

WITCHES AND WOMEN OF POWER: THE PRICE OF MAKING A HERO IN
BEOWULF

by

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WITCHES AND WOMEN OF POWER: THE

PRICE OF MAKING A HEX IN BEOWOLF

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ABSTRACT

The power struggle between the hero and Grendel's mother at the centre of *Beowulf* begins not when Grendel's avenger enters the darkened hall, but much earlier, with the telling of the Finnsburg story. Grendel's mother has as antecedents both Hildeburh and Wealhtheow. All three are mothers whose sons have been or will likely be killed by feuding; they are also *idesa*, women with a power that the poem characterizes as specifically feminine. Women in a world of warriors and feuding, Hildeburh and Wealhtheow have a power that is quite different from the power men use to fight one another. It is not individual power; instead, the community empowers them through their contribution to it, through spirituality and rituals, through wise counsel that reflects a long tribal tradition, and through motherhood, the giving of sons and daughters. Grendel's mother has the power of motherhood, but she is without community, without therefore the feminine ability to respond to the death of her son non-aggressively, non-violently. In her, the two powers, the masculine need to avenge death and the feminine dependence on tribal ties, are in conflict. The masculine triumphs, and turns the woman of power into a female figure of chaos, a witch. It also makes the man of power into a hero, into a force for order in the world.

To create both Grendel's mother and the warrior-as-hero, the poem uses two perspectives, one associated with the women and with feminine power, the other with the warrior and the way he responds to the world. With the victory of aggression over nurturing in Grendel's mother comes also the ascendance to power of the masculine perspective in both the poem and the world that forms its context.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: UNCOVERING MEANINGS

*I saw you once, Medusa; we were alone.
I looked you straight in the cold eye, cold.
I was not punished, was not turned to stone—
How to believe the legends I am told?*

* * *

*I turn your face around! It is my face.
That frozen rage is what I must explore—
Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place!
This is the gift I thank Medusa for.*

The Muse as Medusa

May Sarton (1971)

*A woman in the shape of a monster
a monster in the shape of a woman
The skies are full of them*

* * *

*. . . I am an instrument in the shape
of a woman trying to translate pulsations
into images for the relief of the body
and the reconstruction of the mind.*

Planetarium

Adrienne Rich (1971)

In *Stealing the Language*, Alicia Suskin Ostriker says:

At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature; there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, and Cinderella. It is thanks to myth that we believe that women must be either angel or monster.¹

The same terrain can be just as daunting to women critics, women readers, women as audience. But the need for women to participate in their/our culture, rather than to create an alternative counter-culture, leads us to (re)learn how to understand what we experience when we read or hear these stories, leads us to what Adrienne Rich calls "re-vision — the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."² One way of acquiring this new/old skill, this feminine perspective ("feminine" not because it belongs exclusively to women, but because they/we have the most to (re)gain from

¹*Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 211-212.

²"When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision (1971)," In *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (Norton: New York, 1979), p. 35.

it), one way of acquiring this skill is by going back as far as possible to the beginning, to the folktales and the fairy stories, to the myths and to the earliest literature available to us, to the oral and to the written traditions, that as J. R. R. Tolkien points out tell us about ourselves.³

Tolkien deplors the debasing of fairy-stories which sees them as pretty stories of anthropomorphic animals and diminutive creatures, stories told only in the nursery. Real fairy-stories, stories of the land of Fairie, he says, are the way traditional lore is preserved and passed on. They in fact tell us about the cultural life-line that produced us, our mores, our *a priori* attitudes towards the world we live in. Owen Barfield might say that they create the world we know.⁴ They are not "make-believe" in any real sense. And while there is nothing wrong with fairy stories being told in nurseries by women, by mothers, to children, they are also stories for all of us, because, in Tolkien's words, "such stories. . . open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (129). Rich also recognizes the value of standing outside our own time for the self-knowledge it brings:

. . . until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drowned we cannot know ourselves. . . We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition [of male domination] but to break its hold on us.⁵

That tradition of male domination may come from the texts themselves, but more frequently it is a result of the way we have come to read them.⁶ In the myths, the fairy stories, the old poems, there are heroes, men whose strength is good, who can and do protect the rest of us ordinary people from the things which could harm us. There are achievers, discoverers, kings, men of eloquence and sensitivity, men we can be proud to be descended from. But where are the strong women, the women who have power and who use that power in the

³In "On Fairy Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics' and Other Essays*, Christopher Tolkien, ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 109-161.

⁴In *Saving The Appearances* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1965), and W. A. Myers, "A Prolegomenon to the Study of Older Literatures," in *In Geardagum: Essays on Old English Language and Literature*, Loren C. Gruber and Deal Loganbill, eds. (Denver: Society for New Language Study, 1974), pp. 1-7.

⁵"When We Dead Awaken," p. 35.

⁶For evidence of which, begin with Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

service of good, who protect us from harm? Where are the women we can be proud to be related to?

