented. By the eighth and ninth centuries, the period in which most of the extant Old English poetry was probably composed, these qualities had become disassociated from biological sex but retained their gender affiliations.

A re-examination of "The Dream of the Rood," "The Wanderer," "The Husband’s Message," "The Wife’s Lament," "Wulf and Eadwacer" and Beowulf confirms that the poets used gender-coded language to indicate which poetic characters, female as well as male, held positions of power and
powerlessness. A status of power or powerlessness was signalled by the exercise of particular gendered traits that were open for assumption by men and women. Powerful individuals were depicted with masculine-coded language affiliated with honor, mastery, aggression, victory, bravery, independence, martial prowess, assertiveness, physical strength, verbal acuteness, firmness or hardness, and respect from others. Conversely, the powerless were described with non-masculine or feminine-coded language suggesting dishonor, subservience, passivity, defeat, cowardice, dependence, defenselessness, lack of volition, softness or indecisiveness, and lack of respect from others. Once attained, neither status was permanent; women and men trafficked back and forth between the two. Depending upon the circumstances, members of both sexes could experience reversals of fortunes which would necessitate moving from one category to the other, on more than one occasion in a lifetime.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON THE RELATION BETWEEN ANGLO-SAXON PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND POWER</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. GENDER AND POWER IN ANGLO-SAXON PROSE AND RELIGIOUS POETRY</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. MASCULINE- AND FEMININE-CODED LANGUAGE AND THE POWER CYCLE IN &quot;THE DREAM OF THE ROOD&quot;</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE GENDER-CODED OUTCASTS</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. GENDER IN BEOWULF</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In many ways the Anglo-Saxon perception of power closely resembles Max Weber's more recent twentieth-century definition of power.¹

Power (Macht) is the probability that one actor with a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. (53)

To the Anglo-Saxons, power was the ability to overcome all opposition and impose one's will on others, primarily through physical force but also by more temperate means of persuasion and in the public and private sectors. Although power initially accorded control "over wealth and over deference shown by others," ultimately it conferred control "over people and their actions."² Plagued by divisiveness, fierce rivalry, and, at times, near chaos, the Anglo-Saxons adhered to a concept of power that encompassed such diverse activities as warfare and enslavement on one extreme to counseling and peace-weaving on the other, all aimed at controlling the actions of others. Anglo-Saxon writers frequently expressed an interest in the mechanics of power:
who could exercise it; how it could be gained, preserved, regulated, shared, and lost; and what its limitations were. Concerned with how language could be used to signal a status of power, Anglo-Saxon poets often relied upon masculine- and feminine-coded language to trace the ebb and flow of power among poetical power-figures.

While scholars of the past twenty years have studied power relationships between Anglo-Saxon men and women, they have mostly confined their investigations to proving how and under what circumstances men and women were able to influence a male-centered society. In previous examinations of Old English religious and secular poetry, the prevailing critical attitude has been to associate the exercise of power with sex, the biological distinction between males and females based upon "biological functions" and "anatomo-physiological machinery" (Foucault 153). Members of both sexes were expected to accept social roles and exhibit characteristics and behaviors appropriate to their sex. Traditionally, scholars have assumed that men jockeyed for positions of power in the forefront, and women remained unobtrusively in the background. In short, the realm of public power has been reserved for men, and women have been confined to the home and church. Convinced that scholarship has either habitually overlooked or undervalued the power of medieval women, Barbara Kanner, Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, and Helen Damico and Alexandra Olsen
have published collections of essays focusing on those areas of private life in which medieval women were able to exercise power and influence. Scholars account for powerful women who filled influential positions in government, the upper echelon of church leadership, or literature, by interpreting them as infrequent exceptions or deviations from the normal pattern.

By arguing that Anglo-Saxon women relied upon means to exert power other than those customarily affiliated with men or male-centered activity (warfare, law-making, physical coercion, violent intimidation, national leadership, feuds), scholars such as Susan Boll (book ownership), Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple (religious service), and Marc Meyer (land ownership) have assigned women to the more reserved, pacific, and less strenuous family- or church-oriented channels. Through a dual division of power, these critics have effectively barred women from participating in the conventional forceful and martial, public displays of power. Furthermore, they infer that to better comprehend the real position of Anglo-Saxon women in society, we need to redirect our attention away from the arena of politics and government, which few women dared to enter, to the areas of daily life in which the women normally participated—the home and the monastery.

Occasionally we encounter some timid, brief allusion to the possibility that a status of power and influence was not
established solely by biological sex, but by demonstrating wisdom, nobility, and courage (Damico 27); that, in circumstances which demanded heroic activity to advance God's kingdom, men and women exercised power in the same manner (Chance 110); or that language usage might shed light on how status was established. In Old English texts certain nouns which traditionally denoted a male figure frequently referred to females (Fell 17-19). For the most part, research has either ignored or misconstrued the Anglo-Saxon poets' perception of the relationship between gender and power, especially their use of gender-coded language to distinguish between the powerful and the powerless. Interdisciplinary scholarship has just recently begun to investigate the possibility that gender might be a collection of sexually coded traits which categorize or establish who can and cannot access power and influence in a society. In medieval literary studies, a gender theory has been applied by Allen Frantzen to a prose account of three Anglo-Saxon female saints, and by Carol Clover to Icelandic sagas.

My investigation will primarily examine secular Old English poetry in light of an Anglo-Saxon theory of gender which closely resembles Carol Clover's Icelandic model, focusing on the link between gender and power and how Anglo-Saxon poets employed gender-coded language to reflect the relationship between the two concepts. The traditional
masculine-coded traits in the Anglo-Saxon gender system included honor, mastery, aggression, victory, bravery, independence, martial prowess, assertiveness, physical strength, verbal acuteness, firmness or hardness, and respect from others. On the other hand, feminine-coded traits were dishonor, subservience, passivity, defeat, cowardice, dependence, defenselessness, lack of volition, weakness, verbal ineptness, indecisiveness or softness, and lack of respect. Generally, individuals who exhibited those masculine-coded traits most closely affiliated with warriors were viewed as being powerful. Conversely, those who displayed the feminine-coded qualities associated with non-warriors--women, children, and old men--were viewed as being powerless.

Anglo-Saxon poets did not distinguish two types of power, one exercised by men and another by women. Nor did they rely upon biological sex to determine which of their poetical figures were or were not powerful. Whether or not males or females were powerful or powerless did not depend strictly upon biological sex, sex-related social roles, or sphere of operation. Rather, a condition of power or powerlessness was confirmed by the exercise of traits which formerly had been associated with men and women respectively. By the eighth and ninth centuries in England, the period in which most of the extant Old English literature was probably composed, these qualities had become
disassociated from biological sex, although they did retain their gender affiliations.

No longer the exclusive property of a particular sex, gender-coded attributes comprised a system of classification that signaled to the audience who was able or permitted to exert power and influence. Such traits could be exhibited by men or women, and on the battlefield, in church, in court, or at home. Adhering to a single comprehensive concept of power, Anglo-Saxon poets relied upon gendered language to indicate who, male or female, had access to that power. Manly or masculine behavior indicated those who were powerful, aggressive, strong, and influential. In contrast, womanly or feminine behavior designated those who were effeminate, passive, weak, and ineffectual.

Since Old English texts have preserved no theories on power or gender, any search for the Anglo-Saxon perception of power and gender and the connection between them, first needs to settle on workable definitions of power, sex, and gender that are consistent with our limited knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Power is one of those illusive terms we bandy about, assuming that every listener knows exactly what we mean when we use it. But, like other general expressions with which we endeavor to capture complex or abstract aspects of life, power has many nuances of meaning. Psychologists, sociologists, social historians, and anthropologists have researched and developed multiple
interpretations of power. While scholars from these fields have not been able to agree on a single definition which satisfies the demands of all, they do concur that for modern man, power is one of the most elusive concepts to define. The survey of theories and perceptions conducted by Willis Hawley and Frederick Wirt concisely summarizes the major approaches used to define power and trace the power process.

According to Hawley and Wirt (The Search for Community Power, 1974) two major approaches have established the parameters of past analyses of power. The first approach presumes an "institutional bases of influence" and allocates power to any person who has access to those particular institutions. An institution may be a political alliance, social class, military group, or religious organization, all of which possess certain assets regarded as "power resources" (wealth, prestige, physical coercion, military might, votes, etc.) (2). Those individuals have power who utilize the "power resources" of the institutions to secure compliance to their wishes from others. Hawley and Wirt assign Max Weber's popular definition of power to this category (7). The second approach views power as the "result of interpersonal relationships (author's emphasis)" (2-3). In this approach, whatever the power resource used, power is dependent upon interpersonal transactions which induce an individual to do the will of the person who has power (3). Oversimplified, critics have created a "power
inhering to institutions" (2) versus "power adhering to individuals" polarity (3).

So how does this polarity relate to the state of Anglo-Saxon scholarship? Hawley and Wirt further suggest that if we advocate the outlook that power adheres to individuals, then we will view the "community as composed of many peaks where different sets of leaders operate in different realms of decision making. . . . [Therefore] research is focused upon decision, public and private" through which some compel others to comply (3). This distinction between public and private decision making has been translated into a theory of public power versus private power and adopted by many of the scholars of Anglo-Saxon culture. Consequently, research on Anglo-Saxon feminine social roles, which might have otherwise substantiated that females of that period really did have power identical to that held by men, has been confined all too often to activities related to home or monastery. This public/private power controversy is particularly evident in the treatment of feminine literary figures who have been denied the opportunity to behave in a manly fashion and prohibited from exercising power in the public realm as masculine literary figures did.

Chief among the difficulties we twentieth-century scholars encounter when trying to define or measure power, is the confusion that results because our modern vocabulary contains several words with closely related meanings
through which we communicate about power: authority, influence, persuasion, force, and coercion. Even though twentieth-century scholars have developed strict definitions for each, sometimes these words are used as interchangeable synonyms, sometimes not. Talcott Parsons defines power as the "generalized symbolic capacity to make and make stick binding decisions on behalf of a collectivity [a group]" (Evolution 250), and authority as "a socially recognized right to make a binding decision on behalf of an interactive system [a process]" (249).

Basically pacific in nature, authority is interpreted by Gerhard Lenski as the "enforceable right to command others," while influence is the "ability to manipulate the social situation" of others in such a way as to increase the pressure to respond in accordance with one's own goals "without apparent force of direct authority" (57). Etzioni expands this definition. Influence "entails an authentic changing of the actor's performance" (26). Persuasion involves the manipulation of information, emotions, status, norms, or values (Olsen 6). Etzioni claims that, unlike influence, persuasion "suppresses" but does not change "the actor's preferences" (26). Force means "the application of sanctions," which may include dismissal or demotion, imprisonment or execution, withholding of financial support, or a multitude of other inducements, to limit, reduce, close off, or totally eliminate the alternatives of those individ-
uals who refuse to comply (Bierstedt 13-14). Coercion refers to the employment of violent means (Etzioni 25) or duress and typically involves weapons, military man-power, or a policing agency.

As far as we can determine, the Anglo-Saxons saw no need to establish such sharp distinctions and had little trouble incorporating all of our various modern nuances of meaning into a comprehensive concept of power much like Parsons's theory. As far as the vocabulary and literature are able to confirm, various Old English nouns, adjectives, and adverbs are translated as power, but also have secondary interpretations suggesting control, physical strength or might, hardness, steadfastness, or martial force. Relevant Old English verbs chiefly infer power derived from physical strength or control of others. No words denote only influence, authority, or persuasion. While this fusion of closely related meanings in Old English words may wreak havoc with our precise twentieth-century differentiations, it posed no problem to the Anglo-Saxons. The somewhat ambiguous vocabulary mirrors the instability and uncertainty which characterized an Anglo-Saxon culture subjected to continuous power struggles.

In England as well as on the continent, society was in a state of violent transition. With the exception of a brief interruption of a hundred years of relative peace extending from the late seventh through the eighth centu-
ries, Anglo-Saxon England experienced four hundred years of chronic armed conflict. Early Anglo-Saxon society was organized around the comitatus, a transplanted Germanic heroic structure which afforded protection from marauders and opportunities to gain fame and wealth through heroic deeds. Ideally composed of a group of faithful, courageous, and battle-hardened retainers, the fortunate band was ruled by a generous and respected war lord. During this era, survival was the war band's most elemental goal. Preservation of the life and cohesiveness of the community frequently depended upon the ability to subdue adversaries with reason and persuasion, which was seldom possible, and with physical force when necessary. More often than not, opposition was overcome by the exercise of violent force and superior martial prowess of the warriors of the comitatus, aided by the clever, tactical planning of a resourceful war lord, the hlaford. Anglo-Saxon society was geared to wage war.

Because men respond more readily to the possible use of force than to any other means of inducement (50), Lenski suggests that force is the most effective instrument for seizing power (51). However, since force is not the most effective means of "retaining and exploiting" a position of power, eventually other techniques of control such as persuasion or reward must be substituted, allowing force "to recede into the background," held in reserve to be
used only when more peaceful methods fail (51). Up through the ninth-century reign of Alfred the Great, a period in English history when the emphasis was upon seizing and upholding power, coercion was the mode of operation with which Anglo-Saxons were most familiar. Naturally, the power predominantly depicted in Anglo-Saxon poetry was power derived through and guaranteed by the use of physical force. An examination of the gendered language incorporated in Old English poetry will confirm that, in reality, the Anglo-Saxon perception of power recognized no dichotomy. Rather, the Anglo-Saxon view seemingly intermingled elements which resemble both twentieth-century approaches, the institutionalized and the interpersonal transactional, into a single, comprehensive concept. For the Anglo-Saxons, coercion, force, persuasion, influence, and authority functioned more as methods of achieving power, all interrelated and escalating in severity from mildest to harshest in means of implementation. Whatever the resources or means employed, securing and retaining control over the decisions and behavior of others was the ultimate goal. To be able to control others was to possess power.

From numerous examples furnished by quasi-historical and literary accounts, we have been able to establish a feasible Anglo-Saxon perception of power. However, an applicable definition of gender has not been so easily formulated, although during the past twenty years research
focusing on gender has proliferated. As we might expect, the earliest and most prominent gender models, like the power models, originated in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, and psychology, not in literary theory. As with power, so, too, with gender, there is no consensus on any one definition. Only recently have studies appeared that apply the insights gleaned from gender studies to literary questions.

In *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (1955) Parsons distinguishes two categories which he designates as the masculine and feminine "personalities" (101). Tending towards "instrumental interests, needs and functions" the masculine personality assumes more "technical, executive and 'judicial' roles," while the feminine personality, tending to "expressive interests, needs and functions," assumes the more "supportive, integrative and 'tension-managing' roles" (101). Though Parsons associates the "personalities" with biological sex, he acknowledges that at times it becomes necessary for feminine personalities to "take the predominantly instrumental role" normally exercised by masculine personalities (153). Relieved of their strictly sexual orientations, Parson's categories provide a starting point for the study of gendered roles and language.

Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss credit the social sciences with assigning women to the domestic realm and men to the public realm, creating a "physical separation"
between the two, and confining "social prestige" to the "public domain" (318). Social anthropology has been particularly concerned with the connection between social roles perpetuated by a culture and the power delegated to those individuals who fill the roles. In her foundational essay "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (1974) Sherry Ortner distinguishes two spheres of activity, one for men and another for women. Convinced that she has discovered a plausible explanation for the universal devaluation of women, an explanation based upon women's close ties to "nature" (73), Ortner argues that women have traditionally been affiliated with the "domestic context" rather than with the "public" realm of social life (78). Since females are more apt to be involved with the family unit, they are identified with a "lower order of social/cultural organization" (79). Thus, the family and women represent "lower-level, socially fragmenting, particularistic sorts of concerns" as opposed to those "higher-level, integrative, universalistic sorts of concerns" of men and the social entity (79). Sociologist Diane Margolis translates this public and domestic polarity into the public and private realms. "Men tend to control the public places" while women "tend to be relegated to more private spheres" (345). Nevertheless, Ortner reassures us that women are not totally powerless. Within the confines of the private or domestic
model, women serve as powerful and valued agents of the "cultural process" (80).

Henrietta Moore observes that this particular gender model acquired popularity and power because it was one of the few which provided "a way of linking the cultural valuations given to the category 'woman' to the organization of women's activities in society" (21). In Moore's judgment, this model continues to be "a salient feature of many different types of analysis, and is frequently used as a way . . . [to mark] out a clear domain for women within the material presented" (21). Although the "domestic versus public model" has received noteworthy criticism and does not explicitly refer to gender, Michelle Rosaldo agrees with Moore's conclusion. The opposition between "domestic and public orientations" creates a useful "framework" for examining the "male and female roles" in any society (24). The "private versus public" dichotomy has definitely appealed to scholars of Anglo-Saxon culture and literature.

In their book Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research (1987), Beth Hess and Myra Ferree detect three stages in the development of our twentieth-century perception of gender. The first stage emphasized maleness and femaleness as biologically determined properties of individuals (14), an interpretation that corresponds to the conventional definition of sex. The second stage was preoccupied with sex roles, the effect of socialization practices
and customs upon sex-based differences (14-15). As Christine Gailey notes in her essay "Evolutionary Perspectives on Gender Hierarchy" every culture has constructed "prevailing images of what men and women are 'supposed to be like,'" images which include more than just anatomical differences (34). Masculine and feminine behavior and attitudes also contribute to the images.

With the accumulation of evidence confirming that both social roles and sex characteristics were "notoriously poor predictors of behavior" (Hess and Ferree 15), many social scientists recognized the limitation of their model and renewed the search for a more accurate meaning. In the third stage of development the focus shifted to viewing gender as a "principle organizing social arrangements, behavior, and even cognition" (16). Therefore, Hess and Ferree define gender as a "system" which enables us to categorize people.

Gender is not a trait but a system for dividing people into distinct nonoverlapping categories despite their natural variability on any particular characteristic and regardless of the inconsistency between features that are all supposed to be definitive. (16)

Yet Hess and Ferree admit there are legitimate grounds for objection to their definition. Inherent in every "system" is repression, no matter how insignificant, of
human potential, and no one ever fully conforms to any system (16). Since every ordering system must make allowance for exceptions, none can be all-inclusive.

In an effort to establish a connection between gender and history, Joan Scott (1988) assigns the various gender theories popular among historians to two broad categories: the descriptive, which merely describes "phenomena or realities without interpreting, explaining, or attributing causality" (31); and the causal, which examines "the nature of phenomena or realities" for the purpose of developing "an understanding of how and why these take the form they do" (31). In Scott's opinion, advocates of descriptive theories generally interpret gender as either a synonym of biological sexual identification for "women"; or as a means of denoting a system of relationships between the sexes which "include[s] [biological] sex, but is not directly determined by sex nor directly determining of sexuality" (32). Both definitions of gender based on descriptive theories easily lend themselves to description, rather than explanation.