Getting outside our own time, getting into the world of another time, means altering the relationship between reader and text. Usually, when we are translating from Old English we choose one modern equivalent which seems most appropriate. But when we choose one meaning from many, we strip the word of its original connotations and replace it with our own. We exert the power of translation over it, and then we wonder what the poet could possibly have meant. We may emend to make the text fit into our way of seeing things, but as John Newell Sanborn concludes,⁷ there is always a danger of "fall[ing] into the trap of changing the poem into what we desire it to be. . . . Much more time must be spent on what the work is before we take the line of least resistance and decide that 'the scribe did it.'" Instead of imposing our world on the poem, we need to become vulnerable, open to what has been written. We need to try and uncover the larger contextual fields of meaning that are associated with the Old English words. We need to change our perspective, to suspend our ideas about the way the world is, about its various relationships, particularly the ideas we think we have inherited from the past and the ones that we believe have always been there. At the same time, it is important that we participate in the text, responding to its humanity and to its internal logic.

In my relationship with *Beowulf*, I specifically did not want to be a reader who resists the text, nor even one who resists the canon of critical conclusions about the nature of the poem, but neither did I wish to privilege that canon nor the observations from which its conclusions are drawn. At the same time, I did not wish to upstage the text by creating my own idiosyncratic reader response. I have tried to be both subjective and objective, to respond both to the emotional appeal of the poem and to its logic, to value both the poet's creation and my own contribution to bringing it to life. I have tried to see only what is there, even though I must necessarily describe what I have seen in terms of my own experience. I have tried especially, as far as possible, to stand in the poet's footprints, to see the world through his eyes, to hear it through his ears, but also to analyse and interpret that world in my own way. I have tried most of all to give control neither wholly to poet

⁷In "A Possible Anglo-Saxon Poetic Framework: An Alternative to an Emendation," *Modern Philology* 70 (1972-73): 48.

nor to myself, but to something that consists of both of us, to a relationship that spans ten centuries. Only by doing things in this way was I likely to find out whether or not there were women to be called ancestors, whether or not our names have been written in that particular book of myths. As an important tool of this endeavour, I have included studies of a number of key words throughout my discussion, with two longer studies, of *ides* and *gemyndgian*, in appendices. Too, I have avoided emendations where I could and used an independent dictionary rather than one of the glossaries provided by the various editors. The results were dramatic.

Approaching the poem in this way does not solve all the problems *Beowulf* presents to us, but it clears up enough of them to suggest that it has an important part to play in recovering the original context of the poem. It makes putting women into "monster or angel" categories much more difficult, because it protects them from an invisibility apparently imposed in the intervening centuries, an invisibility that seems not always to have been there. The effect is particularly noticeable at the centre of the poem: in the story of Hildeburh and Hengest; in the scene that follows in which Wealhtheow speaks to Hrothgar and to Beowulf; in the creation of Grendel's mother as the powerfully evil woman, the Hag, the enemy of Beowulf, warrior and Hero. An indication that the women once had a more important place in the poem (and in the world which forms its context) is that examining its feminine component restores a balance that otherwise seems to be missing. When the women stop being invisible, the Finnsburg story has a significance proportional to the length of this "digression" from the main narrative. The dramatic setting of Wealhtheow's two speeches (to Hrothgar and Hrothulf, and to Beowulf) complements the value of their content. And of greatest importance, both Hildeburh and Wealhtheow contribute to and are ultimately changed by the mood of menace created by Grendel's mother's attack on the hall and by Hrothgar's lyric description of her mere. When the women stop being invisible, the warrior also stops being invisible in another way. We no longer see only his perspective, no longer have to accept only his values, his moral position. It becomes apparent that in this central portion of the poem there are two ways of seeing, two perceptions. At the beginning of the Finnsburg story, the warrior, as represented by Hengest, is an isolated figure, separate from the sharing of power within the hall. Then, the power relationships change, so that by the time Beowulf comes face to face with Grendel's mother, he and the ruler are of one mind

and the woman has been banished from the power structure. The warrior is no longer an individual, although Hengest and Beowulf represent him. He is a shared attitude towards the world, a mode of perception that is first expressed in the poem's male voices. He is in the voice of Heorot's *scop* telling of the Finnsburg massacres, and in the voice of the *Beowulf* poet when he speaks directly to the audience, setting the scene for Wealhtheow's speeches, commenting on the treasure given to Beowulf, describing the visit of Grendel's mother to the hall. And he is in Hrothgar's voice when he describes the secret land, the *mere*.

In some ways, not much changes when woman and warrior are equally valued. Beowulf is still heroic, Hrothgar still good and wise. Heorot remains a place of light and joy, and the undefined shadow of a Scylding feud still hangs over it. Hengest is still seen to have done the right thing by staying to avenge Hnæf. The treasure Beowulf receives is still wonderful, and Hunferth is still a sinister figure. The mere in which Grendel's mother lives is still a place of great danger to men. And Grendel's mother herself is still a force that emanates from it, that frightens warriors, that threatens to destroy them. The main difference between this way of reading and more orthodox ones, as might be expected, lies in the women's story. It changes how we see the three *idesa*: Hildeburh, who is frequently ignored in her story; Wealhtheow, who even in Helen Damico's book about her⁸ appears here in a "cameo role;" and Grendel's mother, whose arrival in Heorot seems to be a great surprise, whose portion of the poem causes so many difficulties to structural analysts. And it raises questions a masculinist viewpoint alone does not. Why, for instance, do both Hildeburh and Wealhtheow act as though they have power if they are in fact helpless? What is wrong with Wealhtheow's advice to Hrothgar and Hrothulf, or with her thanks to Beowulf? What makes her "misguided"? The feminine puts more value on the contribution of each story to the whole, on the ways in which Hildeburh and Wealhtheow prepare the way for Grendel's mother, on the ways in which her existence re-defines them. What is important becomes different: relatedness takes its place with story line, with the straight arrow of time.⁹ When the feminine has equal status with the masculine, when the legitimacy of female power and

⁸*Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valykrie Tradition* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

⁹See Ursula K. LeGuin's "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Grove, New York, 1989), pp. 165-70, a discussion of the relationship between time, heroes and narrative.

participation is accepted, we do find the names of mothers, of women of great spiritual strength, of wise women. But we find that along the way, their wisdom has come to be called "arcane," their religion "devil worship," and they have been given the names of Witch and Hag.

Beginning with the Finnsburg story, a sense of interconnectedness, of interdependence, of continuity, of the primacy of the group in matters of survival and prosperity, becomes increasingly limited to the women of power, the *idesa*, while individual strength and initiative become the domain of man the warrior. This separation creates new power relationships, and it becomes evident that for Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, in what is to become the feminine perspective, the meaning of power is quite different from that understood by the warrior. For him, power means being autonomous, and being able to impose his will. Its centre is the individual. As a member of a group, the warrior's autonomy lies in his decision to follow the leader of his choice; the leader expresses freedom of action through followers who contribute their power to insure that his wishes are carried out. For the warrior, powerlessness means not being a member of the dominant group; it means inevitable domination by someone else or some other group with the power he lacks, being made to do what they want, becoming an unwilling contributor to their power. The warrior's power expresses itself through aggression, either self-initiated or retaliatory, and the *status quo* is maintained through threat of aggression.

The case is otherwise with power as it is expressed by Hildeburh and Wealhtheow. For the women, power means working together towards a common goal. Its centre is not the individual but the group, to which autonomy must inevitably be sacrificed to some degree, rather than redirected, as it is for the warrior. Instead of a strong, aggressive leader who defines the purpose for those who follow, there is a spokesperson who takes direction from the group, who expresses the course of action agreed upon. Powerlessness from this point of view has less to do with domination and external aggression than with the destruction of the group, with the inability to prevent extinction. The woman's power expresses itself non-aggressively, by prevention, by setting up frameworks of acceptable behaviour to avoid the circumstances in which powerlessness can occur, and by repairing the damage when that prevention fails, as it is bound to do from time to time.

The woman who has this feminine kind of power, who is powerful but in a way very different to the warrior, is an *ides*. Appendix A is a study of the way *ides* is used by the *Beowulf* poet and by the other poets of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record*. The apparently wide range of applications suggests that the meanings "woman, wife, lady, queen" (in poetry) and "virgin" (elsewhere, where it is almost never found) given by both J. R. Clark Hall and Bosworth-Toller dictionaries, is part of what makes those women invisible. The possible relationship between the Old Norse *dis* and the Old English *ides* suggests a different field of meaning, and a different attitude towards women in general. Although the *idesa* of Old English poetry are not the semi-divine priestesses and wise women of earlier times, of the time before the pagan religions were supplanted by Christianity, it appears that in *Beowulf* at least, those ancient women are still there, still strong, still imbuing human women with the power of the earth, the sea.

Hildeburh when she laments and presides over the funeral pyre at Finnsburg expresses a real power that contributes to making treaties feasible. And even though the treaty fails, even though it is destroyed by Hengest's revenge, still she remains powerful, because negotiation, and its companion, lamentation to release the pain of loss, are desirable alternatives to domination and annihilation. And if in the long run they are not able to guarantee a permanent end to fighting, when complete domination of one's enemy is not to be had, is the alternative of annihilation worth the price? Hildeburh's strength complements the warrior's, is as valuable to the ruler as his is, and it influences our reading of Wealhtheow, the *ides* who follows her.¹⁰ She also exhibits real power in her hall; she is a wise woman, a counsellor who makes sense, who is listened to, who is heeded. Like Hildeburh's, her power remains in spite of the dark possibility of a Scylding feud hinted at by the *scop*, in spite of the evidence in the "Hama-Hygelac digression" that men do not always behave as they should. It too offers an alternative: dynastic rule, tribal affiliations and obligations instead of conquest as a way of acquiring and maintaining wealth and prosperity. Together, the two women serve to create a complex picture of the woman of power within the hall, the woman working for peace and prosperity without aggression, without domination. They are our ancestors, the women who are powerful and who protect us, with their words, their counsel and their songs of grief, with their intervention on the side of peaceful

¹⁰See Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Women in Old English Poetry Reconsidered," *Michigan Academician* 9 (1976): 109-17, and below.

coexistence. With their power of motherhood, they produce sons to protect against external aggression, but also daughters to become bonds of peace when that option is available. And both insure the tribe's continuation, even against the unavoidable death of old age.