Once more gender is perceived as a system, but not necessarily as a system which classifies or organizes into sexual categories. Basically, descriptive gender proponents believe that gender comprises a system which describes women and their activities, or relationships between men and women. Thus, social historians, many of
whom favor descriptive theories, have been inclined to focus on exploring topics such as "women, children, families, and gender ideologies," rather than "war, diplomacy, and high politics," and on describing rather than interpreting (32). Scott's division strongly resembles Ortner's "domestic/public realm" model. Scott points out that the descriptive approach has two shortcomings. Like Ortner's model, it endorses a "certain functionalist view ultimately rooted in biology," and also perpetuates "the idea of separate spheres (sex or politics, family or nation, women or men)" (32).

From a psychological standpoint, Rhoda Unger and Mary Crawford (Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology, 1992) define sex as the biological differentiation determined by "genetic composition and reproductive anatomy and function" (17), while gender is "what culture makes out of the 'raw material' of biological sex" (18). Comprised of qualities, thoughts, and conduct which may be shaped by culture, gender has been used by "all known societies" (18) as a criterion for establishing social distinctions. According to Unger and Crawford we can discern three levels of gender. The individual level consists of sex-related characteristics that confer masculinity or femininity, the interpersonal level emphasizes social interactions between the sexes, and the social structural level interprets gender as a system of power relations (18-19).
On the individual level, Unger and Crawford have devised a list of non-biological stereotypical characteristics that presumably distinguish the male and female genders from one another, 29 traits for men and 25 for women. Males are noted for being self-reliant, distant, ambitious, competitive, active, and aggressive, while females are dependent, affectionate, caring, tender, empathetic, and expressive of emotions (130). Since gender is not "dichotomous," as is sex, such an ordering, if strictly applied, allows for no inconsistencies. Once more we encounter the problem of rigidity. Although many "traits, interests, behaviors, and even physical characteristics are ascribed to women or men, in reality men and women, . . . often show characteristics ascribed to the other sex" (18). Unlike sex identification, gender lines must be flexible.

As a result, Unger and Crawford avoid the strictly sexual connotation and recommend a definition of gender that combines the knowledge gained from levels two and three. Ideally, gender should be construed, not as a single trait or a set of traits tied to biological sex, but, as a "classification system" which not only determines "access to power and resources" (20) but also "shapes relations" among women and men (19). Because men, more than women, have been able to directly access public power through the "government, law, and public discourse," masculine traits tradi-
tionally have been associated with power and have dictated the relationships between men and women (20). Just as important for medieval literary considerations, especially for Anglo-Saxon studies, an adequate gender system must order relations between members of the same sex as well as relations between members of the opposite sex.

Having examined several popular twentieth-century theories and definitions, we can conclude that sex, which is a biologically determined feature, is seemingly fixed and rigid, whereas gender, which denotes the "cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes" (Butler 6), is malleable and fluid. Now to interject a word of caution. In her book Gender Trouble, Judith Butler points out that if gender consists of "cultural meanings" that a sexed body assumes, then "a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (6). Therefore, when gender is completely separated from and exists independent of sex, the logical outcome is that gender becomes a "free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one" (6). Butler warns that such a definition of gender may create a multitude of problematic questions. We have no evidence that the Anglo-Saxons were cognizant of, much less distressed by, these modern concerns. On the contrary, they seem to have
been quite comfortable with a system of "free-floating" attributes.

Intent upon proving that Anglo-Saxon women really did enjoy power and prestige, recent scholarship has diligently pursued a line of inquiry based either on Ortner’s "domestic/public domain" model or on one of the "descriptive" approaches mentioned by Scott, all of which envision a clear demarcation between public and private roles. To date, those who argue for Anglo-Saxon women’s ability and opportunities to function as powerhouses have directed their efforts chiefly to magnifying the domestic or religious contributions made by women. Clearly, Old English poets were not restricted by such a view. While early Anglo-Saxons definitely were aware of sexual differences and sex-related social roles, they did not adhere to a strict sex-oriented classification of people which permitted no traffic back and forth. Old English poetry seems to support a definition of gender that resembles the one devised by Gerson and Peiss.

Gender is not a rigid or reified analytic category imposed on human experience, but a fluid one whose meaning emerges in specific social contexts as it is created and recreated through human actions. (317)

Whereas Anglo-Saxon society did not polarize power, it did accept two sets of gender-coded characteristics
(masculine and feminine) which were normally attributed to one sex or another, but which were at the same time assumable by either sex. No doubt Anglo-Saxon society developed standards of appropriate conduct for men and women, but the standards were not so inflexible that "crossovers" could not occur without condemnation. Events and situations more than biological sex dictated who displayed power and when. Conventional feminine traits were usually demonstrated by females. But, masculine traits and behavior could be exhibited by females without rancor or humiliation. The same does not seem to apply if feminine traits suggesting powerlessness were assumed by males. If males slipped into the feminine-coded category of powerlessness, they often were viewed as unmanly or weak. Once attained, neither status was permanent. Women and men trafficked back and forth freely between the two extremes. Depending upon the circumstances, members of both sexes could experience reversals of fortunes which would necessitate moving from one category to the other on more than one occasion in a lifetime.

In her discussion of "gender hierarchy," Christine Gailey defines the concept as a "situation where social power and control over labor, resources, and products are associated with masculinity" ("Gender Hierarchy" 32). Contradicting Ortner's evaluation, Gailey argues that until recently patriarchy has been the predominant form of
gender hierarchy found in the Western world. Currently, however, a hybrid form of patriarchy has received priority treatment.

Social power now is identified with attributes considered to be masculine; male or female people may fill roles through which power is exercised, but they hold masculine roles. (32)

Maleness is not limited to men only. If they assume masculine roles, women, too, can have access to social power (Kinship xi). Focusing upon Irene Silverblatt's extensive study of Andean women and how much power and influence they exerted, Gailey offers the Inca empire as an early example of a culture that practiced a non-patriarchal form of gender hierarchy. Irene Silverblatt discovered that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Incas of Peru condoned a dual system of authority. Although maleness was metaphorically associated with the "conquerors" and femaleness with the "conquered," in real life, women were actually able to exert tremendous influence (47).

Such gendered roles were not unique to the Inca empire in South America. Earlier precedents can be found among the ancient Greeks. In the Greek play Antigone, Sophocles (496-406 B.C.) hints at the existence of a similar system in Greek culture. When King Creon condemns Antigone to death for insolently defying his orders, he complains:
Later when the King orders the guards to imprison Antigone and Ismene, he comments, "ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε χρῆ γυναίκας εἶναι." "Henceforth it is necessary [that] they must be (act like) women" (ll. 578-79). Extant written records from Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth and ninth centuries and from Iceland of the ninth through eleventh centuries confirm that early Germanic cultures also tolerated a system of "free-floating" traits assumable by males and females. Masculine attributes were metaphorically indicative of power; feminine qualities were metaphorically suggestive of powerlessness.

In particular, Anglo-Saxon poets used masculine- and feminine-coded language to articulate who had assumed a position of power and who had been reduced to a state of helplessness. Medieval literary research has failed to scrutinize Old English poetic language along gender lines, or it would have discovered that Anglo-Saxon women had access to the same power and means of acquisition of power as did men. The survey of the most recent scholarship on Anglo-Saxon culture in Chapter II reveals that scholars have tended to confine their examinations to sex-related social roles derived from the public/domestic model. Repeatedly, they have emphasized that men were free to exercise power in
public offices, namely political and military positions, while women had to manipulate their position in the home or church to exert any power at all.
NOTES

1 This version of Max Weber's definition of power is found in Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). The 1968 translation edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich agrees with this interpretation. However, the translation edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills offers another variation. In general we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. (180)

2 After surveying the theories of power and conflict developed by Max Weber, Karl Marx, Gaetano Mosca, Gerhard Lenski, William Sumner, and others (234-54), James T. Duke offers these conclusions and incorporates them into his own theory of conflict (239).

3 Although critics of the Anglo-Saxon heroic code prefer different combinations, they seem to limit their choices to a pool of qualities which they accept as having been exhibited by the model Anglo-Saxon warrior. The opposite qualities are reserved for the disreputable warriors, and disempowered old men, women, and children. These characteristics are the most demonstrative of the Anglo-Saxon
view of masculine- and feminine-coded traits. I rely upon more recent sources which reiterate the same attributes: articles by Allen Frantzen and Carol Clover, books by Jane Chance and Helen Damico, and a list of male and female traits offered by Unger and Crawford (130).

Old English language scholars Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson suggest these time limitations (124). In close agreement, similar boundaries are fixed by the historians Frank Stenton as A.D. 700-850 (195) and by David Harrison as the seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries (233). However, since no means of dating is accurate enough to provide conclusive verification, most scholars refrain from dating Old English poetry. Generally, they limit the composition dates to the seventh through tenth centuries, sometimes referred to as the early medieval era.

Chapter III of this study includes a fuller examination of the vocabulary associated with power.

On pages 6-7 Butler predicts several problematic questions, some of which are: does sex have a history; does each sex have a separate history; how was the duality of sex established; is sex culturally constructed like gender; and is there really a distinction at all between sex and gender?

Sherry Ortner is adamant. "I would flatly assert that we find women subordinated to men in every known society. The search for a genuinely egalitarian, let alone matriarchal, culture has proved fruitless" (70).


Greek citations from Sophocles' *Antigone* are from the edition by Martin L. D'Ooge. In a footnote on page 66 D'Ooge translates line 485 as "if this authority shall be exercised by her with impunity." The same line is translated by Woolsey as "if she shall exercise this power with impunity" (note on page 91).
CHAPTER II

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON THE RELATION BETWEEN ANGLO-SAXON PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND POWER

In their determination to prove that Anglo-Saxon women were not subordinate, ineffectual non-entities, but, rather, were blessed with considerable power, scholars of the past two decades have assumed that biological sex determined the parameters of individual behavior. In most cases, scholars have interpreted women and men as groups whose activities and roles were tied to and limited by biological sex. Anglo-Saxon scholars have seldom entertained the possibility that an examination of gender-coded language, not sex differences, social roles, or realm of activity, could provide a more accurate understanding of the Anglo-Saxon perception of who could and could not access power. When women were excluded, they were not excluded solely because they were females, but because they failed to demonstrate those traditionally masculine-gendered qualities indicative of the exercise of power.

In spite of popular theorizing to the contrary, Christine Fell advocates that "scholarship does not require us to read only, always, and inevitably a history of oppression and exploitation of the female sex. The real evidence from
Anglo-Saxon England presents a more attractive and indeed assertive picture" (21). In addition, recent studies corroborate Doris Stenton's earlier conclusion that during the Anglo-Saxon period women were "more nearly the equal companions of their husbands and brothers" (348) than in any other period of time, including our own century. Just as capably, though less frequently, Anglo-Saxon women fulfilled social and political responsibilities comparable in every way to those performed by Anglo-Saxon men. Following the Norman Conquest, however, this "rough and ready partnership" was dissolved by an alliance between feudalism and the teaching of the medieval Church which demanded the subjection of wives to husbands as stipulated by feudal law (348).\footnote{1}

Relying upon place-name material, documentary evidence (chronicles, wills, charters, letters, homilies, etc.), archaeological discoveries, vocabulary analysis, and Old English literary accounts, Christine Fell has assembled in *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (1984) a most thorough factual overview of the religious, political, and social roles and activities of Anglo-Saxon females. Acknowledging that the literary portrayal may be a "heightened concept" of reality, Fell believes that it is not dissociated from reality and can corroborate more scientific findings. Therefore, she juxtaposes the "practical" with the "literary" evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period (14). After examining the function of women in myth and legend, daily life, sex
and marriage, family and kinship, manor and court, and religion, Fell concludes that Anglo-Saxon women must have been accustomed "to handling power" and in religious matters frequently were even "specifically asked to take a full and controlling part" (13).

Fell is convinced that the Norman invasion of 1066 introduced into England a feudalistic attitude towards women which sharply contrasted with that of the pre-conquest era. Thus, the last two chapters of the book, authored by Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, accentuate the gap between the roles assumed by women in real life and those they were assigned in literature. As a result of Anglo-Norman civil law, canon law, and Gregorian reform, all of which discriminated against females purely on the basis of sex, women were deprived of the opportunities to exercise power. Their status gradually deteriorated. In literature, feminine roles became stereotyped. Not unexpectedly, the "conventions and ideals" of literature failed to reflect the "harsh realities" of everyday life of post-1066 women (14).

While she mentions Queens Aethelflaed and Edith, most of Fell’s observations center on Anglo-Saxon women whose activities customarily were affiliated with females, stereotypical roles determined primarily by sex. Although she does not herself pursue the subject, in the introductory chapter of her book Fell does recommend a new area of research, vocabulary analysis, pointing out that since "our
knowledge of Old English vocabulary and the way it could be used" is limited, further investigation is needed (19). An inadequate grasp of even the simplest words can alter the intended meaning of the original text (17). Briefly, Fell calls attention to the confusion "inherent in Old English terminology of sex," citing as examples the nouns "man" mann and "lord" hlaford, which in Old English texts referred to females as well as males (19). She acknowledges that our failure to analyze the Anglo-Saxon use of gendered language has limited or occasionally distorted our understanding of the writer's message.

Historical and literary anthologies such as The Women of England: From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present (1979), Women and Power in the Middle Ages (1988), and New Readings on Women in Old English Literature (1990) generate articles that merely isolate and explicate in greater detail areas of feminine activity examined by Christine Fell in her more comprehensive survey. The anthologies share similar goals: to elucidate the "relationship between the roles and experiences of the . . . comparatively obscure female population" (Kanner 7); to "assess medieval women's power more precisely" by establishing their identity and cultural roles (Erler and Kowaleski 13); or to offer a more realistic estimation of "the position, role, and function of women in Anglo-Saxon culture" (Damico and Olsen 3) in order to refute the conventional view that Anglo-Saxon women were "passive,
victimized, and peripheral" (12). The essays selected for inclusion in these anthologies tend to focus on extolling existing roles or discovering new sex-oriented roles filled by women in Anglo-Saxon society.

To do justice to the "still insufficiently studied half" of the medieval population, contributors to Barbara Kanner's collection of interpretive bibliographical essays explore the English feminine experience as recorded in published historical writings (10). Only two essays deal specifically with Anglo-Saxon women. In "An Introduction to Women in Anglo-Saxon Society (c. 600-1066)" Sheila Dietrich examines narrative and biographical, religious, legal, and literary sources, to verify that Anglo-Saxon society's view of behavior "appropriate to a certain sex" was less limiting for women than views that prevailed later (36). She contends that the Germanic-based Anglo-Saxon society permitted women "to step directly and without fuss into roles which involved ruling a kingdom or . . . leading an army" (36). Dietrich argues that, though they be few in number, Anglo-Saxon women such as Aethelflaed, Seaxburh, and Edith not only acquired and exhibited "an impressive independence and influence" (32), but also participated in behavior more characteristic of men than women, and without being subjected to public censure. After searching the archives of legal records and concentrating on land charters, in "Land Charters and the Legal Position of Anglo-Saxon Women"
Marc Meyer traces the "relational ties between developments in Anglo-Saxon economic politics and the functional status and power of women of wealth and property" (11). He concludes that through land ownership Anglo-Saxon women were able to exert power and influence.

Having rejected the popular "historical" view of power as "public authority" imposed by "law and force," Erler and Kowaleski have incorporated only essays that explore the "private model" of power to "draw women within its [power's] circle" (1-2). They are confident that their book presents a "more exact view" of medieval women's actions and gauges their power more accurately than previous studies which interpreted women as powerless and marginal characters (1). In order to acquire a position of prestige or play a role in the decision making of the community, medieval women had at their disposal a number of options: "economic contribution . . . , sexual attraction, affection, wifely persuasion, and motherly guidance" (Erler and Kowaleski 10).

Reflecting the influence of anthropological and sociological theories which emphasize the allocation of power based on sex and the "cultural devaluation" of women and their activities, many of the articles apply a theory of power which can be interpreted as "informal influence" (2). They do little more than reiterate the theme that women had to depend upon their position in the family or church to access power (3). In "The Power of Women Through the Family
in Medieval Europe, 500-1100," JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple contrast the power allotted to women through the family during the Germanic period with the loss of power experienced as a result of the growth of feudalism and the dominance of the patriarchal Roman form of Christianity. After exploring the private roles filled by religious women in "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100," Jane Schulenburg concludes that during the early medieval period, restrictions upon the activities of the "allegedly inferior" sex were either ignored altogether or temporarily "abated" in order to recruit women with power, property, and wealth for the advancement of the Church (121).

Joan Ferrante conjectures that since women in medieval literature were allowed so few opportunities to exercise "real power," they had to resort to "subtle or hidden ways . . . to manipulate people and situations," to secretly "subvert" the "public voice" to insure "serious effect" (213). To "control reality" women depended upon their "wits, intrigues" or the "clever and sometimes devious use of words" (213). Not only is Ferrante's evaluation of literary women as sneaky and conniving individuals unflattering, it is also myopic. In two sentences she dismisses the women of Beowulf as unworthy of consideration because they were mere "passive victims" who willingly accepted their roles as victims of male feuding (213-14).
Ferrante completely ignores Wealhtheow, the main female character, as well as Hygd, both of whom were strong queens who openly used their public power and influence to achieve their own goals.


As readers of vernacular literature, as mothers in charge of childhood education, as literary patrons who commissioned books and translations, and as wives who married across cultural and geographical boundaries, women had a specific and unique influence. (150)

Through book ownership women exercised the "greatest and most far-reaching power known to society" (149). They controlled who had access to learning. When "gender" is singled out for special attention, as in "Citizenship and Gender," by Martha C. Howell, the term still refers to the conventional female biological distinction.

Claiming to "develop a balanced assessment of the representations of women--and, . . . of men--in Anglo-Saxon literature" (2) as well as a "more accurate reading" of the Old English texts, the collection of essays edited by Damico and Olsen re-examines some of the stereotypical feminine
roles in light of feminist inquiry. With only a few extant samples to support his thesis, L. John Sklute suggests that "peace-weaver" freoðuwebbe was not an epithet applied only to woman, but, rather, was a "poetic metaphor" for any individual (a male angel in "Elene" or Offa's wife in Beowulf) who attempted to secure peace by weaving "friendship and amnesty," by constructing bonds of "allegiance," between the king and an outsider (208).

After examining the "sad lady" geomuru ides stereotype, Joyce Hill concludes that in Anglo-Saxon historical writings the imbalance between the scant attention paid to the activity of royal women and the extensive coverage devoted to the activity of men is indicative of the marginalization of women that occurs when idealized history is transformed into legend. Such a process creates a polarity between stereotypical masculine associations (action, physical aggression, success in war, and acquisition of treasure) and stereotypical feminine qualities (intrigue, helplessness, victimization, and mourning) (240, 244). Hill maintains that, stylized though they be, the portraits of women presented by Anglo-Saxon writers do reflect a "recognizable reality" (237). Patricia Belanoff's essay, "Women's Songs, Women's Language," examines "Wulf and Eadwacer" and "The Wife's Lament" in light of Julia Kristeva's theory of language acquisition, which distinguishes two types of language, the semiotic (female/
maternal) and the symbolic (male/paternal) (194-95). Belanoff confesses that, like Kristeva, she does not limit semiotic language solely to women's voices nor symbolic language only to male voices. Crossovers occur.\textsuperscript{3} Upon occasion women may take advantage of symbolic language, and men may need to use semiotic language.