Then Grendel's mother enters the text. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen¹¹ notes that

it is significant that the poet makes no mention of the existence of Grendel's mother until after the passage in which he depicts two mothers, one sorrowing for a lost son and the other worrying about possible future danger to the sons she bore; by describing three sorrowing mothers, the poet gives us the point of view of Grendel's mother before he describes her effect on the men with whom we normally sympathize. (152)

Damico recognizes Grendel's mother as the completing figure in a progression. She describes the trio as a "mother-triptych."¹² She sees Wealhtheow as a pivot between mother-victim, Hildeburh, and mother-villain, Grendel's mother, between the first and second parts of a "revenge action pattern," as a bridge between "historical and fantastical narrative." But what turns a victim into a villain? How does the woman who laments become an avenger? And what joins history to fantasy?

Grendel's mother is the third mother, the third *ides*. Because she follows Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, because their power remains in spite of their failures to guarantee a lasting peace, the story of Grendel's mother and her relationship to the hall is not the same story as it might otherwise be. By following them, by being *ides* and mother as they are, she begins to move towards the hall almost from the moment of her son's death, drawn as inexorably as he was, but drawn not by the joy and *comitatus* of the fighting men, drawn instead by the success of one single man, the warrior champion, Beowulf.¹³ Grendel's mother stands with Hildeburh lamenting at the funeral pyre, the pyre on which lie both Hildeburh's son and her brother, giving her songs their power to heal the pain of death. In her is the strength to find through the recognition of a common experience of grief an end to enmity, not its beginning, and to accept each death (no matter the specific agent) as part of

¹¹"Women in *Beowulf*," in *Approaches to Teaching Beowulf*, Jess B. Bessinger, Jr., and Robert F. Yeager, eds. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1984), pp. 150-156.

¹²*Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, p. 122.

¹³In the narrative, Beowulf is the direct cause of her appearance in Heorot because he kills her son, a point Hrothgar does not hesitate to use when he wants Beowulf to kill her too (ll. 1334/5). But also what Beowulf *is* as much as what he *does* brings them face to face.

something larger, as part of the whole process we call our lives. Grendel's mother is in Wealhtheow's words to Hrothgar, words that limit his actions, words that also limit both the actions and rewards, the potential for advancement, of the hero. She is the bond of kinship that ties Hrothgar's power to his duty to kin, that prevents him handing over his power to Beowulf, the champion, the hero. She is the power that gives truth to the words "*here*, the men do as *I* say."

However, the power of the *idesa* to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the hall by promoting non-violent action becomes negated, replaced by an aggressive power that endangers men, that threatens to destroy warriors. She is a creature whose power is masculine, though she is feminine. Long before she dies, the peculiarly feminine power of the *idesa*, its good as well as its dangers, its rewards as well as its responsibilities, ceases to exist. In its place is the power of the warrior who kills her, his wisdom, his response to death. The loss of feminine power leaves behind Hygd, wise and good, but not a participant in ruling the Geats, Offa's queen, siren and *ides* until her conversion by marriage into a good woman, and Freawaru, fragile bed-fellow to Ingeld, unfairly given the too-heavy role of peace-weaver.

Grendel's mother, both her life and her death, have a profound impact on how the world is shaped. She is created not from the perceptions of everyone in the hall but only from the perception of the warrior. Through her, he gets rid of everything that does not advance his superiority, and that includes all perceptions but his own. Her death, with its accompanying effect on the women in the hall, clears the way for his supremacy. Without a potent feminine perspective to temper aggression with nurturing, the world he dominates has only dualities: "either/or" instead of "and." In the warrior's world, all conflicts must end with a clear winner and a clear loser; compromise, the mutual laying down of arms without victory or defeat, means only unfinished business and the inevitability of another Finnsburg massacre. For him, the true sharing of power is not the sharing of leadership, of participation in decision making; the soldier gives his unquestioning loyalty to his lord and in return participates in his lord's freedom from oppression by an outside force. To the ruler all benefit and loyalty are owed, and his own best interest is axiomatically the best interest of those who follow him. Without this focus of power in a single individual, there is nothing to prevent another Scylding feud. Under this regime, a woman who is a part of the

hall, "good," also contributes to the power and supremacy of her lord. Unable to give physical strength, she gives what she can, her reproductive ability, her participation in the creation of more warriors to enhance his might. Wisdom becomes a function of understanding dominance relationships and power struggles, and so her power to influence the actions of the lord through wise counsel and through other forms of peace-weaving is replaced by dependence and reliance on his leadership, his protection. She no longer has equal status with the warrior who through his strength of arms shares the power of his lord. In the dualization of power and powerlessness, power and physical strength (or its extension, prowess with weapons) become allied, and the woman is excluded from both. She becomes dis-integrated, powerless.

In this warrior's world, however, powerlessness is as difficult for women to live with as it is for men. As Ostriker points out, "the female power to do evil is a direct function of her powerlessness to do anything else."¹⁴ When "good" women become truly powerless to influence the society in which they live, when the warrior prevents the exercise of the power of Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, when it is not even given a place and a value, no matter that it is different from his, then Grendel's mother will be born, and she will be evil. Ostriker also notes that

the violent desires arising from the contemplation of powerlessness are suggestively interchangeable, and those women who express them most dramatically and thrillingly make clear at the same time that the wish to kill/die confirms a dualized world and a dualized sexuality. (p. 165)

And Grendel's mother is exciting: she rules her own hall, as Hrothgar does, she has the power to avenge the death of her son, the power not to be a victim, to act as Hengest did, according to *wordd ræden*. But she also confirms the dualized world of the empowered and the powerless in which the warrior is Hero, and in which all power which does not itself reflect this duality is illegitimized. The "either/or" perspective of the warrior makes Hildeburh and Wealhtheow look like victims and fools. Unwilling to impose dominance, they are forced into submission. Reluctant to separate self from other, they are relegated to always being "other." Without their legitimized role as subject, they become permanently objectified, become passive in not being always and only active. Those things denied them by the dualizing process — self, subjectivity, activity — turn the *ides* into a female man, into

¹⁴*Stealing the Language*, p. 222.

Grendel's mother, the dam, the troll-wife, the monster.¹⁵ Superficially different, the three women, Hildeburh, Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother, are actually only one, the woman of power. She is a casualty of the warrior's quest to become a Hero: in her presence, he cannot be special, more than other men, so he destroys her. When he does, all *idesa* are dis-integrated; those who are not metamorphosed into the potted-plant heroines of romance¹⁶ join the host of evil strong women, among whom number Lady Macbeth, Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, Lady Dedlock, Baba Yaga, and the witch/stepmother who tries to kill Hansel and Gretel.

The remainder of this paper focusses on a close reading of *Beowulf* 1063 to 1383. Chapter II examines the relationship between Hildeburh, Finn and Hengest, and between the two responses to death the Finnsburh massacre presents us with. For the woman and the ruler, there is the truce, the treaty which grows from it, reparations and ritual lamentation to expurgate the antagonistic emotions of those who recently faced each other on the battlefield. But the warrior has lost his lord, his focus of power. He cannot accept the compromise solution of the truce, cannot choose a new ruler who, from his perspective, has chosen this "powerless" alternative. For him, there is only vengeance, no matter the cost. The Heort *scop* creates a dual, masculine/feminine perspective on the events by having Hildeburh preside over the first part of the story and Hengest the dominant force that controls the end. The ruler, caught between the two forces thus brought into existence, follows the first and is destroyed by the second. Chapter III looks at the relationship between the two *idesa*, Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, and at the relationship between Wealhtheow and the *Beowulf* poet as he speaks directly to his audience, at the two ways of seeing treasure, as a tool of the ruler and as a cause of feuding and death. The masculine perspective now sees female power trying to usurp the ruling authority. Of the two perceptions, only the feminine is explicit, expressed through Wealhtheow's words. The masculine is in the descriptions that frame her speeches. It insinuates that feminine power is ineffective in protecting the hall from destruction, a failure compounded by its perceived attempt to dominate and suppress ~~masculine power, the power of both warrior and ruler.~~ Chapter IV introduces Grendel's

¹⁵See Carol Halstead ("The *Brimwif* and the *Beowulf*," M.A. Thesis, SFU, 1986) for the enthusiasm with which critics have embraced and even enhanced this limited view of her.

¹⁶See Shirley Marchalonis, "Above Rubies: Popular Views of Medieval Women," *Journal of Popular Culture* 14 (1980): 87-93.

mother in physical form, and investigates her relationship to the other two *idesa*, the contrary terms used to describe her, and their effect on her relationship to the men in the hall. Through the *Beowulf scop's* handling of events, the power of the *ides* is perverted into power the warrior understands. The women within the hall are made to appear ineffective in preventing violence, but nevertheless their power remains, as does the essential humanity of Grendel's mother. Chapter V discusses Hrothgar's description of Grendel's mother and the mere. The masculine domination of perception, its ascendance over the feminine, creates through Hrothgar's words a creature, a feminine power that is completely inhuman, completely evil. Feminine power as practiced by Hildeburh and Wealhtheow completely disappears, and the warrior is promoted to a place of supremacy in the hall, promoted from champion to Hero, from someone who stands for one group of people in battle to someone who stands for all humankind against the forces of Darkness.

CHAPTER II
IDES PRIESTESS

*Whirl up, sea —
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.*

Oread

H.D. (1914, 1925).

*I come like a woman
who I am
spreading out through nights
laughter and promise
and dark heat
warming whatever I touch
that is living
consuming
only
what is already dead.*

The Women of Dan Dance with Swords in Hands
to Mark the Time When They were Warriors

Audre Lorde (1978).

The *ides* as a wicked woman, an enemy of the hall, as Grendel's mother, does not take a separate, easily identified form until line 1258, when the *ides aglæcwif* steps onto the page, but the *idesa* who precede her, Wealhtheow and Hildeburh, are invested by the poet both with the human character of *ides* as mother and woman of consequence in the hall, and with *ides*, descendant of an ancient, wise, woman priestess. The transformation to monster comes about because the *ides* is powerful in her own way, and because that power is very different from the kind of power that is intrinsic to the dualized, hierarchical world of the masculine supremacist, the warrior. In the world of *Beowulf* before the death of Grendel, the aggressive masculinism which eventually destroys the positive power of the *ides* is not evident. In the hall, Wealhtheow, the *ides*, is part of the power structure.¹ Grendel's death brings the beginning of an end to that golden time, the time when the warrior's dualized perspective, after it appears with the building of Heorot, has done no more than separate the inhabitants of the hall from the world of monsters and goblins who live on the marches.