Special-interest works generally emphasize isolated or selective areas of feminine study. In \textit{Woman as Hero in Old English Literature} (1986), Jane Chance re-examines the heroines in Anglo-Saxon literature to account for the discrepancy between the actual literary characterization of women as strong and active agents and the literary ideal of Anglo-Saxon women as "passive, peaceful, and colorless addition[s] to society" (xiv). Regardless of the "rule of Anglo-Saxon society [that] demanded passivity, rather than leadership and initiative, from most of its women" (111) and that absolutely refused to countenance feminine heroism (xvii), writers often portrayed females via the same heroic diction and imagery as they used to depict heroic males (xiii). However, while feminine heroic figures were treated favorably if portrayed in a religious context as warriors of God, they were treated pejoratively if portrayed in the secular context of the Germanic \textit{comitatus} (xiv). Thus, Chance argues that exceptional women who acquired positions of authority in the political or social sectors, did so, not by exhibiting manly traits, but by demonstrating great
sanctity and chastity, assets considered heroic in women who 
functioned in and outside the church (xv, 111).

According to Chance, the conventional secular role 
of Anglo-Saxon woman was "perfectly fulfilled" in the 
"archetype of the Virgin Mary," a role that "demanded her 
passivity and peace-making talent" (xiv), and encompassed 
"all of the roles normally available to women" (xv). The 
heroic ladies of Beowulf--Hildeburh, Freawaru, Hygd, and 
Wealhtheow--serve as prime examples of the Virgin-figure. 
In this category Chance also includes the militants, Judith, 
Juliana, and Elene. She discounts the female warriors' 
use of force and violence on the grounds that the trio 
functioned martially on the anagogical allegorical level 
as representatives of the church militant, "Eccelesia as hero" (52).

Any female guilty of inverting the "passive ideal" 
and exhibiting "lascivious, heathen . . . [or] rebellious" 
tendencies was modeled upon Eve (xiv). Through their uncon-
ventional behavior, Grendel's mother and the narrators of 
"Wulf and Eadwacer" and "The Wife's Lament" are guilty of 
inverting the feminine social roles. Functioning as a 
"warring anti-type of harmony and peace" (108), Grendel's 
mother "blurs the sexual and social categories of roles" 
(97). And, by assuming the role of scop, a role most 
frequently reserved for men, the two wives mask "the 
failure, . . . of a feminine social role" (83). While the
Bible was the source of both archetypes, Germanic diction, values, and imagery influenced their depiction (xvii). In the final chapter, Chance acknowledges that manly, warlike behavior was permissible for a "warrior of Christ," whether male or female, if such activity was necessary to "continue His work and thereby defeat His enemy" (110).

Whereas Chance interprets Wealhtheow as an embodiment of the Virgin Mary, in Beowulf's *Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (1984) Helen Damico traces some prominent Anglo-Saxon female literary characters, namely Wealhtheow and the Christian female warriors, back to the Old Norse valkyrie-figure. Damico contends that the dual nature of this mythological character, a combination of fierce war-demon and courtly warrior-figure, was incorporated into Old English literature, especially into *Beowulf*. Though portrayed in provocative guise, the murderous animosity of Modthrytho qualifies her as a "grim slaughter-spirit" (46). Likewise, Grendel's mother is not only an "archetype of corruption" (4), but also is a rendering of the malevolent female "warrior-figure," a baleful "battle-demon" (57). In addition to being described as "mighty sea-woman" merewif mihtig (l. 1519), "mighty evil ravager" mihtig manscāda (l. 1339), and a "sinful man" sinnigne secg (l. 1379a), she is also referred to via masculine pronouns in lines 1260, 1392, and 1394 (46). The corrupt behavior of these two representatives of the baleful nature of the valkyrie-figure
is sanctioned by neither society nor the poet and must be redeemed or punished (48). Out of love for her husband Offa, Modthrythro reforms (49); Grendel’s mother is killed in a duel with Beowulf.

Wealhtheow serves as a model for the noble female-warrior. While this aristocratic lady neither brandishes a sword nor charges into battle, several factors do contribute to creating a "martial ambiance" (5). Reminiscent of a Germanic lord’s band of *pegns*, the queen is attended by a "troop of maidens" *maegpa hose*. Just like the king, Wealhtheow exercises influence in the court. Not only does she reward exceptional *pegns* with rich gifts and receive homage from Hrothgar’s retainers, but she even counsels the king on national policy and decisions. By inciting Beowulf to battle, the queen demonstrates that she, too, is capable of precipitating action (5-6). In her comparison of Wealhtheow to Elene, Judith, Juliana, and other popular Anglo-Saxon warrior-women, Damico acknowledges that "the heroic temperament apparently is equally appropriate to male and female" as long as they demonstrate "soberness of mind, nobility of birth, [and] courage in action" (27). True, Damico does attribute to Wealhtheow and the female warrior-saints, manly behavior and traits which signal power. But, instead of crediting these qualities to the Anglo-Saxon poet’s use of masculine-coded language to confirm a status of power, she affiliates the forceful displays with the
warlike valkyrie-figure which the *Beowulf*-poet had appropriated from Old Norse literature and incorporated into his own portrait of women. The masculine traits were part and parcel of the borrowed, foreign literary figure.

Expanding the scope of her book *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (1983) to include continental as well as English sources, Angela Lucas relates the roles of women in religion, marriage, and literature (including wills and charters, learned treatises, sermons, and homilies) to the ideas in society which produced that literature (xi). In spite of widely promulgated views which upheld the "inferior position of women" and approved "legal restrictions" to guarantee their submission (182), Lucas claims that many medieval women were neither "regarded as useless nor were they oppressed," but, rather, were "accorded considerable responsibility" (187). Yet, the title of Lucas' article confirms that she has confined her study to the same spheres of activity as did her predecessors--the home and church.

Regarding the date of the diminution of Anglo-Saxon women's power, in *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, Stephanie Hollis takes issue with Christine Fell, Doris Stenton, and Sheila Dietrich. According to Hollis, because these three scholars have seriously underestimated the early influence of the Church's dogma and misogynist teachings, they attribute the loss of power to the "changes introduced
by the Norman Conquest," a claim that is "misleading" (7). Furthermore, Jane Chance is guilty of overestimating the penetration of "patristic conceptions" into society when she interprets female Anglo-Saxon literary characters as types of the Virgin Mary or Eve figures (9). Chance has assumed incorrectly that the Anglo-Saxons had "thoroughly interiorized the iconographical constructions" of the two feminine models (9) much earlier than they actually had.

Hollis suggests that we might be "more accurate to speak of a gradual erosion in the position of women, ... from at least as early as the eighth century" (7). For confirmation, Hollis refers primarily to Bede's "near silence on the activities of reigning queens," "under-representation of women's social participation," "scanty, unforthcoming coverage of the double monasteries" which were ruled by abbesses, "marked limitations" as a chronicler of female monasticism (13), and "derogatory attitude" towards monastic women (246) as proof of an "aspiration" to bring about the "actual marginalization" of women (13). Although Hollis does consider the issue of power and women, she consistently treats women as members of a subordinate sex, implying that power was dependent upon sexual distinctions. Disregarding Anglo-Saxon society's open toleration of women who assumed male roles and did so successfully, the Church was determined to put women in their proper place, to prevent them from intruding into main-stream, public
activities. Highly critical of Bede, Hollis attempts to convince us that Bede’s attitude was a forerunner of the stricter, more exclusive stance adopted by the later medieval Church, and, as such, constituted a deliberate attempt to curtail woman’s authority and activity.

Ignoring the older view that men were the primary source of power, leadership, and influence, many of these late twentieth-century researchers redefine the terminology to broaden the "conventional understanding" of power, thereby making room for women’s behavior. Refusing to rely upon the traditional definition of power as public authority guaranteed by martial prowess and coercion, these "new forms of power and new areas for its exercise" (Erler and Kowaleski 1) stress the "ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions, and to achieve goals" (2), while de-emphasizing participation in more aggressive, manly activities. Essentially, they are arguing that medieval women possessed power too, but the power to which women had access was not the same as that available to men. Women’s power was different: it was peaceful and passive in comparison to the more violent, aggressive, and martial power usually exercised by men.

Needless to say, Anglo-Saxon women assuredly demonstrated this diluted form of power. They wrote wills, witnessed numerous charters, and owned and bequeathed land and property. Whitelock’s collection of Anglo-Saxon wills
features thirty-nine wills, ten of which were drawn up on behalf of women alone and four more on behalf of husband and wife together. Over a quarter of the fifty Anglo-Saxon wills that survive were signed by women (Fell 95). Between A.D. 940 and 956 Eadgifu, the wife of King Edward the Elder, dutifully witnessed fifty charters (Lucas 44). According to Lucas, the Domesday Book furnishes irrefutable proof that women held ownership of estates separate from those of their spouses, property which the husband had absolutely no authority to give or sell (184).

Marc Meyer alleges that, especially when women were the owners, the "possession of land meant wealth, power, and influence" (70). Of the ten women in Whitelock's collection of wills, all ten possessed land to bequeath. Eadgifu owned extensive estates in Essex, Suffolk, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire, and possibly in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Not only could Anglo-Saxon women own land, but they could also inherit land. Wulfwaru willed a total of seven estates to her four children, five and a half estates were bequeathed to her two sons, and two and a half estates to her two daughters (Whitelock, Wills 63-65). Patrick Wormald's handlist of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits verifies that, although in the minority, lawsuits were filed by and apparently won by women, mostly abbesses and queens. Not unexpectedly, many of the lawsuits were associated with disputes over land ownership (247-81).
As demonstrated above, documentary evidence certainly supports this newly expanded and moderated, though somewhat ambiguous, diminished, and demeaning definition of power. Obviously, many Old English scholars feel comfortable with a dichotomy of power, public and private, the former being the realm of men and the latter the domain of women. But, if feminine power is deprived of its vigor, then how does such a definition account for the contradictory literary roles sometimes assigned by Anglo-Saxon poets: to feminine figures, roles which incorporated violent, aggressive, and martial behavior; to masculine figures, roles which reflected passivity, submission, and effeminate behavior? Anglo-Saxon poets often thrust female figures into circumstances that required the display of masculine traits, and placed male figures in situations that demanded the assumption of feminine attributes.

By relying upon our twentieth-century theories which segregate power along public/private lines, scholars have failed to detect in Old English poetry a relation between Anglo-Saxon perceptions of gender, sex, and power, perceptions that were similar to those of other medieval northern European cultures even though they are somewhat alien to our own. Scholars have neglected to consider that through gender-coded language Anglo-Saxon poets were expressing their belief that power belonged not just to members of the male sex, but to any individual, regardless of sex,
class, or profession, who was capable of displaying those masculine-coded traits signifying power.

Allen Frantzen calls to our attention the weakness of works like Jane Chance’s *Woman As Hero in Old English Literature* and Damico’s and Olsen’s *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, prime examples of what Frantzen terms an early phase of the feminist revolution. Advocates of this "women in" phase have earned respect for their dedication to re-evaluating texts in order to discover "the woman’s" point of view (447). For the world of scholarship, such studies are valuable for having catalogued and listed previously ignored data (448). Unfortunately, these same examinations have also succeeded in joining "sex to women in a construct nearly as monolithic as that which had traditionally joined everything else to men" (449). Feminist scholars who have ardently pursued gender studies have constructed a "universalized female paradigm" corresponding to and just as inadequate as the "universalized male paradigm" created by Freud (449).

In his article "When Women Aren’t Enough" (1993), Frantzen credits poststructuralist feminism with having insisted upon a re-examination of the idea of women, a re-examination which also necessitated "a new look at men" (450). He first presents a lengthy survey of the history of gender studies, offers a definition of gender which can be applied to literary analysis, enumerates the advantages
gained by applying gender theory to medieval texts, and then analyzes the behavior of three female saints along gender lines. For literary purposes, Frantzen adopts a definition of gender that incorporates the three main components of the psychological and sociological interpretations.

Gender is a tool [not a system or process] for reconceptualizing male as well as female roles, reconfiguring the power struggles between the sexes, and merging sexual distinctions founded on reproductive difference. (445)

Frantzen enthusiastically recommends re-examining medieval texts and institutions in light of gender concerns because it will demand a "reassessment of the flow of power in and around medieval texts of all kinds" (452) and "redefine" the positions of power, allowing them to be "recast in fluid terms" (451).

Not only do these interpretive gender-based techniques describe behavior, thoughts, and traits that are and are not typical of men and women, permitting men and women to behave like men and women respectively, but they also accommodate men who act like women, and women who act like men (451). Thus, the qualities that we generally associate with opposites like victimizer and victim, oppressor and oppressed, power and powerlessness, are interchangeable and assumable by members of both sexes. Males and females can fill identical roles or they can exchange roles when
the circumstances warrant. In Frantzen's opinion, gender explains why some women in medieval works achieved a status more powerful than that of men, and why some men held a weaker position than other men and women (446). At last, a literary scholar interprets gender as a system which orders relations among members of the same sex as well as members of the opposite sex. Gender studies provide a means of understanding how an individual's identity can be shaped "by custom and institutionalized social possibilities that exclude certain forms of behavior," and of debating and revising the "cultural interpretations" males and females have been forced to bear and the "social possibilities" that contain them (452).

In his own analysis of the three "desexed holy" women (Agatha, Eugenia, and Euphrosyne) from Aelfric's prose piece Lives of Saints, Frantzen interprets the saints' lives in a sociological context. Having outlined an abbreviated system of traits that could be applied to men or women, he argues that manliness was not marked by class but by gender (461), and gender was determined by performance (451). Focusing on "manly women," a name for transvestite saints" whose "gender identities" had to change before they could achieve the sanctity they desired, Frantzen examines how "switches of gender identity" furnish opportunities "to explore the meaning of gender itself as a performative category" (460). He concludes that these female saints had to transcend their
womanly bodies either through disguise (cross-dressing) or by mutilation of the female form (amputation of a breast), to conform to Aelfric's own belief that women could not earn salvation unless they acquired "a man's nature" (464). For a woman to be holy, she had to become like a man (466-67), which seemed to be limited mostly to physical appearance. "Gender switching" was seen as an "enabling" process (466). Unfortunately, Frantzen's list of masculine- and feminine-coded characteristics is somewhat abbreviated.

Carol Clover expands the list in "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," an article in which she examines the relationship between power and gender in Icelandic sagas. Although Clover does not deal specifically with England or the Anglo-Saxons, she does explore the relationship between power and gender in the literature of another medieval Germanic society with a similar masculine-centered heroic code. Recorded in the thirteenth century, the sagas claim to recount events which occurred in the period of early Icelandic settlement (ca. 870-1050). The sagas provide a literary account of the attitudes and customs of a warrior-based culture which had Germanic antecedents and flourished under conditions as disruptive and competitive as those experienced by the Anglo-Saxons in England. Clover's fundamental premise is that Scandinavian culture, and perhaps Germanic culture throughout northern Europe (385), including Anglo-Saxon
England, condoned a "sex-gender system rather different from our own, and indeed rather different from that of the Christian Middle Ages" (364).

During this period, gender was not necessarily "coextensive with biological sex" (379). Instead, it constituted an open system of "acquired traits [masculine and feminine]" (370) based "to an extraordinary extent on winnable and losable attributes" (379) which were accessible to both men and women. Masculinity and effeminacy were distinguished, not by sex, but primarily by the degree to which persons exhibited particular characteristics: "strong and weak, powerful and powerless or disempowered, swordworthy and unswordworthy, honored and unhonored or dishonored, winners and losers" (380). "Distinction had to be acquired, and constantly reacquired, by wresting it away from others" (380). Women could exercise power and influence without undue disapproval. Clover suggests that for whatever reason an Icelandic woman chose to play "life like a man," she was occasionally "deplored" by medieval authors, but more often she was "flatly admired" (377).

After closely examining the use of flytings (verbal insults or abuse), especially those involving sexual defamation, Clover concludes that flytings were "preoccupied with power--or more to the point, with powerlessness under threat of physical force" (377). The Scandinavians recognized only one gender that comprised a single-standard system by which
persons were judged to be adequate or inadequate. This standard was "something like masculine" (377). To be powerless was to be impotent, to be effeminate, and to have slipped into the "default category" reserved strictly for the person of either sex who, regardless of the reason, fell "outside normative masculinity" (377). Typically associated with women, powerlessness, and not femaleness, was the condition which the Scandinavian mind most feared and loathed. On the other hand, though it was enjoyed mostly by men, sovereignty, and not maleness, won admiration.

With the exception of Frantzen, to date, Anglo-Saxon scholars have neglected to apply a theory of gender to Anglo-Saxon society and literature, settling for a myopic view of how power was accessed and who accessed it. They have accepted a bifurcation of power based chiefly on sex differences or sex-related social roles, a division that acknowledges two types of power, public and private. Public power which encompassed activities such as warfare, law-making, physical coercion, intimidation, and verbal sparring, was set aside for men. Private power which included church work, land ownership, child bearing and rearing, peace-weaving, and household duties was allocated to women. Satisfied with just convincing critics that Anglo-Saxon women really did exercise some kind of power, the world of scholarship has failed to examine how gender-coded language was used to signal power relations between
men and women, and men and men. The gender system that we encounter in Anglo-Saxon poetry was not merely a literary figment of overactive artistic imaginations. It was a viable element of Anglo-Saxon society. We can detect evidence of this gender system and the Anglo-Saxon writers' interest in power and its various manifestations in the quasi-historical (religious and secular) prose accounts of the time, as well as in the religious and secular poetry.
NOTES

1 See also Chance (xiv); Dietrich (32); Power (402-03); and the historian David Harrison's, England Before the Norman Conquest. Harrison categorically declares:

   In fact, women were accorded an unusually honoured place in Old English society and considerable scope for their abilities . . . . Altogether, women enjoyed greater legal freedom before than for long after the Norman Conquest. (272)

2 See also Jane Chance, page 5.

3 See footnote 8 on page 201.

4 Jane Chance uses similar wording to describe Grendel's mother (95).

5 According to Frantzen, these manly, desexed women were able to transcend their womanly bodies either by cross-dressing as men (Agatha, Eugenia, and Euphrosyne) or through the amputation of a breast (Agatha) (461-65).
CHAPTER III

GENDER AND POWER IN ANGLO-SAXON

PROSE AND RELIGIOUS POETRY

While dates ranging from A.D. 650 to 1000 have been proposed for the writing of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the consensus is that extant works were probably first composed between A.D. 680 and 850,\textsuperscript{1} during some of the most contentious centuries of English history. By the seventh century, English Christianity had adopted as its official form of organization a system of centralized authority which demanded allegiance to the Pope. Three hundred years later during the tenth-century reign of Edgar, the first "king of England" \emph{Engla cyning} (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 975\textsuperscript{2}), the political organization embraced the concept of the sovereignty of the King. The preceding years were filled with political intrigue and violent turmoil as power figures, male and female, competed to secure a status of power and leadership.