¹Helen Damico's *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* is devoted to showing that Wealhtheow is a figure of "some consequence," (though "subordinate . . . in the poem's hierarchy of characters"), p. 14.

At first only an undefined subterranean dis-ease disturbs the celebration of Beowulf's victory, a vague dissatisfaction that after such a build-up, the scourge of Heorot was too easily dealt with, a brief sense of disquiet at the comparison between Beowulf and Heremod. The noise of the celebration in Heorot drowns out that first uneasiness; the brief dark cloud is eclipsed by the glittering treasure that is Beowulf's reward for ridding the hall of its enemy. Then Heorot's *scop* is compelled to present the story of the Frisian massacre. Although incidental to the story of Beowulf the hero, the story about Hildeburh and Hengest is intrinsic to the *Beowulf* poem. It sets in opposition the needs of the woman and the warrior, with the ruler's best course of action caught between the two. It presents exigencies of both, the necessity for a truce, for healing the break between Frisians and Danes, and the need to avenge the death of a leader, to regain the autonomy lost through his death. The balancing of needs gives the impression of equal power, as does the woman's association, through the *ides* priestess image of her, with the cycle of birth and death and with *metodsceaft*, and the warrior's sanction by *worold ræden*, "world-ness." This precariously balanced world influences how we experience Wealhtheow on her second appearance in the hall, when power has already begun to shift in favour of the warrior. The power relationships of both prepare the way for Grendel's mother.

	bær wæs sang ond sweg	samod ætgædere
	fore Healfdenes	hildewisan
1065	gomenwudu greted	gid oft wrecen
	donne healgamen	Hroþgares scop
	æfter medobence	mænan scolde
	*[be] Finnes eaferum	ða hie se fær begeat
	hæled Healf-Dena	Hnæf Scyldinga
1070	in Freswæle	feallan scolde

*There was song and sound both together before the Healfdene's leader in battle, the mirth-wood touched, a song often sent forth. Then Hrothgar's scop had to tell a hall-diversion along the mead-bench, about Finn's heirs/sons; when that calamity poured over them, the warriors of the Healfdenes, Hnæf of the Scyldings had to fall in the Frisian massacre.*²

²The complete Old English text of the sections relevant to this discussion has been included because I have not depended on any one of the standard editions available: Klaeber, Wrenn, Chambers, or Krapp and Dobbie (the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record*). Instead, with help from the MS. facimile in the Early English Text Society edition (Zupitza), I have removed most of the emendations these editions contain. The few emendations I have not been able to eliminate are identified by [*] but are otherwise unremarked on, having been amply justified elsewhere (by Klaeber, Wrenn, etc.). However, for convenience of reference I have kept the line divisions of the later editions. Following each section of text is my own gloss of it.

The transition from bright Heorot to bleak Finnsburg prepares the way for the process of coalescing around the woman a perspective in which men's lives are not their own, in which they are compelled by outside forces to behave in certain ways, in which they are powerless to prevent or forestall even their own deaths. In the brightly-lit hall overflowing with riches, food, drink and celebration, something important is missing, something which the *scop* must provide,³ for he does not choose to tell the story — he is compelled to perform it (1067). *Scolde* is repeated at l. 1070, describing Hnæf's fall. The two events, the *scop*'s song and Hnæf's death, are not alike in kind, but their proximity helps to create in them a sense of nonspecific external cause. The force of life and death that is outside human control, more than any particular agent, brings about Hnæf's demise, and by association that same force of fate causes it to happen that the *scop* sings this particular story at this moment in the celebrations and in the poem.

The story of the Finnsburg massacre is a warning of what could happen to the celebrators in Heorot and therefore an introduction to Grendel's mother's identification with Hildeburh, *geomuru ides*, with the hall. The *scop* sings of the other side of victory, the other side of killing.⁴ While golden Heorot celebrates the killing of an enemy, bleak Finnsburg counts the dead. In the rapid change in location from Denmark to Frisia, in the complete reversal of fortunes between the two places, Heorot's future hangs suspended. There will either be continued prosperity and good fortune, or a return to sorrow if vengeance

²(cont'd) Although here I have used modern punctuation and, where otherwise the sense would be too difficult to follow, modern word order, these glosses are not meant to be translations into smooth English, but merely guides to show my own choices of vocabulary and phrasing. In cases where to choose would have restricted or distorted my sense of what the poem is doing, I have either included a range of applicable meanings or left the word in its original Old English to be discussed in the text that follows. The effects of this treatment are often not particularly dramatic in themselves but they do change the way the poem reads. One reason for this may be that the modern English becomes more transparent than it might be in a smoother rendering, bringing the reader that much closer to the Old English text. To get to the sense, the reader must stretch, become involved in the process of the poem, become open to another way of experiencing the world.

³This function of the *scop* is very close to the role of Shakespeare's Fools, and lends support to Norman Eliason's contention that *scop* and *pule* are one (see "The *Pule* and the *Scop* in *Beowulf*," *Speculum* 38 (1963): 267-284).