Following the cessation of Roman rule in A.D. 410, Britain was plagued with religious controversy and discord; assaults by marauding Picts and Scots from northern Britain; encroachment by the mercenary Angles, Saxons, and Jutes from the Continent; and incessant wrangling among petty kings,
many of whom resorted to violence to establish a position of supremacy. Tersely but aptly Bede (A.D. 673-735) captures the unrest of the times in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* Interea Brittaniae cessatum quidem est parumper ab externis, sed non a ciuilibus bellis. . . . *pugnabunt contra iniucem, qui hostem euaserant ciues* (i.22).³ "Meanwhile, Britain was at rest for a while from foreign, but not from civil wars. . . . The citizens who had escaped the [foreign] enemy fought against one another."

Through manipulation when possible and coercion when necessary, Church and State allied to eventually wrest power from the older segmental system of governance which at times recognized as the chief authority figure the patriarch of the family, the leader of the chiefdom, or the petty king of a tribal state.

A quick perusal of the Old English vocabulary will substantiate that power was of primary importance to the Anglo-Saxons. If we take into consideration the limited sources from which we can construct a comprehensive vocabulary as well as the demands of the alliterative system in poetry, the fascination of Anglo-Saxon writers with power was no passing fancy. Judging from the number of words denoting power or strength, this ideal was prominent in every sector of Anglo-Saxon society. The Anglo-Saxon language contains numerous nouns which are translated as "power," but have additional secondary meanings that
incorporate the idea of force, physical strength, or violence. Besides nouns, writers also had at their disposal a multitude of adjectives and adverbs, many of which have independent stems not derived from extant nouns or verbs, that also inferred powerful, strong, or hard. Numerous verbs, several being derivatives of weald, expressed the idea of to be strong or to exercise control over.

The Anglo-Saxon word-hoard boasted a substantial supply of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs through which writers could convey ideas about power to their audiences. Nouns include *afol, cæft* (might, strength of body, cunning), *eafod* (strength, violence, might), *mægen* (might, strength), *meaht* (might), *weald* (power), *ellen* (strength, courage), *strenðu, onweald* (authority, power) and *onsting* (authority, right to intervene); adjectives and adverbs: *bræsna* (strong, bold), *geocor* (strong, fierce, hard), *rice* (strong, powerful, mighty), *ranc* (noble, brave, strong), *rof* (vigorous, strong, brave), *stearc* (stiff, rigid, strong, violent), *stringlic* (strong, firm), *strang, swið* (mighty, strong), *cæftig* (strong, powerful), and *meahtig, fæste* (firmly), *fæstlice* (firmly steadfastly, resolutely), *stearclice* (sternly), *stiðlice* (firm, strong, hard, stern), *strenģlice* (strongly, firmly); and verbs: *strangian* (to strengthen), *swiðan* (to strengthen, to use force against), *strengan* (to make strong), *trymman* (to make firm, strong), *trumian* (to become strong), *geweald* (to rule, control), *onweald*
(to hold dominion over, to get possession of), wealdan (to rule, to control, to have power over), mægenian (to gain strength), and niðan (to force, compel). Such an abundance of synonymous words strongly suggests that to be physically strong or powerful or to control via force was a topic of vital concern to the writers.

Even a cursory reading of the documentary and quasi-historical prose sources (religious and secular) will reveal an obsessive interest in the individual acquisition and loss of power and influence, regardless of the sex of the power-figure. Bede's more expansive Ecclesiastical History as well as the yearly notations of the seven manuscripts of the Chronicle, both comprise a composite record of the rise and fall of members of the Anglo-Saxon elite, female as well as male, who possessed power and prestige and were able to control events and people. And, practically every Old English poem, especially those of a religious nature, incorporates power as either a primary or secondary theme. Writers of both prose and poetry favored masculine-coded language as a means of indicating those who were powerful. Among the authors themselves there seems to have been no prohibition forbidding women from exercising power, provided they exhibited the appropriate masculine-coded traits which signified power. Nor were the poets reluctant to depict men who had assumed a feminine-coded status of powerlessness.
Bede records the clandestine and bitter contest between Edwin and Aethelfrith, contenders for the Northumbrian throne. Having been deprived of his right to rule and rendered helpless to protect himself from hostile forces, Edwin wanders for several years as an exile, eventually seeking safety with King Raedwald of the Angles who promises to assist Edwin in the recovery of the throne. Weakened either by threat of attack or bribery, Raedwald violates his trust, agreeing to betray Edwin, in spite of his earlier pledge to help the young nobleman. In his time of weakness, Edwin is approached by a spirit (God or a messenger from God) who assures Edwin he will be a king "who surpasses in power" potestate transcendás all those who have reigned before him in England, provided Edwin promises to obey and accept the guidance of God (ii.12). Finally, Edwin recaptures the throne of Northumbria in A.D. 616 with the assistance of King Raedwald, who has grown to fear that Aethelfrith, who has become his rival too, has designs on his territory of East Anglia (ii.12).

When we initiate a search for documentary substantiation of women who exercised power and achieved success similar to that of men, religious sources provide us with various examples. Abbesses such as Cuthburga, Aethelthryth, and Hild functioned as competent administrators, actively participating in royal councils and religious synods, overseeing the construction of ecclesiastical buildings
(Schulenburg 110), endowing monasteries from their own wealth, offering wise advice to kings and princes, and exercising authority over monks and nuns. These women readily accepted and carried out responsibilities comparable to those performed by male bishops or male members of the king’s witan, advisory council. In addition, women could access the storehouse of knowledge and were acknowledged for supporting or acquiring learning. Bede commends Hild who had the foresight to recognize Caedmon’s spiritual gift and persuade him to enter the monastery and dedicate himself to rendering sacred history into melodious verse (iv.24). Included in a letter to Boniface offering her services to the English missionary endeavors on the Continent, the nun Leofgyth (Lioba) sends a few lines of her verses composed in Latin for his perusal and correction. Leofgyth praises Abbess Eadburg for having taught her the art of versification (Whitelock, Historical Documents 798-99).

In an examination of medieval English monasteries published in 1896, Lina Eckenstein concluded that women honored as saints were numerous in England, but primarily during the mid-seventh through mid-eighth centuries (80). From A.D. 650-750, two of every five saints were women (Schulenburg 104), and accounts of female saints’ lives were as popular as those of males. Bede does not hesitate to express his admiration of the women who used their power and influence on behalf of the Church, especially in con-
nection with the double-monastery system which flourished in England.⁵ Constituting large, stable, and impressive communities filled with women from wealthy and important aristocratic families, the double-monasteries provided a "significant power base" and a steady supply of resources for the petty rulers of the kingdoms in which they were established (Schulenburg 110).⁶ Many of the women who are mentioned in the Chronicle—Aethelburg, Aethelthryth, Eormengota, Seaxburg, and Hild—either founded or supported religious houses, labored as leaders of the monasteries, and frequently were rewarded with sainthood, just like their male counterparts Cuthbert and Aidan.

Although the Chronicle is dedicated more to political rather than religious moguls and many of the details have been omitted, it has preserved the remnants of power struggles on both the religious and secular fronts. Having incurred the animosity of King Ecgfrith and Archbishop Theodore, Bishop Wilfrid was deprived of his authority and possessions and, according to the Chronicle, in A.D. 676 was expelled from his bishopric in Northumbria by the king. During the next nine years the Chronicle is completely silent about Wilfrid’s whereabouts and activities, but from other sources we glean that the dispossessed bishop traveled to Rome, presented his complaint to the Pope, and received a favorable decision. Upon his return to England, Wilfrid lacked sufficient power to persuade the Anglo-Saxon ruling
structure to issue a reinstatement. The disempowered bishop was promptly imprisoned and eventually had to flee to the Isle of Wight. Only with the death of King Ecgrith in A.D. 685, does the Chronicle confirm that Wilfrid was restored to the Bishopric of York.

In an unusual extended entry for the year A.D. 755, the scribe of the Chronicle furnishes, in quick succession, three episodes which demonstrate the entire power cycle (win, lose, regain) in the bloody dispute between the petty kings Sigeberht and Cynewulf, and Cynewulf and Cyneheard (brother of Sigeberht). To acquire kingship of the West Saxons, Cynewulf deposed Sigeberht, who was famous for unjust acts against his subjects, but Cynewulf himself was unable to retain his kingship. Determined to regain the power his brother previously had lost, Cyneheard and his band boldly attacked and murdered Cynewulf and his retainers. To counter this treachery, faithful followers of Cynewulf retaliated by killing Cyneheard and his men. Repeatedly, power is gained by violent force and lost by violent force.

Since extant secular documentation is often silent on the subject of strong, influential women, modern scholars often have been quick to criticize or defend the Anglo-Saxon authors on the basis of sex discrimination. To account for the paucity of documentary information on females, Betty Bandel falls back on the old public versus private power
controversy, maintaining that the incidents in which women featured prominently in the *Chronicle* were relatively few because of "the prevailing patriarchal method" of appointing men to fill public offices (114). Thus, powerful women were seldom mentioned because there were few powerful women holding public positions. Whenever possible, women were excluded from holding positions which would have allowed them to exercise power. If they were recognized at all, excluding churchwomen, females were typically "linked with the political and economic rights of some family" (114). Pauline Stafford is far more critical. In comparison to the achievements of kings, the activities of queens were deemed unimportant by the chroniclers (Stafford 1). Accounts of their accomplishments are corrupted by "every possible form of bias and distortion . . . : malicious gossip, political propaganda, deliberate suppression of facts, inadequate knowledge, blatant antifeminism, even simple lies" (30). Joyce Hill agrees with Stafford's judgment and further accuses the scribes of demonstrating "a political partisanship" which frequently made the Queens "scapegoats for the Kings' actions" (235).

Christine Fell credits the lack of representation to the nature of the documents themselves. Because women seldom actively participated in warfare, "peaceable and peace-time activities of queens and princesses inevitably . . . [received] little attention in chronicles centering on
power-struggles" (93). Acknowledging the universal scarcity of secular source material, Angela Lucas proposes that perhaps Christianity, with its strict restraints upon "independent action" by females outside the home or church, might be responsible: "After the advent of Christianity we have to look more and more to convents and monasteries, rather than secular life, for signs of prominent female figures" (30).

In spite of these occasional harsh judgments, we do encounter secular references to Anglo-Saxon women who "played power politics" like men (Chickering 264). Those who are singled out for honorable mention are recognized for displaying the same qualities as those exhibited by men who held similar positions of power. With no words of commendation or criticism for either, the Chronicle notes that Queen Seaxburg ruled the West Saxons for one year following the death of her husband Cenwalh in A.D. 672. In A.D. 722 Queen Aethelburh demolished Tantun, a fortress town formerly built by King Ine. At most we can assume she acted on her own initiative for no further comment is offered. David Harrison conjectures that Ine had built the fortified burh to protect recent conquests in the region, and it had been seized by Eadlberht of the West Saxons. When Aethelburh reclaimed the fortress, she razed it to the ground to prevent a repetition of the incident. Just as succinctly and impartially, similar events focusing on the activities of men are recorded by the chroniclers. In 702 Kenred succeed-
ed to the kingdom of Southumbria, and in 777 Cynewulf and Offa fought around Bensington. Offa eventually succeeded in capturing the town.

One hundred years after the incident occurred, Asser's *Life of Alfred* recounts the story of Eadburh, wife of King Brihtric of Wessex (married in A.D. 787), as related to him by King Alfred himself (11-13). Having assumed control of most of the kingdom following their marriage, Queen Eadburh became a tyrant, eliminating all who resisted her authority. Whenever possible, the queen undermined and destroyed the reputation of her opponents. If scandal and rumormongering failed, she resorted to murder. Under such insidious circumstances, Eadburh accidentally poisoned her husband, the king. Forced to flee for safety to Charles, King of the Franks, she eventually died in disgrace and poverty. Nevertheless, before her own demise, Queen Eadburh had so abused her power and alienated the West Saxons that they retaliated by instituting a policy forbidding future queens from ruling jointly, from sitting on the throne beside the king, and even from bearing the title "queen."

In the year 755 the *Chronicle* records the infamous behavior of a king who also committed similar offenses against the noblemen of his kingdom, was banished by his subjects, and experienced a miserable death in exile. In disgrace, King Sigeberht was deprived of his kingdom and driven into the Weald because he was found guilty of crimes
against his own people. The king's most dispicable act was to reward with murder the loyalty of one of his most faithful supporters, a nobleman who had stood by him longer than any other. He killed the ealdorman of Hampshire. Alienated from the community network and deprived of the protection offered by membership in the comitatus, Sigeberht was later stabbed to death by a swineherd near the stream at Privett.

In the Chronicle a single abbreviated entry records the death in A.D. 918 of Queen Aethelflaed, the greatest English warrior-queen. A separate series of annals ("Mercian Register") maintained during the years A.D. 902-24, recount at length the manly, courageous, and warlike exploits of the "Lady of Mercia." This queen assumed leadership of the kingdom following her husband's death, and for eight years dominated the political scene, ruling with integrity, fortitude, and foresight greater than her husband's and perhaps equal to her brother's. Working in conjunction with her brother, King Edward of Wessex, to reclaim most of the territory previously surrendered to the Danes under the Danelaw, Aethelflaed functioned as more than a token ruler. To record the activities of the brother-sister alliance, the "Mercian Register" and Anglo-Saxon chroniclers used similar, masculine-coded language. Aethelflaed accomplished projects identical to those undertaken by her brother, successfully constructing ten fortified burhs, commanding the Mercian army, on at least one occasion personally leading the
Mercian troops in a campaign to capture Derby, and accepting the peaceful surrender of the greater part of the Danish army at Leicester in A.D. 918.

As in the quasi-historical accounts, so, too, in the surviving 30,000 lines of Old English poetry, especially in the religious poetry, is attention focused on power figures and the qualities they have in common. In the long poem "Andreas," the author examines the struggle between earthly and divine power. Posited as an earthly lord-figure who commands a band of religious retainers, God governs via might. He exercises ultimate power (1717-19a). Not only is God's "holy power" halegum mihtum (l. 104) sufficient to deliver any þegn from harm, but God's power is so awesome that by merely speaking a single word He can move cities and countries upon the face of the earth (ll. 205-10).

The twelve disciples are introduced with military vocabulary as "leaders bold" and "warriors of might" frome folctogan and rofe rincas, (ll. 8-9). Matthew is a "warrior" magu-pegne (l. 94) "strong in battle" beadurofum (l. 96). Andrew is "hard, strong and valiant" heard ond higerof (l. 233) and "powerful" ellenrofe (l. 350). This masculine quality of hardness or firm resolve, especially in relation to combat, shows up again in "The Battle of Maldon," "The Husband's Message," and Beowulf. Empowered by God, Andrew rescues Matthew from prison, bravely endures hardships, and performs miracles.
Three religious poems spotlighting women involve them in power disputes. Critics generally concur that the authors of the poems which feature Judith, Juliana, and Elene allow the trio to exercise a great deal of power and influence because of their religious affiliation. Empowered by God to do his bidding, their aggressive, combative, behavior is as appropriate and commendable as that of Andreas's. The poets rely upon the same martial adjectives and verbs to describe the activity of these three female warriors as they do to recount the warlike deeds of masculine figures. To save the Israelites, "with strength, courage" mid elne (l. 95) Judith, a "courageous, powerful woman" ides ellenrof (l. 109), "hews off" forcearf (l. 105) and sloh (l. 108) the head of Holofernes, the evil king of the Assyrians. Having won her own glory in battle (ll. 122-23), this woman then "commands" biddan (l. 187) the Hebrew army to arm themselves and attack the Assyrian army.  

Refusing to obey her father's demand that she marry a wicked idol worshipper, like Matthew, Juliana stoically endures humiliation and torture for her faith. More aggressive than Andrew, Juliana dares to "seize" genom (l. 288) and "bind with fetters" fetrum gebunde (l. 433) a fiend from hell. Elene, described as a "warrior-queen" guðcwen, is commissioned by her son King Constantine to recover the cross of Christ (l. 254). Far more aggressive than Juliana, Elene boldly leads a "troop of armed warriors"
mægen (l. 242), heape (l. 269) and guðrofe hælep (l. 273) to Jerusalem to confront the Jews. When attempts at persuasion and threats of punishment fail to convince the Jews to disclose the location of the cross, Elene does not hesitate to resort to torture by starvation as a means of coercing Judas into revealing his secret.

There is no denying that Anglo-Saxons poets freely relied upon gendered language to signal power relationships. Since the masculine-coded attributes assigned to power-figures, especially to female power-figures, in religious poems are so frequently credited to God’s empowerment, I have limited my investigation chiefly to the secular poetry, with the exception of "The Dream of the Rood." Although it features male power-figures, "The Dream of the Rood" offers the most thorough documentation of how changes in power relations were designated via masculine- and feminine-coded language. An examination of the use of gender-coded language to signal when the power-status changed in "The Dream of the Rood," "The Husband’s Message," "The Wanderer," "The Wife’s Lament," "Wulf and Eadwacer," and in the characters of Hrothgar, Unferth, Hygd, and Wealhtheow in Beowulf, will help us understand how the Anglo-Saxon gender system was structured and how it ordered relations between members of the same sex as well as between members of the opposite sex.

Previous to Clover’s study which concluded that the medieval Germanic culture in Scandinavian countries was
preoccupied with powerlessness, Fell claimed that much of
the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons was concerned with the "vul-
erability" of the individual (37), whether with an old
warrior who has lost his lord ("The Wanderer"), an exiled
lord alienated from the kinship structure ("The Husband's
Message"), or women separated from their men ("The Wife's
Lament"; "Wulf and Eadwacer"). The poets relied upon a
convenient tool, gendered language, to indicate who was in
a position of power and when that position altered, regard-
less of the biological sex of the power-figure. Masculine-
coded language confirmed that a character held a position
of power, and non-masculine language indicated that a
character had assumed a status of powerlessness.

In "The Dream of the Rood" we can easily recognize
the power figures and follow the power cycle in its entirety
merely by observing the sign posts furnished by gendered
language. When characters become disenfranchised, they are
described via feminine-coded language. Once they have
regained their status of power, masculine-coded language is
again employed. In "The Wanderer" and "The Wife's Lament"
we can track the demise of two exiles, one male and the
other female, who are unable to escape their condition of
powerlessness. Yet, while they have slipped into the femi-
nine "default category" (Clover 377) reserved for the help-
less and the weak, they obstinately cling to manly virtues
and heroic standards. Unlike the Husband of "The Husband's
Message" who successfully regains his position of power, the Wanderer and the Wife have come to occupy a position of powerlessness and must make a last stand through sheer stoic endurance. Not so the woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer" who crawls into a shell of utter passivity to weep and bewail her misfortune, while the men struggle to maintain whatever power status they possess. Unlike the gender-coded language used to indicate power positions under feud conditions, the language of the Hrothgar and Unferth episodes from Beowulf reveal how old age and inferior verbal skills can also produce a change in the status of a power-figure from powerful to powerless.

In contrast, the language in numerous Old English poems confirms that many of those women whom we have traditionally interpreted as helpless victims were indeed viewed by the poets as power-figures. As a result of tribal feuding, familial hostility from in-laws, or invasion by monsters, many of the women in Anglo-Saxon secular poetry find themselves entangled in violent disruptions of the existing social structures. In response, the women participate in no battles, command no troops, wield no weapons, and confront no supernatural creatures. Yet, by no means are the wives of "The Husband's Message" and "The Wife's Lament," or Queens Wealhtheow and Hygd of Beowulf portrayed merely as passive and helpless victims who stand on the sidelines or hide in the shadows, bemoaning the caprice and injustice
of a patriarchal society, as did the woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer." Instead, they exhibit manly attributes identical to those displayed by men under similar circumstances.
NOTES

1 See note four on pages 25-26 of Chapter I.

2 All citations from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are from the Plummer edition. Since all the entries are arranged chronologically, my citations are to year, not page reference. Subsequent citations to this work are noted as Chronicle.

3 All citations from Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People are from the edition by Colgrave and Mynors and include book and chapter, not page references. The translation is mine.

4 While not exhaustive, this list contains many of the vocabulary words most frequently associated with power to which I refer in Chapters IV-VI.

5 Opposing this view is Stephanie Hollis who asserts that since several Old English writers of religious documents, especially Bede, deliberately marginalized women, "the admiration that some readers [especially Colgrave] have seen reflected in Bede’s portrait of Hild is to a high degree their own" (246).

6 Based upon a statistical survey in her article "Female Sanctity . . . ," Jane Schulenburg notes that the years 650-750 in Britain comprised a "golden age for female saints" (103). With the "establishment of the Carolingian dynasty," the total number of saints from both sexes

7 See footnote 171 on page 472.

8 Plummer incorporates the "Mercian Register" into manuscript "C," beginning at the bottom of page 101.


10 Citations from "Andreas" are from The Vercelli Book, edited by Krapp, pages 3-51. The translation is mine.

11 Citations from "Judith" are from Beowulf and Judith, edited by Dobbie, pages 99-109. The translation is mine.

12 Citations from "Juliana" are from The Exeter Book, edited by Krapp and Dobbie, pages 113-133. The translation is mine.

13 Citations from "Elene" are from The Vercelli Book, edited by Krapp, pages 66-102. The translations is mine.

14 Although the two elements of this polarity should most accurately be termed masculine and non-masculine, traditionally the non-masculine qualities have been associated with women or dishonored warriors. Thus, I’ll use the more familiar masculine-feminine designations.
CHAPTER IV

MASCULINE- AND FEMININE-CODED LANGUAGE AND THE POWER CYCLE IN "THE DREAM OF THE ROOD"

Anglo-Saxon poets did not believe that all men were powerful or that all women were helpless, or that power was the exclusive prerogative of the male sex. They did not perpetuate a bifurcation of power, one exercised by men and another by women. Nor was a position of power or helplessness determined entirely by biological sex, social roles, or sphere of operation. To reiterate, a condition of power or powerlessness was signaled by exhibiting specific traits. The powerful individual was identified as one who demonstrated honor, mastery, aggression, victory, bravery, independence, martial prowess, physical strength, assertiveness, verbal acuteness, hardness or firmness; and who deserved the respect of others. In contrast, a powerless person was one who was guilty of dishonor, subservience, passivity, defeat, cowardice, dependence, defenselessness, weakness, lack of volition, verbal ineptness, softness or indecisiveness; and who was unable to demand the respect of others.¹

These attributes indicated who was able or permitted to exercise power and influence. Since all these traits were gendered and open for assumption, the Anglo-Saxon power
system allowed for deviations from normal expectations. All these traits were gendered and open for assumption. Just as women could behave in a manly fashion, so, too, could men act in a womanly manner. Once attained, neither status was permanent; men and women trafficked back and forth freely between the two. Depending upon the circumstances, members of both sexes could experience reversals of fortunes which would necessitate moving from one category to the other, on more than one occasion in a lifetime. A re-examination of Old English poetry will help us not only to reconstruct the Anglo-Saxon gender system, a system similar to the Scandinavian gender system dissected by Clover in her article on Icelandic sagas, but also to increase our understanding of the way Anglo-Saxon poets used gender-coded language to delineate power relations among poetical figures.

In "The Dream of the Rood" (A.D. 700-750) \(^2\) the fluidity of the process can be easily detected by watching for the changes in gender-coded language. According to Mitchell and Robinson, "The Dream of the Rood" resolves a centuries-old power struggle between two competing cultures: the Germanic heroic tradition which celebrated courage, mastery, and aggressive action, and the Christian outlook which promoted loving kindness and self-sacrifice (240). Martin Irvine argues convincingly that in "The Dream of the Rood," the cross functions as a typological emblem of the greatest of victories, a "sign of [Christ's] victory over sin and death"
(173). True, Christ is portrayed as a heroic young warrior-lord. But, in order to secure the greater victory, the spiritual conquest of evil and the redemption of mankind, Christ willingly accepts death on the cross. This poem honors behavior which directly opposes the principles of the violence-prone heroic ethos. Acquiescence was not the prescribed reaction to threats and violence.

More important for my investigation, the cross and Christ, who are initially portrayed as strong power figures, demonstrate the traffic back and forth between power and powerlessness, a process that the "Rood"-poet depicts via gender-coded language. The masculine-coded cross experiences a major power struggle: a faithful and loyal retainer of Christ, the cross must reconcile his duty to use physical strength and martial prowess to protect his lord and himself in threatening circumstances, with the obligation to obey the lord’s command to remain passive and powerless. As the cross and Christ move from an established position of power (coded masculine), through the loss of power (coded feminine), and to the regaining of power, we note how the "Rood"-poet uses gendered language to trace the power cycle in its entirety. Although I focus primarily on the rood’s position, that of Christ is too closely intertwined with that of the cross to ignore.

When the poem opens, a dreamer begins to relate his midnight vision of the cross of Christ. The narrator imme-
diately enumerates those characteristics—honorable, worthy of respect, brave, victorious—which establish a status of power for the cross. Very early in the poem, the cross is cast as a loyal and courageous retainer of the "Lord of heaven" heofona Hlaford (l. 45). Although the title serves a dual role, an earthly and a heavenly lord, according to Leslie hlaford was a "technical term for the relationship in which a nobleman . . . [stood] to his retainers" (5). The cross deserves honor and respect not only from men throughout the world but from all of creation (l. 13). Relying upon the superlative form of the adjectives, the poet emphasizes that the retainer-cross is the "brightest" beorhtost (l. 6) and "best" selesta (l. 27). Enveloped in light and adorned with precious gold and gleaming jewels (ll. 4-6a), the "sign" beacen (l. 6) enjoys an exalted and noble, even royal, standing. When the dreamer notices that the cross is also "drenched with blood" mid wætan bestemed (l. 22-b), he assumes that the "cross of victory" sigebeam (l. 14), the "tree of glory" wuldres treow (l. 14), must have participated in some "very wretched struggle" earmra argewin (l. 19), but has emerged the victor. Initially the cross is introduced as a male-coded power-figure, a retainer of a mighty lord.

However, once the cross begins to speak and recount past events, the language begins to shift to the feminine mode. Helpless and defenseless, the cross becomes the
recipient of action performed by other stronger male power-figures, the foes of Christ as well as Christ himself. The cross experiences the fate all too often shared by survivors on the losing side of a medieval battle: torture, rape, enslavement, or some other form of degradation. Lines 34-46a of "Judith" details the humiliation Holofernes intended to inflict upon Judith, his Jewess captive. Warriors who chose to surrender rather than die fighting (the honorable fate of warriors) suffered the usual humiliations of captivity. The first verse of "Deor" recounts such a fate for Weland, the epitome of the warrior-type. Having been captured and kidnapped, Weland is mutilated, crippled, enslaved, and forced to craft beautiful treasures for King Niðhad. Like the disempowered figures of Weland and Judith, the cross is subjected to cruel indignities and portrayed with descriptive language traditionally reserved for the conquered. He is "bound" gefæstnodon (l. 33), "carried off" genaman (l. 30), and "made into a spectacle" geworhton him thær to wæfersyne (l. 31). The cross is set high on a hill so all may view his humiliation. By choosing not to fight to the death like a manly hero, as the Anglo-Saxon audience would expect, the retainer-cross has allowed himself to be mastered and relegated to the ranks of the helpless, the ineffectual, the disempowered.

In contrast, Christ is depicted as the figure of power. Reminiscent of Biblical imagery which depicts Christ as the
bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; John 3:29) or God as the husband (Is. 54:5; Rev. 21: 2,9), imagery with which the Christian "Rood"-author was no doubt familiar, Christ hurries with great zeal "to climb, mount" gestigan (ll. 34, 40) and "embrace" ymbclypte (l. 42) the cross. Similar sensuous imagery occurs in "Andreas." The helmsman of the boat, Christ, relates to Andrew that when he was crucified, he "covered, enfolded" pehte (l. 966) the gallows. Although in "The Rood" the Church is not introduced as the bride nor Christ as the bridegroom, the analogy depicting the association of Christ to the cross seems to introduce another metaphor based on the male-female relationship. Rather than acting, the cross is acted upon. Twice, the cross reminds us that the young warrior-lord mounted or climbed him.

"Strong and steadfast" strong and stiðmod (l. 40), Christ strips off his clothing (l. 39) and approaches the cross. The compound adjective stiðmod is comprised of two elements, stið, meaning "stiff, hard, rigid," and mod "mind, heart, spirit, resolve." Calling to mind the hard, firm, muscular body of a battle-hardened warrior, this word emphasizes that Christ's mind or heart is rigidly or firmly set and cannot be moved. The young warrior-lord's resolve is as firm or hard as his manly, warrior body.

We find a similar play on the contrast of hard or firm and soft in "The Battle of Maldon." A band of fierce Vikings has come ashore to plunder the countryside around
Maldon. One Viking warrior arrogantly stands on the shore and "sternly shouts" stiðlice clypode (l. 25) that the Anglo-Saxons can have peace without conflict and avoid "hard, fierce, battle" hearde hilde (l. 34), provided they can pay off the Vikings with gold, rings, and other treasures (ll. 31-41). In this instance, stið- is combined with the adverbial suffix -lice. For emphasis, the adverb can be interpreted, "sternly, firmly, unyielding," the swaggering, Viking warrior shouts at Byrhtnoð.

In return, Byrhtnoð applies to the Viking men an adverb derived from soft, a direct contrast to the imagery of hard and a word more suitably used to describe the female body. With subdued sexual overtones, Byrhtnoð's derogatory taunt in line 59 completes the hard-soft contrast. "You shall not gain the treasure so easily (softly)." Ne sceole ge swa softe sinc gegangan. The enemy troops will need more than threatening speech and posturing to convince Byrhtnoð of their adversarial superiority. Having encouraged his own band to rely upon "virtuous courage" hige godum (l. 4), Byrhtnoð and the Anglo-Saxons fight to the death. From line 25 on, all adjectives and adverbs denoting hard, firm, or steadfast refer to the Anglo-Saxons, not the Vikings. Once the cowards among the Anglo-Saxons have fled, a core of brave fighters remains. Some are "war-hardened" wigheardne (l. 75) and all are "firmly resolved" stiðhicgende and anræd (ll. 122, 132), and "steadfast" stede (l. 249). They are
prepared to fight "firmly" fæstlice and "sternly" stið (l. 301). Byrhtnoð ceases to resist only when he has been so severely wounded he can no longer stand "steadily, firmly" fæste (l. 171). Just as Byrhtnoð earlier predicted, having underestimated the manly and heroic character of their opponents, the Vikings were unable to "easily, softly" capture the booty.

In "The Rood," Christ displays the same firm resolve or hard, stern mind as did the warriors under Byrhtnoð's command. In the sight of many, the divine warrior-lord eagerly accepts the challenge, discards his clothing, and "bravely" modig mounts the gallows (l. 41). Conversely, having violated the heroic code by not trying to defend his Lord, the cross has become an object of "shame" wommum (l. 14). Cast in a subservient position, the cross confesses that it has lifted up its lord, the "powerful king" riche cyning to die (l. 44). At this juncture, the vivid image of Christ suspended from the cross becomes the center of attention and of power.

The middle section of "The Rood" which recounts the actual crucifixion (ll. 39-74), contains a mixture of masculine- and feminine-coded language that accentuates the ambivalent and changing status of both the cross and Christ. Portrayed as a faithful "retainer" hilderinca (l. 72), instead of overwhelming the enemy with forceful resistance, the cross is obligated by its own loyalty to the Lord not
to seek reprisal when severely provoked. Although he is physically superior, "powerful enough to overcome all adversaries" ealle . . . mihte / feondas gefyllan (ll. 37b-38a), the cross voluntarily refrains from defending himself or the Lord (l. 47). Within these parameters, severely injured, "pierced with dark nails" purhdrifan . . . mid deorcæn næglum (l. 46), and "smeared with blood" mid blode bestemed (l. 48), the passive cross stands "firmly, fixed" faeste (ll. 38, 43), "refusing to bow to the earth" hyldan me ne dorste (l. 45). Nevertheless, even as the cross stoically refuses to bend in the face of sure defeat, feminine-coded language reveals that he is also guilty of womanly behavior.

According to the exiled warrior of "The Wanderer," any retainer eager for glory and concerned with his reputation will wisely hold his tongue and resist broadcasting his thoughts or complaining about his misfortunes to others (ll. 11-17).5 "A suffering man must bear up silently" speaking only to himself or in his own thoughts (Mitchell and Robinson 252). Or as Beowulf advises Hroðgar after the death of Aeschere, a man should not grieve or mourn too much when action is called for (ll. 1384-85).6 When Christ mounts and embraces him, the cross "trembles" bifode (l. 42). Later, the cross, the male figure who demonstrates feminine traits, even "cries out" or "weeps" stefn up gewat (l. 71).7 While Anglo-Saxon culture did not sanction such behavior from its heroic warriors, trembling and emotionally
crying out or weeping was condoned from the women. Tacitus notes that in Germanic cultures: "Quickly they put off tears and grief, but sadness they put off late. It is honorable for women to grieve/cry [when death claims a dear one]; [it is honorable] for men to remember." Lamenta ac lacrimas cito, dolorem et tristitiam tarde ponunt. Feminis lugere honestum est; viris meminisse (Germania xxvii).  

Without censure the women in "The Wife’s Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer" weep over their misfortunes. Banished from her husband and people, the former "weeps over her miseries" wepan mæg mine wræcsipas (1. 38); the latter "weeps" reotugu (1. 38) over her separation from Wulf (1. 10). In Beowulf, Hroðgar is depicted as the weakened old king who for twelve years has been too powerless to protect his people from Grendel’s onslaught. After Beowulf eliminates the monsters and is preparing to depart for his own homeland, Hroðgar is so overcome by emotion that he weeps until the tears run down his beard (ll. 1872b-73a). Like the women and old Hroðgar, when the cross fails to control his emotions and cries out in anguish, he is displaying a weakness—lack of emotional control—a feminine-coded behavior. If we judge the behavior of the cross by the Anglo-Saxon heroic standard which disapproved of complaining, crying, and emotional outbursts from men, the cross is guilty of less than virtuous, even unmanly, behavior. And, by failing to come to the defense of his
lord, a service expected of all faithful retainers, the cross has slipped into the feminine-coded category of the weak and ineffectual.

Still, the ordeal is not over. The cross is subjected to the ultimate indignity: he is unceremoniously buried in a deep pit. Imprisoned in an earthen tomb, the retainer-cross is separated and alienated from his lord and the rest of mankind. Likewise, after suffering the humiliation and torture of crucifixion, Christ succumbs to an ignominious death. By the end of this section, the cross and Christ are mastered and utterly defeated. Christ bleeds; the cross is bled upon (11. 22, 48). Christ sweats profusely; the cross is drenched with his lord’s sweat (1. 23). The lord is nailed to a tree; the retainer-cross serves as the instrument of his lord’s death. The nails which pierce the retainer are first driven through the body of his lord. The obligations of the lord-retainer relationship have been subverted. The lord has forbidden active resistance; the retainer has failed to fight and risk his life to protect the lord. The lord dies, and the retainer is left standing in a pool of the lord’s blood (1. 62). Both Christ and the cross have been disempowered by a stronger enemy, and the masculine-coded conquerors dare to mock the feminine-coded conquered in their defeat (1. 48). Power has fallen into the hands of other, stronger male-figures.
This condition of divine powerlessness is not irreversible. During the Harrowing of Hell, Christ reclaims divine control and resumes the stance of the young warrior. Behaving once more in a strong, manly fashion, He is "victorious" sigorfæst (l. 150), "powerful" mihtig and "successful" spedig (l. 151). Three days after His crucifixion, Christ rises from the dead "by his own great power" mid his miclan mihte (l. 102). Since Christ has the "power to judge" domes geweald mankind (l. 107), a privilege enjoyed by those who possessed extensive power (namely male rulers), men fear the very word He utters. "There is no man who is unafraid in the presence of the word which the Creator speaks." Ne mæg þær ænig unforht wesan / for þam worðe þe se wealdend cwyð (l. 110-11). Through his own courage and divine prowess Christ has regained his former status as power-figure. Mary and the cross cannot do the same for they lack those masculine qualities which signal power. They must wait to be empowered by the male-figure, Christ. The cross deliberately places himself in the company of Mary, a woman. Implying that the respect is identical to that extended to Mary, the cross claims that Christ honors him above all trees just as He honors Mary above all women (l. 90-92). Echoing the sentiments expressed in line thirteen, the cross is again decked with gold (l. 77) and honored by men far and wide (l. 81).
The cycle of power has come more than full circle. Power has not merely been regained; it has been augmented. Where the cross formerly was just a tree, a piece of lumber, now he is exalted. Following the restoration of power, the entire glorious universe prays to the cross (l. 83), any individual who fears the cross will receive healing if the cross intercedes (ll. 85b-86), and any Christian who hopes to dwell in the kingdom of Christ must go "through the cross" ȝurh ʒa rode (l. 119). The cross is worthy of homage, is empowered to heal, and has become an intermediary between mankind and the most powerful lord of all. In addition, the cross has been given authority over mortal men: Nu ʒc ƿe hæte (l. 95a). Relying upon the active voice of action verbs, the dreamer is satisfied that the cross has the power to "fetch" gefetige (l. 138) and "bring" gebringe (l. 139) a man's soul (his own) to heaven. With complete confidence the dreamer himself prays to (l. 122) and honors the sigebæm (ll. 127-29).