⁴As Kemp Malone points out in "Hildeburg and Hengest" (*ELH* 10.4 [1943]: 257-84) "the *Beowulf* poet chose not to treat the outbreak of the trouble nor yet the siege of the hall with its culmination the sortie" (263).

cannot be averted.

1071	ne huru Hildeburh	herian þorfte·
	eotena treowe	unsynnum weard
	beloren leofum	æt þam [lind]plegan
	bearnum ond broðrum	hie on gebyrd hruron
1075	gare wunde	þæt wæs geomuru ides
	nalles holinga	Hoces dohtor
	metodsceaft bemearn	syþðan morgen com·
	ða heo under swegle	geseon meahte
	morþorbealo maga	

Yet Hildeburh had no need to praise the pledge of the giants/enemies. Became guiltlessly deprived of loved ones at that [shield] play, of sons and brothers; they fell on account of fate, wounded by spear. That was a sad/mourning ides; not at all without reason did Hoc's daughter mourn the measure of fate/destiny/god-nature, when morning came, when she under the sky could see the evil/violent death of kin.

Before defining the warrior's perspective, the poem explores its alternative, the perspective that will be assigned to the *ides*. The first person we see at Finnsburg is not Finn, not Hengest, but Hildeburh. In spite of being directly involved in only one third of the first part of the story (to the end of *fit* XVI; 20 lines of a total of 60), Hildeburh is at its heart. She opens the scene, sets the mood of the place, becomes immediately the focus of the sorrow, the mourning, the sense of loss which pervades it. The poet shows only her and the dead, the sons and brothers. It seems as if no one else exists in the world, and that subjective perspective amplifies the feeling of loss, the overwhelming emptiness when everyone that matters to you has been taken away. Of course, as critics and editors are often quick to point out, Hildeburh has lost literally only one son, one brother, and so *bearnum ond broðrum* (1074) is a generic plural. Be this as it may, a generic plural sends a different message than a specific singular, expanding the one case to include all such. In the loss of *bearnum ond broðrum*, Hildeburh becomes everyone who has lost family, as through her flows the intense alone-ness which binds them together.

Bearnum also functions as part of the interplay of meanings that (re)invests *ides* with the special power of the mother. Both *bearn* and *gebyrd*, which alliterates with it (1074), are derived from *beran*, to bear, to give birth to. Although usage has separated the meanings, when they are brought together like this, their common origin is revived, added to the later meanings. *Bearnum* with *gebyrd* says that everyone's life is ruled by fate, that to be born is to die. The mother who makes possible the birth is thus instrumental in the death. In this,

she belongs to the Mother who is sometimes called Nature, sometimes Earth, or Gaia, or a hundred other names. The special power of the *ides* mother to create new life, to heal the wounds caused by death, to weave together a future of peace between two once-warring tribes, means that her relationship to death is not that of conqueror and conquered but one of interdependence. Because she is a vital part of the life/death process, through her death is not an end. Loss is for her the other side of new life, new blood, new relationships. And death makes it possible for her to be a mother, makes space for the new life, makes change and a future better than the past possible.

The situation at Finnsburg, however, gives the association of *ides* mother and death a special twist that makes apparent for the first time a separate warrior perspective. The deaths of the two men, Hildeburh's son and brother, are fated not only generally but also specifically by their births: they die because one is born a Dane, the other a Frisian, and because of a treaty that failed, a treaty for which Hildeburh was the bond-of-peace. Through the mother of Hildeburh and Hildeburh as mother, their fate, their *gebyrd* is set. So it could be argued that, because part of what gives women their power, and their tribal standing, is their ability to bear sons, they participate in the fate that takes those sons away. The same ability that makes them bonds-of-peace implicates them in the deaths of their sons, so that it could be said that inherent in their power is a conflict of interest. At this first instance, the *scop's* choice of this particular story told in this particular way creates no more than a variation on the relationship between two aspects of *ides* mother, her involvement in both birth and death, two ways of valuing the power of woman-as-mother. But in the association of *ides* with both motherhood and fate, in the recognition of an alternate way of seeing her role in the joining of life and death, is the beginning of the separate warrior perception that creates from the *ides*, from the woman of power within the hall, a monster. Through his eyes, his way of experiencing the world, she will become the source of all danger to man-as-warrior, to his person, and most of all to his supremacy in the hall.

As Hoc's daughter sorrows, the double perspective subsides and with it goes the *ides* mother. Hildeburh once again becomes only a woman facing death, a woman who stands for all women, and for everyone who grieves. To her is given the sense of having been deprived of loved ones, and the feeling that she has done nothing to deserve such a loss.

Toward *her*, the *eotenas*⁵ have behaved badly, have broken their word. *She* mourns the *metodsceaft*, the way things have been shaped, the nature of the world that includes such unpreventable death. The dead we see are *her* kin, *her* flesh and blood, and their death is both violent and evil. Whatever power she might otherwise have, be it power in the hall or the power of motherhood, what dominates and blots out all else is the overwhelming desolation that every human being feels when they cannot prevent what is born from dying. And that sense of desolation is itself the mother of a great power, the power to bring an end to fighting and killing, the power to find another way.