Through gender-coded language the changing status of the cross and Christ can easily be tracked. An examination of the gender-coded language in "The Rood" confirms that in the Anglo-Saxon poet's work, power was a privilege enjoyed by the strong and resourceful individual who displayed those masculine attributes which signaled a status of power. Similarly, powerlessness was indicated by displaying feminine traits denoting defeat, weakness, passivity,
defenselessness, and submission. Neither status was permanent. As the circumstances changed, so might the status. At any given moment, power could be won or lost. While he does provide an account of the entire power cycle, the "Rood"-poet was not the only Anglo-Saxon writer who employed gender-coded language to order the relationships between men and men or to indicate when that relationship altered.
NOTES

1 See note three on page 25.

2 While most critics hesitate to date any Old English poem, based upon the dating of the Ruthwell Cross whose runic inscription contains parts of the rood's speech, John Pope sets these dates (A.D. 700-750) as the latest date of the composition. See John C. Pope, Seven Old English Poems (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), pages 60-61.

3 Citations from "The Dream of the Rood" are from The Vercelli Book, edited by Krapp, pages 60-65. The translation is mine.

4 Citations from "The Battle of Maldon" are from The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, edited by Dobbie, pages 7-16. The translation is mine.

5 Citations from "The Wanderer" are from The Exeter Book, edited by Krapp and Dobbie, pages 134-37. The translation is mine.

6 Citations from Beowulf are from Beowulf and Judith, edited by Dobbie, pages 1-98. The translation is mine.

7 As Krapp notes, stefn is not in the original manuscript, but is an emendation (page 63, footnote for line 71). The conflict centers on sentence sense versus preservation of alliteration. Sweet (156), Mitchell and Robinson (245), and Pope (68) substitute stefn for syðdan. Pope
reasons that since there is no need for the conjunction *syðōan*, it is better to substitute *stefn*. Krapp and Bright add *stefn* but retain *syðōan*. Bright argues that the line needs *stefn* for alliterative purposes (314). Literally, the phrase is translated "[his] voice departed." I paraphrase as, "he cried out."

8 Citations from Tacitus' *Germania* include chapter, not page reference. The translation is mine.

9 Citations from "The Wife's Lament" (210-11) and "Wulf and Eadwacer" (179-80) are from *The Exeter Book*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie. The translation is mine.
CHAPTER V

THE GENDER-CODED OUTCASTS

In Anglo-Saxon society, to become an exile was to risk weakness, helplessness, and defenselessness. Isolated from society and vulnerable to attacks from any stronger antagonist or hostile group, the life of the exile, whether of lord, retainer, or wife, was in constant jeopardy. Separated from the protection and support of the community structure, the exile was an easy target. As outcasts, the Husband of "The Husband's Message," the old warrior of "The Wanderer," and the women of "The Wife's Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer" are vulnerable.

Abbreviated in length and recounted by a wooden staff which serves as messenger,¹ "The Husband's Message" primarily recounts a nobleman's recovery of power after having lost it. The speaker relates the story of an honorable, aggressive, independent, and respected male-figure who experiences the bitter loss and joyous regaining of his lordship. Formerly, the lord has been an independent and successful property owner who "held lands (an estate) and had a homeland" eard weardigan an lond bugan (1. 18), a nobleman who proudly promenaded with his lady through the "hall and courtyard" meoduburgum (1. 17).² Unfortunately,
as was so often the case in warlike Anglo-Saxon society, a feud breaks out and the lord is forced to escape alone in a ship, abandoning wife, home, and the security of his kinsmen, to seek a future somewhere beyond the sea.

Circumstances substantiate that the Husband does not passively accept his misfortunes, but aggressively seeks to rebuild his empire. Preferring not to dwell upon the hardships encountered by the exile as he courageously struggled to create a community support system among strangers in a foreign land, the messenger gladly reports to the wife that her husband has remained "faithful" treowe and has re-established his reputation as a "famous" tirfæste (l. 12) nobleman. Eagerly, the lord anticipates the arrival of his beloved, the woman who will share in gold-giving to the lord’s new band of "warriors and companions" secgum ond gesipum (l. 34). Echoing Christ’s "resolved mind" siðmod in "The Rood" (l. 40) and Beowulf’s state of resolve fæstræd to help Hroðgar (l. 610), this lord’s mind, heart is "firmly set" on hyge hycge (l. 11). He has complied with the Sea-farer’s advice: "A man must control a strong mind, . . . and hold it in a firm or fixed position." Stieran mon seal strongum mode, . . . ond þæt on stædelum healdan (l. 109).³

More fortunate than the Wanderer who is unsuccessful in his mission to locate a new leader, this lord overcomes his miseries, founds a new kingdom, gathers another band of warriors, and once again enjoys opulence and safety. He
regains power and prestige commensurate with that which he earlier forfeited because of the feud. The future described by the messenger is better than the past and brighter than the present. The Husband lacks nothing: neither horses; nor treasures; nor pleasures of the mead-hall; nor riches of a brave warrior (ll. 45-6), "any treasures on earth appropriate to the status of an eorl," a noble man (Fell 68). But, most important for his continued survival, he is again in command of a band of "heroes, warriors" hæleþa (1. 390).

To accentuate the masculine-coded status of the man, the staff refers to his master as "lord" employing four different titles which were usually applied to males: mondryhten (1. 7); frea (1. 10); þeoden, also implying "prince" (1. 29); and wine, which suggests "friend" (1. 39).

Containing no feminine-coded language, this poem portrays an Anglo-Saxon Husband who, remarkably, not only demonstrates those qualities appropriate to a power-figure, but obviously is confident that his lady will do the same. Taking the initiative, he dispatches a cryptic message instructing his wife that, upon hearing the cuckoo's cry, she is to depart.

Ne læt þu þec sibþan sibþes getwæfan,
lade gelettan lifgendne monn.

Ongin mere secan, mæwes eþel,
onsite sænacan, þæt þu suð heonan
ofer merelade monnan findest,
Thereupon, do not permit any living man your journey hinder the way prevent.
Begin to seek the sea the territory of the seagull
sit in a ship so that you southward hence over the seaway the man you will find where your lord is expecting you.]

As Renoir points out, the "very process of joining" the Husband seems "emotionally difficult and physically dangerous" ("Contextual Glance" 74). Yet, with absolutely no suggestion of having made arrangements for the passage nor having furnished either provisions or escort to accompany the lady on her dangerous journey, the Husband tries to convince her to get in a boat and come to him, alone. Due to the feud, apparently the husband can't personally come to fetch his lady nor does he think that her people will allow her to depart unopposed. He arranges a clandestine meeting so the staff can deliver the message "privately, secretly" onsundran (l. 1), and twice cautions the woman to allow no man to deter or hinder her from successfully completing the journey. Making no allowance for trepidation, inexperience, weakness or the absence of any means of protection, the Husband encourages the lady to behave in as manly a fashion as he did, to be strong, brave, and resourceful. We might wonder how the lord expects his aris-
tocratic lady to accomplish the task should armed men contest her departure.

Based on the sharp contrast between the "joyful expectations raised by the internal actions and, ... the disheartening prospect evoked by the logic of the presumed external situation," Renoir argues that the poem should be "construed as an expectant call without much likelihood of a happy answer in the foreseeable future" ("Contextual Glance" 76). In close agreement, Leslie suggests that the woman might rightfully be hesitant to obey the husband's summons since she has already "been deserted by him" once (18). Nevertheless, this Anglo-Saxon Husband seemingly is prepared to accept, and even encourages, manly behavior from his wife.

In medieval times, few exiles experienced the Husband's good fortune. By far the most common power struggle we encounter in Old English poetry centers on those individuals who have slipped irreversibly into powerlessness and are subjected to severe hardships. Secular poetry offers several poignant accounts of those alienated individuals who have become disenfranchised, the Wanderer by the death of his lord and the women of "The Wife's Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer" by separation and alienation from their spouses. Unlike the Husband of "The Husband's Message," the Wanderer, the Wife, and the Woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer" are unable to remedy the problem.
Recognizing that "The Husband’s Message" is an exception, in his survey of formulaic expressions that are common to Old English "exile" poems Greenfield observes that the same language denoting vulnerability, loneliness, and wretchedness, is used to portray those who find themselves estranged from the community’s social structure, regardless of the sex of the exile or the reason for the exile ("Formulaic Expression" 200-206). Both the Wanderer and the Wife have been cast adrift as solitary travelers. The Wanderer is labeled as a "wretched solitary one" anhaga (l. 1) and earm anhaga (l. 40a), who is claimed by the "paths of an exile" wraeclastas (ll. 5, 32). The Wife sees herself as one who "travels, goes alone" ana gonge (l. 35) on the "exile’s paths" wraecsiōas (ll. 5, 38). Alienated from the safety offered by the kinship structure, they are safe in no port. They have no friends or family. Isolated and alone, they search for a friendly lord who will welcome them into the joy and security of the community.

Deprived of both physical and abstract comforts and plagued by wretched, anxious minds, the exiles are often described with adjectives ending with the suffix -leas or with compounds of cearig. "Friendless" freondleas (l. 28); "lordless" wineleas guma (l. 45); "homeless" eōle bidæled (l. 20); "wretched" hean (l. 23), earmcearig (l. 20), and earm (l. 40a); "anxious of mind" modcearig (l. 2); "weary of mind" werig mod (l. 15); and "desolate" wintercearig
(l. 24), the Wanderer lacks even the bare necessities of life. He experiences "hardships" earfeða (l. 6), "sorrow" sorg (ll. 30, 39, 50), and "care, trouble" cearo (l. 55) so severe he can barely survive. Equally "friendless" wineleas (l. 10), "sad" geomor (ll. 1, 17) and hygegeomor (l. 19), the Wife endures "hardships" yrmpa (l. 3), "grievous need" weapærð (l. 10), "torments" wîte (l. 5), and "grief" uhtceare (l. 7), earfoða (l. 39), and modceare (ll. 40, 51).

While the Wanderer's circumstances are dangerous enough, the Wife's situation is far more desperate. She has faced the perils of solitary travel and has located her missing lord. Instead of receiving a warm welcome, she has been banished from the life of the community and forced to live in the "most wretched" laðicost (l. 14) of conditions. While terminology and circumstances are common to both exiles, the outcomes differ.

Through no fault of his own, the principal speaker of "The Wanderer" (ll. 6-110) finds himself in a precarious situation, the worst possible scenario for an Anglo-Saxon warrior in the heroic age. "He is a retainer who has lost his lord and comrades and who therefore finds himself with no place in society, no identity in a hostile world, . . . naked to his enemies" (Mitchell and Robinson 252). Previously, the eardstapa (l. 6) has enjoyed the power, security, and camaraderie made possible by a generous war-lord who entertained his retainers at banquets and rewarded them with
abundant gifts and guiding words. The Wanderer recalls how in days now gone he enjoyed the "gift stool" gieftola (l. 44), receiving rewards for his own manly deeds. But, death has deprived the Wanderer of his treasure-giving lord, and the old warrior has experienced a reversal of fortunes. Because of age and the loss of his lord, the Wanderer has become an outcast, moving from a position of strength and power to one of weakness and powerlessness. Alone, he is defenseless against a band of hostile attackers and destitute with few means of securing shelter or food.

Weary of mind (l. 15), separated from his home and kinsmen (ll. 20-21), desolate (l. 24), and utterly devoid of happiness (l. 36), the exile stoically endures hardships (l. 6), battle with hostile enemies (l. 7), and the death of his beloved kinsmen (l. 7). Discouraged and apprehensive, the Wanderer broods over his misfortunes, recalling the good old days. The current situation is so miserable that sometimes he wonders how he can bear his lot without "his mind growing dark," surrendering to total despair (ll. 58-90). Although fate seems to be against him, by no means is the Wanderer inclined to settle for passive endurance. Aggressively, he seeks a new lord who might extend friendship and joys, and risk welcoming into his war-band an untried old pegrn for whose credentials no one can vouch (ll. 25-29a). Though he has lost those manly attributes which would enable him to retain a position of power, the Wanderer stubbornly
clings to a masculine ideal (ll. 65-69). Time has ravaged and weakened his body, but his will is indomitable. He is a staunch advocate of the same heroic ethos voiced by Byrhtwold at Maldon. After the death of Byrhtnoð, Byrhtwold must encourage the remnant of the war band to die fighting rather than passively endure defeat from the Vikings.

Hige sceal þe heardra, þe heorte þe cenre, 
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlæð.

(11. 312-13)

[Resolve shall be the harder, the heart 
the keener, 
courage the greater, as our strength decreases.] 

Likewise, the old Wanderer, a battle-hardened warrior who has spent his entire life following such a heroic ethic, just doesn’t know when to quit.

In his own defense the Wanderer offers a specifically masculine-coded comment.

. . . Ic to soðe wat 
þæt bip in eorle indryhten þeaw, 
þæt he his ferðlocan fæste binde, 
healde his hordcofæn, . . . (ll. 11b-14a)

[. . . I know for a truth 
that it is in a brave man (warrior), a noble custom, practice 
that he his feelings, emotions bind fast 
hold his treasure-chest of thoughts.]
Aware that he is in a dangerous and unenviable position, the old warrior at least tries to preserve his dignity by behaving like a proper warrior, a real man. Resolved to suffer and worry in silence, the old man’s stance is ironic since the poem is a lament. In sharp contrast to the stern, resolved mind presented by Christ in "The Rood," the "Wanderer"-poet acknowledges in the prologue that sometimes a man will for a long time experience a "troubled mind" modcearig (l. 2), a mind weakened by anxiety, before he obtains God’s mercy. Giving no indication of Christian leanings, the Wanderer recalls that often he has "bewailed his cares" ceare cwiban alone (l. 9), that he has often searched for a new lord while plagued by "wretched worries, anxieties" earmcearig (l. 20); and, philosophically, that "anxiety" cearo is often renewed in the man who must send his weary heart over the congregated waves (l. 55). Not only has his aged body failed, but the Wanderer’s thoughts have also betrayed him. His primary resource is no longer his physical strength or martial prowess, but his will-power. He will endure suffering with stoic perseverance, and continue his search for a sympathetic lord.

Although controversy surrounds the identity of the speaker, this idea is repeated towards the end of the poem, using almost the same language and incorporating the same sentiment. Stanley Greenfield considers the poem to be a monologue spoken by a homeless exile. On the other hand,
John Pope distinguishes three speakers in "The Wanderer," the eardstapa of line six who utters two speeches (ll. 1-5; 8-57); a second speaker, a man with a philosophical bent, who is identified as snottor on mode in line 111; and the poet who tacks on a bit of Christian advice in a short epilogue (ll. 112-15) (79-80). Michael Alexander thinks we have two speeches, the first spoken by the eardstapa (ll. 6-53), a bridge passage which connects the first speech to the second, and the speech delivered by a wise man (ll. 73-110). A prologue and an epilogue, both of five lines, frame the poem (87-88). The division I prefer is that of two speakers. Basically, the poem is a dramatic monologue, briefly introduced (ll. 1-5) and concluded (ll. 112-15) by a Christian poet who urges man to seek comfort in God (Mitchell and Robinson 252).

Thus, in the epilogue the Christian narrator commends the Wanderer because he has acquitted himself well and has fulfilled the virtuous, heroic, and manly expectations of silent suffering and fortitude.

... ne sceal nafre his torn to rycene
beorn of his breostum acypan, nempe he ær þa bote cunne,
 eorl mid elne gefremman. (ll. 112b-14a)
[... Never shall a man too quickly
his grief, affliction reveal from his breast
unless he beforehand the remedy knows how
the man with courage, strength to bring about.)

The man is praiseworthy who keeps the faith and does not
voice his anxieties too quickly, unless through great cour-
age he knows how to remedy the problem. The Christian poet
seems to be complimenting the old warrior for enduring
adversity, worries, and cares, without whimpering and
whining, for behaving in a manly fashion even though he has
been reduced to a feminine-coded state of defenselessness
and powerlessness. Even as the poet credits the old man’s
resolve, he also stresses the limitations of such honorable
behavior because it lacks Christian hope. In admiration,
the poet recommends similar stoic behavior for Christians
who must wait to receive comfort from God.

The Wanderer is not the only exile whose adversity is
vividly recorded in verse. The plight of the Wife of "The
Wife’s Lament" is as perilous and unsettled as that of the
Wanderer. Despair consumes a young Wife whose husband has
fled the homeland because either he himself has been exiled
(Wentersdorf 512; Greenfield 907) or because his life is in
danger due to a feud or other power struggle (Wentersdorf
512), for a destination unknown to the Wife. No Old English
poem is more distressing than "The Wife’s Lament." Faced
with two alternatives, to wait patiently and passively, or
make an effort to locate the absentee husband, the Wife
chooses the latter. Accepting her weakened status as a
"friendless exile" wineleas wræcca (l. 10), she bravely "set out, departed" feran gewat (l. 9). To make matters worse, the husband’s kinsmen, who for some unspecified reason (perhaps infidelity) are hostile towards the Wife, persuade the husband to banish her to an unpleasant, unfriendly, ancient earthen abode where she experiences loneliness, sadness, and deprivation. Her friends are in the earth (probably dead), and she is alienated from her lord-husband and from the kinship structure which would normally have provided comfort and protection.

After closely dissecting each line in the poem, looking specifically for words which would imply passivity, Renoir concludes that the poem focuses exclusively on passive acceptance of fate. According to Alain Renoir’s calculations, only three of the fifty-three lines of the poem are "devoid of words" suggesting passive endurance, or take on the "suggestiveness" of preceding or following lines which do (14). Renoir interprets "The Wife’s Lament" as a poem that features passive endurance, as does "Wulf and Eadwacer" (13). In close agreement, Martin Green thinks "The Wife’s Lament" offers a picture of "absolute passivity and hopelessness" (129). The Wife’s past has been riddled with conflict; her present is gloomy, joyless, and bitter; and she has no future (123-32).

But, the action of line nine and the application of masculine-gendered language to describe the woman undermine
this claim. Behaving in as manly and brave a fashion as did the Wanderer or the wife in "The Husband's Message," initially the lamenting Wife actively and aggressively seeks to locate and rejoin her lord-husband. I agree with Wentersdorf's estimation that the outlook of the narrator is "colored throughout" with "quiet but unflinching courage" (516), or as Greenfield judges, with a "stoic fortitude" (History 226). Only after she has aggressively sought to remedy the problem and failed does the Wife display the conventional feminine-coded traits. Rejected, falsely accused, condemned, and banished, the Wife finally acquiesces. Sadly she admits that she will never be able to rest her anxious mind, modceare minre gerestan (l. 40). She can no longer maintain the manly standard which demands absolute control over a strong mind and the ability to hold it in a firm or fixed position ("Seafarer" l. 109). As a last recourse, she sits and weeps over her misfortunes. Ic wegan mæg mine wæcscipas (l. 38).

That the Wife initially "thinks of her husband . . . as her lord" (Wentersdorf 493) and is "representing her position as retainer" to her lord-husband (Desmond 586) is undeniable. Too many times she addresses the man via terms which have "legal connotations" (586) and which confirm that he is a man "of some rank among his people" (590). In lines six and fifteen, the Wife acknowledges the husband as hlaford. Leslie reminds us that in Anglo-Saxon law, the status
of a wife was similar to that of a retainer (5), so the association is not entirely inappropriate. In her analysis of the Old English titles applied to the lord-husband, Desmond concludes that *leodfruma* (1. 8) "prince, chieftain, king" has political implications. *Frea* (1. 33) refers to a man who holds a specific position as lord of a people, and *wine* (1. 50) implies a "friendly lord" (586). Deliberately, the Wife resorts to masculine-coded vocabulary to cast herself in the male role of retainer, the warrior who in exchange for service has the right to expect protection and reward from the lord. The phrase *folgað secan* (1. 9) reinforces the retainer imagery created by *leodfruma* of line eight. According to Leslie, *folgað* "appears to have been a legal term in Old English, denoting the service due by a retainer to his lord" (53).

In line 26 the retainer-Wife admits that she has become embroiled in a *fahðu* "feud" with her lord. Since *fahðu* is a technical term that "always denotes a state of feud" (Leslie 7) and is almost always confined to and resolved by the male-members of society, the Wife is again assuming a male role. But this female’s bravery is not rewarded with rich gifts. Instead, she is declared an outcast and imprisoned in an inhospitable place, where she is beset by hardships. Douglas Short speculates that three people are involved in the poem, the woman, her lord-husband, and another young man, the "friend" *wine* mentioned
periodically in the poem (ll. 9-10; 18-26; 45b-53) and singled out specifically in line 49. The animosity of the husband and his kinsmen is perhaps justified, resulting from the Wife's previous "reprehensible behavior" in taking a lover in the absence of the lord. The kinsmen, then, want to separate the Wife from the lover and condemn both to a life of misery (593). Like any disloyal or treacherous male member of the lord's war band, the retainer-Wife is banished from the group for inappropriate behavior.

In direct opposition to the Wife's active resistance to misfortune in "The Wife's Lament," the Woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer" surrenders to despair and adopts a stance of passive endurance. Brief and enigmatic though it is, "Wulf and Eadwacer" provides a portrait of Anglo-Saxons who, via gender-coded language, are depicted as powerful and powerless figures. The poet has played an annoying trick upon the inquisitive minds of his audience. He fails to tell us who the characters are. He doesn't even provide the name of the Woman, and he furnishes so little information about the "whelp, child" hwelp (l. 16), that we cannot be sure who the father is, if, indeed, the hwelp is a child. Neither does the poet clearly delineate the relationship between Wulf, Eadwacer, and the Woman. Nor does he reveal what action preceded the desolate scene before the fire. Peter Baker and John Fanagan suggest that Wulf is the legitimate husband of the Woman, and Eadwacer is the illicit lover.
Essentially, Baker rests his case upon three pieces of evidence. In Anglo-Saxon times the wælrecowe of line six were "often evil and nearly always hostile" (45). The name Eadwacer meant "watcher of goods" (wealth or happiness) (49). And, serving as the link, the masculine-coded epithet se beaducafa, (1. 11) which refers to Eadwacer, was a "military epithet" (48) meaning "battle-quick." Baker conjectures that Eadwacer is the leader of the band of hostile men as well as the Woman's "guardian or jailer" (49), and Wulf is more likely the Woman's husband. "He has been outlawed by her people; she, perhaps because she is the wife of an outlaw, has been sent to live on an island, where she is watched over by Eadwacer, who has made love to her" (50).

Without focusing on Wulf's outlawry, Fanagan reaches a similar conclusion. The "language of war" (132) confirms that as a "valiant member of a warlike society," Eadwacer, seems to be in charge of the camp and in command of those hostile men who are in hot pursuit of Wulf. Eadwacer is the only one of the three characters who enjoys a secure position. Surrounded by wild men who seek to kill him, Wulf holds as tenuous a position as that held by the Wanderer and the Wife. According to Fanagan, Wulf is the spouse and Eadwacer is an interloper with whom the Woman has committed an "act of folly" (133). In a moment of "miserable weakness" she has degraded herself by giving her body as a gift to the beaducafa. True, she regrets her unwise decision,
but she cannot escape the consequences. For her lapse in marital faithfulness, she is spurned by her own (and Wulf's) people, and must seek haven in the camp of her lover, Eadwacer (134). The Woman who sits beside the fire, sick and crying, is physically and emotionally wretched.

The traditional interpretation proposed by Henry Bradley in 1888 is still preferred by most critics. Wulf is the lover and Eadwacer is the "tyrant husband" (197-98). Following the conventional reading, Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf propose that the poem can best be understood in the "context of outlawry" (7). Relying upon two Old Norse references which associate the wolf with outlawry, Pulsiano and Wolf argue that Wulf, the father of the child but not the husband of the Woman, is under penalty of full outlawry and will be hunted down and killed like an animal, like a wolf. The Woman is despondent because she is separated from Wulf, and she knows there is a real threat that the child, like his father, will also become an outlaw (ll. 5-7).

The masculine-coded language of the poem establishes Eadwacer as the power figure. He is the only one of the three who enjoys security or exercises power. Since the Woman refers to Eadwacer as the "bold one in battle" se beaducafa, obviously he has previously established a reputation for martial prowess and bravery in military campaigns and probably is in command of the "fierce men" who are hunting Wulf. As the aggressor, Eadwacer performs the
only physical action in the poem. He "seized" the Woman "in his arms" *bogum bilegde* (l. 11). All the action attributed to Wulf is predicted by the Woman and projected to the future (ll. 7, 17), and may be no more than wishful thinking. Because he is the object of some type of manhunt, probably the result of outlawry or feuding, Wulf is in hiding on another island and can’t come to the camp where the Woman sits or he will be killed. Chance interprets Wulf as a "failed lord" who cannot provide for the Woman, the child, and the tribe, "the protection and wise guidance" that he should (88). A mixture of masculine- and feminine-coded language emphasizes the unstable state of affairs for Wulf. Wide-ranging, isolated from his people, and vulnerable, Wulf, like the Wanderer, has become an easy target. He has little chance of survival should he face an attack by a band of armed, hostile men. Refusing to surrender to defeat, Wulf actively tries to preserve his life. With the strength of only one man to defend himself, his chances for success are not favorable. Wulf definitely can make no claim to a position of safety, might, or power, especially against the superior forces of the armed band from Eadwacer’s camp.

In contrast to both Eadwacer and Wulf, feminine-gendered language verifies that the Woman has opted to exercise utter physical passivity. When the power-figure seizes the Woman in his arms, like the cross in "The Dream,"
this female figure of powerlessness offers no resistance. She even confesses that she enjoyed the interlude. While she has not been completely exiled from the network of the kinship system, the Woman has become estranged from the comfort, camaraderie, and support of her particular community. Her care and safe-keeping has been entrusted to Eadwacer, and the Woman and the whelp seem to be confined to the camp. On a rainy evening, she sits forlornly by the fire, crying, sick at heart for longing after Wulf, and tortured by an "anxious, fearful mind" murnende mod (l. 15). Even though her lover and her child are in danger, she takes no initiative. Alienated, emotionally deprived, and disempowered by anxiety, she does not flee, hide the child, plead with Eadwacer for mercy, nor make any plans to aid Wulf should he try to rescue her. As T. A. Shippey notes, in Anglo-Saxon heroic society women were as "liable to suffer as men," but, due to their condition of helplessness, were less able "to act, to decide, to escape from suffering by violence" (72). This Woman makes no effort, violent or otherwise, to deliver herself, or her child, from the dangerous and unpleasant circumstances in which she finds herself.

Unlike the Wanderer and the Wife who have been totally separated from the community, the Woman is at least on the fringe of the social network of the kindred. The old warrior and the Wife try to maintain some semblance of manly strength and resistance; the Woman surrenders with only a
whine and a whimper. While these outcasts occupy a position of weakness as a result of having been alienated to varying degrees from the community, some of the male characters of Beowulf, who are still an integral part of the social group, are reduced to a feminine-coded status of powerlessness by old age and verbal ineptness.
NOTES

1 In *Three Old English Elegies* R.F. Leslie offers evidence that the messenger is not a rune-staff, but a human being, a retainer of the husband (13-14). But, most critics still consider the messenger to be a wooden staff carved with runes.

2 Citations from "The Husband's Message" are from *The Exeter Book*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie, pages 225-27. The translation is mine.

3 Citations from "The Seafarer" are from *The Exeter Book*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie, pages 143-47. The translation is mine. See also "Maxims I," page 158. *Styran sceal mon strongum mode* (I.50).


5 See page 55, note 26 of *Three Old English Elegies*. Leslie interprets the same word as proof that the wife is not talking about her own situation here, since a wife would never be involved in a feud with her husband.

6 See Chickering page 315 for a discussion of the association of "wolf" with "outlawry."
CHAPTER VI

GENDER IN BEOWULF

Beowulf provides a casebook study of the dominant manifestations of power present in Anglo-Saxon society and how gender-coded language signals changes in power-positions. Just as gender orders the relations between the outcasts of Anglo-Saxon poetry, so, too, does it order the relations between some of the strong male characters of Beowulf. When we first become acquainted with the old Danish king, Hroðgar, the poet describes him with appropriate masculine terminology. Not only is he a lord of manly virtues, but he excels in physical strength, martial prowess, mastery, assertiveness, and bravery, all those attributes which denote a status of power. In his youth Hroðgar was a "strong, mighty" ðryðswyð man (l. 131), "battle-famed" guðrof (l. 608), "victory-famed" sigerof (l. 619); a "war chief" wigfruma (l. 664) who for years had enjoyed "victory in battle" heresped (l. 64) and "honor in war" wiges weorðmynd (l. 65), who had built the "greatest of hall-buildings" healærna mæst (l. 78), and whose "word had power everywhere" wordes geweald wide hæfde (l. 79). For fifty years the king had ruled a "treasure-city of heroes" hordburh hæleða (l. 467) by his "war strength" wigge
Until the attacks of Grendel begin, the "famous man of valor" wijdunỳs wîg (l. 1042a) has never failed to be in the forefront of battle.

Sadly, Hroðgar has experienced a reversal of fortunes edwenden (l. 1774b). Due to the infirmities of old age and the ferocity of a monster with superhuman strength, the Danish ruler has for twelve years endured enough misery and sorrow to cause a "breaking of his spirit" modes brecōa (l. 171), the opposite of Christ’s or Beowulf’s strong spirits. The "strife" has been "too great" gewin to swyō (l. 191), and Hroðgar, unable to turn trouble aside, has lapsed into brooding over his misfortunes as did the exiled warrior in "The Wanderer" and the Woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer." Hroðgar and his advisors have considered various plans, but nothing has alleviated the problem (ll. 171-74). The old king reluctantly confesses that before the arrival of Beowulf, he had no hope of relief from his woes (ll. 931-34a).

As his power declines, Hroðgar gradually slips into the category of the weak and is depicted as passive, helpless, weak, fearful, and ineffectual. The king’s pride is unbearably humiliated. He is "sorrowful" sorh is me (l. 473) to have to reveal to a foreign delegation his "shame" hynðo (l. 475) and his inability to prevent such carnage. For the first time since he was strong enough to lift his shield-arm, Hroðgar’s strength has failed him.
For safety, he must entrust his gold-hall to a younger man (11. 655-57). At night the fearful Danes desert the hall, seeking safety elsewhere. Even on the night of Beowulf’s arrival, knowing that Grendel would surely attack (11. 646b-51a), the Danes do not remain in the hall or nearby to lend aid if needed. Rather, the old king and his retainers leave the hall. Hroðgar’s sole wish is to find his bed-companion, Wealhþeow (11. 664-65). The scenes directly before and after Beowulf’s night of heroic combat with Grendel, picture Hroðgar in the company of women. As a framing device, these vivid scenes call attention to Beowulf’s bravery. At the same time, they imply that due to old age the king has been forced to rejoin the ranks of the dependent and seeks whatever safety he can find with the women of his court. In this time of national crisis, the king seeks the company of a woman, his queen, and the security of her bed-chamber, not the battlefield. He depends upon another male, one who is younger and stronger, to accomplish those deeds he no longer can. The entire kingdom has been disempowered by fear. Beowulf accurately assesses the situation when he informs Unferð that Grendel doesn’t fear any resistance from the Danes, nor does he expect any attacks from them (11. 595-601). They are passive, dejected, and offer no worthwhile resistance to the devastation reaped by a physically more powerful enemy. They are no longer worthy opponents.
If the poet had not evoked sympathy for the beloved and gracious old king (ll. 862-63), Hroðgar would have been reduced to a pathetic "has-been" who still holds the affection, though not the confidence, of his people. The morning following the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, we see Hroðgar leaving the queen's quarters, accompanied by his troop of earls, and the queen and her troop of women, the defenseless all together. Shortly thereafter, Wealhþeow confronts Hroðgar at the banquet and, in front of the entire assembly, chides him for neglecting his fatherly responsibilities. Later Beowulf tells Hygelac that at the feast celebrating Beowulf's victory over Grendel's mother, the great-hearted king, bound by old age, publicly bemoaned the loss of his youth and the deterioration of his "war-strength" hildestrengo (ll. 211-13a), a direct violation of the manly and heroic expectation of silent endurance. Hroðgar's lament on his re-entry into the dependent category sounds much like the "female lament" raised by Egil Skallagrimsson (Egil's Saga) when senility forces the old man to rejoin the women (Clover 384).

As the Woman of "Wulf and Eadwacer" bewails her misfortune, so, too, does Hroðgar bemoan his loss after the death of his oldest and most valued friend. Finally, young Beowulf must prod the old king into action, reminding him that it is better to act, to do something more than talk and brood, to "avenge" wrece (l. 1385a) Æschere's death, rather
than to "mourn overmuch" felæ murne (l. 1385b). Paralyzed by fear, the Danes seem unable to act in their own defense. They depend upon Beowulf to be the agent of change. After waiting nine hours for Beowulf's triumphant return from the mere, Hroðgar and his band are the first to assume that Beowulf is dead, give up hope, and return to Heorot. When Beowulf has accomplished his mission and finally returns victorious, he comforts the old king like a son to his enfeebled and fearful old father, reassuring him that he "will not need to fear" ondrædan ne þearft (l. 1674b) harm from Grendel or Grendel's mother any more.

On the day of Beowulf's departure from Heorot, Hroðgar exhibits more unmanly behavior. He breaks down and cries, the only instance in the poem when a character is overcome by emotion. Knowing that he will never see the brave young man again, Hroðgar cannot control his emotions and weeps like a woman. In lines 1872 and 1877, the poet records that "tears fell down" hruron him tearas, streaking Hroðgar's cheeks and beard, because he could not withhold that "emotion" breostwylm. On the return voyage Beowulf and his men lavishly praise Hroðgar, but at the same time acknowledge that Hroðgar was a blameless king until old age deprived him of the "joy of his strength" magenes wynnum (l. 1887a). Like those helpless warriors, women, and children of his kingdom, the old king must depend upon a stronger and more courageous warrior to care for him.
Beowulf has postponed the destruction of the Danish kingdom, but as hints in the poem suggest, not for long. According to lines 81-85, at a later date the beloved old king will once more be unable to protect his kingdom. He cannot prevent the burning of the gold-hall nor protect his people from the "hostility, slaughter" wælnið of a younger man, his son-in-law Ingeld and the Heaðobards (l. 2065-67). As the first half of the poem concludes, the poet leaves us with the vision of a noble old king who no longer can demonstrate those masculine-gendered qualities needed to preserve his reputation or his kingdom. Hroðgar, like the Wanderer and the Wife, has assumed a status of powerlessness. Because they lack the strength of Beowulf, the poet seems to be predicting that the Danes lack the stamina to defend themselves and will become the victims of others who are stronger, fiercer, and more aggressive.

Chiefly through words of wisdom delivered by Hroðgar (ll. 1700-74) and Beowulf (ll. 2732b-43a) or occasional authorial comments (ll. 2177-83a), the Beowulf-poet prescribes the attributes of a good ruler. The successful candidate for kingship must be a manly man, courageous, noble, wise, and skilled in battle. The poet specifies that Hroðgar is a lord of "manly virtues" gumcystum godne (l. 1485), and that Beowulf is "good in his virtues, / in manly customs" se ðe worna fela / gumcystum god (ll. 2542b-43a). Above all else, a good king must be strong enough
to protect his kingdom and people from all adversaries, human and otherwise. For fifty years Hroðgar has been able to keep the Danes safe by his war-strength and valor. In his old age the ring-giver has grown too weak to prevent Grendel from inflicting a twelve-year reign of terror. Because Hroðgar can protect neither the hall nor the retainers of the comitatus, his prestige and reputation have begun to dwindle. Rumors of the ravage of Heorot and the inability of Hroðgar to rid his kingdom of the troll-like menace spread abroad until they reach the land of the Geats. Before he departs, Beowulf, "the strongest of all living men" moncynnes mægenes strengest (l. 196) with the strength of thirty men in his "hand-grip" mundgripe (l. 380), demonstrates his superior verbal skills in a contest of words with Unferð, slays two monsters, cleanses the hall, and saves the Danish kingdom.

Brief though they are, the character sketches of Modþryðo and Heremod serve as warnings to those powerful leaders who would rule with cruelty and hate. In no way does the poet’s portrayal of Queen Modþryðo suggest weakness. Even the queen’s name denotes "strength" or "mind strength" and has masculine connotations. Modþryðo is a female power-figure who behaves in a manly fashion but whose behavior draws censure from the poet. However, she is condemned, not because she acts like a man, but because, out of arrogance and pride, she abuses the power entrusted
to her. She directs her "wicked deeds" *firen* (l. 1932) against those loyal and respected male retainers who have been charged with protecting and preserving the continuity of society. Any retainer, other than a lord, who dares venture into her presence and look into her eyes is rewarded with death by the sword. Based on "pretended insults" *ligetorne* (l. 1944), Modpréo deprives beloved warriors of their lives.

The digression involving King Heremod serves a dual function in the poem. Not only does this evil king serve as a foil to good king Hröðgar, but, like Queen Modpréo, he provides a negative example of the type of leadership Hröðgar condemns. King Heremod, a warrior who in his youth exhibited the manly, strong, and courageous traits of a hero, is later condemned because he slew his shoulder-companions while "enraged" *bolgenmod* (l. 1713). Because his heart was "blood-thirsty" *blodreow* (l. 1710), he behaved unmanfully and brought great sorrow to his noblemen (l. 906). Even though he was a "famous prince" *mære þeoden* (l. 1715) who at first showed great promise, he earned the enmity of his own people and was expelled from the kingdom.

Maneuverings to secure more political power and the intrigue they fostered are prominent in the episodes of failed peace-weavers (the Finn episode, the marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld), the hinted betrayal of Hropulf, the antagonism and feuding between Hygelac and Onjenbeow's sons,
the alliance of Hygelac’s son and the outcast nephews of
Onela, Wealhþeow’s objection to Hroðgar’s adoption of
Beowulf, and Hydg’s efforts to persuade Beowulf to assume
the kingship of the Geats after Hygelac’s fall in battle.

Physical strength and martial prowess were not the only
manly skills that Anglo-Saxons admired. They also appre-
ciated a man who was clever in speech. The antagonism of
Unferð towards Beowulf and the spirited verbal duel which
ensues catches most vividly the competition between two
young males of comparable standing as warriors, to establish
the superiority of one over the other. Unferð and Beowulf
elect to test their verbal, rather than their martial,
prowess. By accusing Beowulf of unmanly behavior, of
behavior which is foolish and possibly cowardly, Unferð
hopes to confirm his own superiority over Beowulf the young
upstart. The Beowulf-poet depends upon gender-coded lan-
guage to establish the standing of each man in society, to
demonstrate how excellence in the masculine-coded trait of
verbal sparring can cause fluctuations in power, and to help
us recognize when those fluctuations occur.

Perhaps the most controversial character in the story
of Beowulf is that mysterious man who sits at the feet of
King Hroðgar and appears only five times (ll. 499, 980,
1165, 1455, 1807). No other Old English character has been
maligning more than Unferð. Rosier (1962), Brodeur (1959),
Chambers (1932), Lawrence (1928), and Malone (1927) in-

pret him as a treacherous counselor who eventually was involved in Hroðulf's usurpation of the Danish throne.¹

Convinced that the textual evidence is too "flimsy" to substantiate charges of treachery and cowardice ("Pyle and Scop" 275), Norman Eliason rejects this characterization but does accept Rosier's judgment that Unferð was a court jester who at times played the fool. Refuting the suggestion that Unferð was a scurrilous court jester whose sole purpose was to provide entertainment or validate Beowulf's credentials, Fulk (1987), Hughes (1977), Ogilvy (1964), and Bonjour (1950) argue that Unferð was probably a reputable warrior and respected member of the Danish court.² Furthermore, Fulk believes that Unferð was the name of a real historical person whose origin, like that of many personal names in Old English literature, "is wrapped in etymological obscurity" (125).

Masculine-coded language verifies that Unferð plays a serious role in the poem, a role which demands that he be a man of considerable stature. Having proven to himself and to the Danish court that he possesses those essential masculine-coded qualities—physical strength, martial prowess, bravery, and verbal cleverness—Unferð challenges the verbal adroitness of Beowulf. To reaffirm his own position as famous man and renowned warrior and to discredit this boastful contender who proposes to undertake a heroic exploit beyond Unferð's capabilities, the Dane dares to
match his verbal skill against that of a young warrior whose prowess has yet to be proven and may even be suspect.

As the poet indicates, both Beowulf and Unferð must have been sons of worthy fathers. That Unferð enjoyed a prestigious position in Danish society is supported by implicit and explicit references within the poem itself. Apparently he is a valued member of Hroðgar’s retinue. Twice the Beowulf-poet recognizes Unferð as the trusted man who sits at the feet of the Danish king (ll. 499–500, 1165–66), a position of honor. On the other hand, when identifying himself to the Danish coast guard, Beowulf claims that his father was a "noble war-lord" æþele ordfruma who was well known among other nations (ll. 262–63). If names were chosen by the poet for their symbolic meanings, for the "metaphorical value" created by the "interplay of naming" (Chickering 6)—Ecglaf, the "leavings, heirloom of the sword" and Ecgþeow, "servant of the sword"—the fathers were also men who had acquitted themselves well in battle.³

The swords establish that Beowulf and Unferð were skilled and famous warriors. Only the bravest of warriors owned, wielded, and bequeathed treasured old swords. Hrunting is the best, one of the foremost of inherited treasures (l. 1458), with a sharp blade hardened by battle blood (ll. 1460a, 1490), famed for never having failed any master who knew how to wield it (ll. 1460b–61). For his journey down into Grendel’s mere, Beowulf gladly accepts the loan of
the weapon. Accepting the sword as a worthy weapon of a warrior of his stature, Beowulf never questions its reliability nor condemns its failure against supernatural forces. Beowulf respects the reputation of Unferð and Hrunting enough to request that Hroðgar present Beowulf's own noble sword, Nægling, to Unferð, should Beowulf not be able to return Hrunting to its rightful owner (ll. 1488-90).

Besides the evidence implied by internal circumstances, the Beowulf-poet inserts several direct evaluations of Unferð's character. In lines 1166b-67a the poet notes that everyone, at least everyone in the Danish community, knew of Unferð's "heart, spirit" ferhþe and "great courage, power" mod micel. When Unferð lends his magnificent old sword to Beowulf, the poet describes him as being a "powerful" man of "strength, might" eafopes cræftig (l. 1466). Although he criticizes Unferð for fratricide, even Beowulf acknowledges that Unferð is "clever" þeah pin wit duge (l. 589) and later calls him a "famous man" widcuðe man (l. 1489). Based strictly upon the evidence presented in the poem, I agree with Fulk and others who conclude that Unferð is a "serious warrior," perhaps even a local champion, who commanded some respect, and that the Beowulf-poet intended Unferð's challenge as serious business, not mere foolery or drunken entertainment (116). The poet even furnishes a motive for Unferð's resentment and envy. Fearful that this brash young Geat will be able to supplant him, Unferð attempts
to embarrass Beowulf before the king and all the gathered
Danish and Geatish warriors. Out of vanity, Unferð
"begrudges" uþe any man the opportunity to perform heroic
deeds and acquire more "fame" or "glory" mærða than he
possesses (ll. 501-05).

Carol Clover interprets the incident as an example of
mannjafnaðr "man-comparison," a verbal confrontation in
which two males match reputations for the purpose of estab-
lishing one's superiority over the other ("Germanic Context"
444). This Scandinavian social practice was not an uncommon
element of protocol in northern European literature for
putting any visitor through the "necessary paces" (460), a
means of conducting a "hostile investigation" into the
credentials of a foreign warrior (466). To Clover, this is
a logical explanation for Unferð's escape from reprimand for
his inhospitable speech and for the absence of a violent
altercation after such strong provocation. By beating the
court pyle, a keen-witted man of words, at his own game,
Beowulf succeeds in establishing his worthiness. "Having
the last word is equivalent to winning the contest" (465).
Following Beowulf's victory over Grendel, Unferð is struck
silent and makes no more taunts about valor in combat
(ll. 980-84). If we add that Unferð was prompted by his own
envy, as much as, if not more than, by his courtly duty to
challenge an alien, interpreting this episode in the German-
ic context of flyting does tie up several loose ends.
So, whether Unferð's version of the swimming contest is the sole current account at the Danish court (Hughes 387), whether he is maliciously trying to discredit Beowulf in front of the assembly, or whether he is merely participating in verbal combat to verify the reputation of an intruder, Unferð does accuse Beowulf of foolish pride and frivolous, immature behavior (ll. 508-09), of being overcome by a stronger Brecca (l. 518), and of failing to demonstrate "greater power" mare mægen (l. 518). Since Beowulf is still an unproven warrior in the Danish court, Unferð attempts to gain the upper hand through a safe channel, a verbal duel. Obviously, the pyle is confident that if he can convince his audience that Beowulf is not as honorable and courageous as he boasts, but, instead, is guilty of exaggerating his heroism, of exhibiting weakness, of losing, and of being verbally inept, Unferð will be able to preserve his standing as a champion warrior and valued member of the king's retainers.

Of course, Unferð's plan fails. After courteously listening to the charges, Beowulf immediately retaliates. First, he publicly ridicules Unferð's beer-addled condition, a fact which the poet repeats a second time in line 1467. Next, Beowulf provides an accurate account of the adventure, emphasizing his greater power in swimming (ll. 533-34), his loyalty to Brecca (l. 544), his victory against severe hardships (ll. 547-49), and his daring feats against
the sea-monsters (ll. 559-66a). Then, Beowulf undermines Unferð’s own reputation, claiming that he has never heard any such stories of heroic struggles or displays of bravery deorlice (l. 585) on the part of Unferð. On the contrary, the young Geat has heard that Unferð did kill his own brothers, a contemptible deed for which he will be consigned to hell. Ogilvy contends that while such behavior is indicative of cruelty and might blemish Unferð’s honor, it would not besmirch his bravery (371). In agreement, Klaeber observes that this terrible charge "does not seem to have imperiled . . . [Unferð’s] prominent position at the court" at all (149). Nonetheless, Beowulf declares that he has heard no rumors of Unferð’s having performed any heroic deeds.

Convinced that Hroðgar would not have suffered as much "shame" hynō at the hands of Grendel if Unferð’s battle-fierceness were as sharp as his tongue (ll. 591-94), Beowulf eventually does level a charge of cowardice. Even though flyting was a common feature of Scandinavian culture, here Beowulf softens the insult. He accuses not only Unferð, but all the Danish warriors as a whole, of insufficient bravery and martial prowess, of lacking some of those manly qualities held in reverence most by warriors (ll. 595-601). However, since the entire Danish court, including the king, as well as Beowulf’s own men, fear Grendel, even this accusation is not as harsh as it might first appear. During the
victory celebration, the poet declares that the Danish people "found no fault" wiht ne logon (l. 862) with Hroðgar. Obviously, they must have made a concession regarding their king's lapse in courage. After all, Beowulf is a superhero with the superlative strength of thirty men in his handgrip. Unferð, like the king and the other warriors, has access to mere human strength. When he avoids combat with Grendel, Unferð is not necessarily rejecting the promise of fame, but the certainty of being eaten by a monster. So, we can't unduly fault Unferð for failing to attempt a heroic deed no other Danish warrior, including the lord of the comitatus, was brave enough to try. As Ogilvy reasons, "it would have been no credit to Beowulf to surpass a coward in daring; to surpass the best surviving champion of the Danes was another matter" (374).

Without doubt, Beowulf wins this contest of verbal skills. Having refused to measure himself against Grendel, Unferð matches himself against Beowulf and discovers that he is inferior. Hughes suggests that when Unferð lends his sword to Beowulf, in essence he is openly admitting that Beowulf is the superior man and warrior (395). From this point on, Beowulf assumes the role of powerful protector, the role of the champion who defends the old king, his goldhall, and all the helpless citizens, including the warriors. Even if the Beowulf-poet does not include any hint of sexual insult, in this scene he uses gender as a kind of covert
category. The poet uses gender and language to substantiate that, unable to maintain a position of "undisputed superiority" (Bonjour 18), Unferō and the other manly battle-experienced warriors of the king’s retinue who have previously slipped into the category reserved for old people, women, and children. They have joined the ranks of the weak, the defenseless, the impotent, the effeminate, those who must depend upon others for protection. The poet summarizes Unferō’s descent in lines 1468b-71.

... Selfa ne dorste
under yða gewin  aldre geneðan
drihtscype dreogan; þæ þe dome forleas,
ellenmærðum. (ll. 1468-71a)

[. . . He himself did not dare
Under waves of struggle  his life to venture
his bravery to test,  there he lost glory
fame for courage.]

Besides those behaviors and skills directly associated with warfare and verbal dueling, the liberal dispensing of gifts to warriors who had proven themselves loyal and heroic, was also a predominantly masculine-coded activity. Treasure-giving promoted loyalty among the members of the war band. However, in *Beowulf*, queens as well as kings participate in this activity. Throughout Old English poetry, generosity was recommended as a highly admirable and desired quality of a good leader. Very early in the poem, the
Beowulf-poet advises that a *(geong g)uma* "young lord, man" (l. 20) should bestow splendid gifts upon his chosen men so they will stand by him when war comes. Wiglaf harshly chastises the members of Beowulf’s retinue who had formerly accepted wonderful gifts from their lord, but who have compromised their integrity by failing to stand beside the old king in his moment of greatest danger (ll. 2864-90). Because they have not maintained that prized manly virtue of courage, they and their families are cast out of the community. Worse, the whole nation will die out.

Numerous epithets identify King Hroðgar as the dispenser of gifts to the heroic warriors: "treasure-giver" *sinoes brytta* (ll. 607, 1170), "ring-giver" *sincgyfan* (l. 1012) and *beaga brytta* (l. 352), "hoard-guard of heroes" *hordweard hælepa* (l. 1047), and "gold-friend" *goldwine* (ll. 1171, 1602). In his sermon against pride and greed, Hroðgar introduces Heremod as a negative example of a ruler who had great "strength" *maegenes* and exhibited great potential (l. 1716), but who was so greedy that he refused to give any rings to reward the heroism of his own Danish warriors (ll. 1719-20). Hroðgar tells the story hoping that Beowulf might "learn manly virtues" *gumcyste ongit* (l. 1724a). The old king issues a dire prediction of destruction for any leader who, due to anger and greed, overlooks this virtue and gives no gold-plated rings to honor the members of his retinue (ll. 1749-50). The poet
himself acknowledges Hroðgar's reputation as the best of world-kings who "gave treasures sceattas daelde (l. 1684b-86).

Beowulf does not hesitate to praise the Danish king's generosity. First, he requests that if he is killed by Grendel's mother, Hroðgar should send all the treasures to Hygelac, so Hygelac will know that Beowulf had found a ring-giving lord of "manly virtues" gumcystum (11. 1485-87). In Beowulf's mind, gift-giving is indicative of "manly virtues." Later, at Hygelac's court, Beowulf proclaims Hroðgar's liberality before displaying and offering gifts to Hygelac (11. 2155-56). After Beowulf becomes king of the Geats, he also establishes a reputation as "gold-friend" goldwine of Geats (11. 2419, 2584), "ring-prince" hringa fengel (l. 2345), "gold giver" goldgyfan (l. 2652), as did his predecessors Hreðel the "lord of treasures" sinca baldor (l. 2428) and Hygelac, the "giver of treasures" sinces brytta (11. 1922, 2071).

Queens Wealhþeow and Hygd exhibit the same virtues. The poet himself notes Queen Hygd's wisdom, excellence, and generosity. By no means is she "illiberal, niggardly" hnah (l. 1929) nor "sparing of gifts" gneād gifa (l. 1930). Following the death of King Hygelac and convinced that her son is not strong enough to hold the ancestral throne, Hygd offers "treasure and kingdom, rings and the throne" hord ond rice, / beagas ond bregostol (11. 2369b-70a) to entice
Beowulf to accept the "royal power" cynedom (l. 2376). Hygd's first priority is to preserve the kingdom, not to retain the power position for her son Heardred.

Just as Hroðgar uses gift-giving to mediate honor, and therefore power, so, too, does Wealhþeow. As a reward to Beowulf for ridding the Danish kingdom of Grendel, Wealhþeow presents to the young hero a "neck-ring" beages (l. 1216) and other "treasures" sincgestreona (l. 1226). Immediately afterwards, she informs Beowulf that the loyal retainers of Hroðgar's retinue also obey her orders doð swa ic bidde (l. 1231). She either shares in or independently exercises a lord-retainer relationship. In addition, she is accompanied by her own following, a "troop of women" maepa hose (l. 924). Damico claims that hos is "broadly associated with military troops" (73) and "equals in excellence the gestrumu micle 'large troop of warriors' that accompanies" Hroðgar (5). Favorably impressed, upon his return home Beowulf describes the Danish queen as not only a "famous queen" mæru cwæn (l. 2016) who awarded "ring bands" beahwriðan (l. 2018) but who also "encouraged the young men" bædde byre geònge (l. 2018), as a lord might do.

Once Wealhþeow discovers that Hroðgar has expressed his intention to adopt Beowulf as a son and to withhold none of his worldly goods, the Danish Queen's liberality ceases to match that of Hygd. At this point Wealhþeow does not pick up the cudgel or wade in among the retainers to do battle.
But, neither does she passively acquiesce. Instead, she aggressively attempts to influence the king’s decision. No doubt, more concerned with the inheritance of her two sons than with the welfare of the nation, she steps forward to confront the king with his duty to retain the Danish throne for Danes. Advising as any concerned Danish warrior or counselor might, before the entire assembly Wealhtheow approves of Hroðgar’s generous gifts of treasure and praise to the Geats. Then, she contradicts Hroðgar’s pledge to Beowulf, reminding the king, “To your own kinsmen leave the people and the kingdom (ll. 1178-79). The queen’s chief concern is to preserve the kingship for her two sons Hreðric and Hroðmund.

Conclusion

In English secular poetry the authors frequently expressed their ideas about power through gendered language. As interpreters of life and masters of their language, Anglo-Saxon poets manipulated words and language to convey their perceptions and to order relationships between men and men, and men and women. Whatever the primary theme may be, most Old English poems deal with power relations. The poets were intrigued by what constituted power and powerlessness, who could hold either position, and how could they, as poets, signal to their audiences when the status changed. Neither sex nor social role sufficed as designators. Both men and women; and kings, warriors, and wives could exercise
manly attributes if the circumstances warranted. The poets frequently depended upon gendered language to indicate the status of those who did and did not possess power. If a character exhibited masculine-coded qualities or was described with masculine-gendered language, then that character usually was interpreted as a power-figure. On the other hand, if a character demonstrated feminine-coded traits or was depicted with feminine-gendered language, then that one was generally assigned to the category of the defenseless, helpless, and passive weakling.

During the course of an episode when the situation merited such a change, characters could move from one category to another, and occasionally back again. Deprived of their masculine-coded traits, male power-figures such as the Wanderer, Hroðgar, and Unferð slip into the feminine category of powerlessness and display feminine traits. On the other hand, wives and Queens could claim for themselves masculine-coded positions by displaying manly qualities. A gender system as flexible as that of the Anglo-Saxons was capable of ordering relations not only between members of the same sex, but also between members of the opposite sex. The Anglo-Saxon gender system allowed men to be powerless and women to be powerful. The poets employed gender-coded language to establish the status of the characters and to indicate when changes in status occurred.
NOTES

1 See Rosier, pages 1-7; Brodeur, pages 152-57; Chambers, pages 27-29; Lawrence, pages 76-77; and Malone, pages 268-313.

2 See Fulk, pages 113-27; Hughes, pages 385-95; Ogilvy, pages 370-75; and Bonjour, pages 17-22.

3 See Chickering pages 6-7 for a discussion of the metaphorical significance of names.

4 This phrase is of doubtful origin. Both Klaeber and Dobbie place brackets around geong g to indicate these letters are emendations restored by Christian Grein in his 1867 edition of Beowulf.
WORKS CITED


Bonjour, Adrien. The Digressions in Beowulf. Oxford:

[Review of English Writers: An Attempt towards a
History of Literature, Vol. II, by Henry Morley.]

Bright, James W. Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader.
Eds. Frederic G. Cassidy and Richard N. Ringler. N.Y.:

Brodeur, Arthur G. The Art of Beowulf. Berkeley and Los

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge,

Chambers, R. W. BEOWULF: An Introduction. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1932.

Chance, Jane. Woman As Hero in Old English Literature.

Chickering, Howell D., Jr., ed. and trans. BEOWULF: A Dual-

Clover, Carol J. "The Germanic Context of the Unferp

---. "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power


Harrison, David. England Before the Norman Conquest. Ipswich: Hadden Best and Co., Ltd., [197-].


---, ed. *English Historical Documents, c. 500-1042.*