		þær he ær mæste heold
1080	worolde wynne	wig ealle fornam
	Finnes þegnas	nemne feaum anum
	þæt he ne mehte	on þæm meðelstede
	wig Hengeste	wiht gefeohtan
	ne þa wealafe	wige forþringan
1085	þeodnes ðegne	ac hig him geþingo budon
	þæt hie him oðer flet	eal gerymdon
	healle ond heahsetl	þæt hie healfre geweald
	wið eotena bearn	agan moston
	ond æt feohgyftum	Folcwaldan sunu
1090	dogra gehwylce	Dene weorþode
	Hengestes heap	hringum wenede
	efne swa swiðe	sincgestreorum
	fættan goldes	swa he Fresena cyn
	on beorsele	byldan wolde
1095	ða hie getruwedon	on twa healfa
	fæste frioduwære	Fin Hengeste
	elne unflitme	aðum benemde
	þæt he þa wealafe	weotena dome
	arum heolde	þæt ðær ænig mon
1100	wordum ne worcum	wære ne bræce
	ne þurh inwitsearo	æfre gemænden
	ðeah hie hira beaggyfan	banan folgedon
	ðeodenlease	þa him swa geþearfod wæs
	gyf þonne Frysna hwylc	freçnan spræce
1105	ðæs morþorhetes	myndgiend wære
	þonne hit sweordes ecg	*seðan scolde

Where he before held most of world joy, strife destroyed entirely Finn's thanes, except only

⁵R. E. Kaske, in "The *Eotenas* in *Beowulf*" (*Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. Robert P. Creed, Providence, RI, 1967, pp. 285-310) makes the case for one single translation of *eotenas* as "giants" throughout *Beowulf*, the word being used literally to signify evil creatures of the race of Cain, and metaphorically as an insulting name for one's enemies. Kaske also points out the "fairly regular progression [in *Beowulf*] from monsters to men" (p. 301), from "universalized external violence" to "human foes." The *eotena* who have victimized Hildeburh are unnamed, uncharacterized, and therefore are part of the "externalized violence" done to her and hers.

a few, so that he could not in that place of assembly win the battle against Hengest, not at all, not then force out the wealaf by fighting, the lord's thane; but they offered [but also commanded, announced] mediation with them, that they yield completely to them the other dwelling, hall and high seat, so that they could have control of half (=equally) against the children of the giants/enemy; and with property-gifts, the son of Folcwalda each day might honor/enrich the Dane(s), might treat Hengest's band with goods, even as very much with riches, ornamented with gold, as he in the beerhall wanted/intended to encourage the Frisians' kin. Then they pledged on two sides a fast peace-bond. Finn to Hengest, with courage, strongly, declared with oaths that he, by judgement of advisors, would hold that wealaf with honor, that there any man with words nor works might not break the bond, nor through malice-skill afterwards might taunt, even though they, lordless, would follow their ring-giver's slayer when it was so necessary for them. If then anyone of the Frisians with bold speech might be reminding of that murder-hate, then sword's edge must prove it.

The strength of Hildeburh's grief forms a framework within which the treaty between Finn and Hengest takes place. The frame itself reflects the interconnectedness of everyone who has experienced the fighting, and the understanding that the sense of loss expressed through the woman's sorrow is common to all of them. Because of this framing, Hengest's loss becomes an extension of Hildeburh's, becomes strong because hers is strong, and it becomes the main reason he chooses to accept Finn's terms. There is no problem with Finn's motive; he offers the treaty because he is unable to regain control of his hall, his place of power, by force. He wants men to replace those who were killed, new thanes so that he can once again be strong. For this, he is willing to pay generously. But why does Hengest agree to the truce? Because the Danes are *wealaf*, "those who are left behind after terrible calamity." The word (at l. 1084) gains importance as it interacts with the situations of both Finn and Hengest. It says that the Danes, like the Frisians, have lost men in the fighting, so that by implication, the two sides are equal in the combination of strength (or lack of it) and tactical/strategic advantage; from this a stalemate has arisen, hence Finn's insistence on and Hengest's acceptance of the truce. At the same time, being *wealaf* reminds those Danes who have been left of those who were not, of comrades who died in the fighting. Finn also suffers loss of world-joy, and so the position of Danes and Frisians, both physical and emotional, seems equal, the need to end the fighting coming from both sides. How the fighting began, whose "fault" it was, who killed whom, become less important than the fact of death, and it seems reasonable not just that a truce and treaty might be contemplated but that they might actually be effective.

The narrative moves away from the hostility towards a resolution of the two sides. An arrangement is made for the payment of *wergild*, the terms of which are exceptionally

generous to Hengest. In this is a recognition both of the greatness of Hengest's loss and the value of the hall to Finn. With the return of the hall, provision is made for a consolidation of remaining forces against⁶ any common enemy (the "children of the *eotena*"), emphasizing that both Danes and Frisians are weakened, and therefore vulnerable. It also creates one people of them by giving them a common enemy. And, without placing blame for the outbreak of hostilities in the first place, Finn proposes to honor the Dane, i.e., Hnæf,⁷ generously with property gifts, a completely legitimate way of preventing or ending a feud. Stanley J. Kahrl, in his examination of *fæht* in *Beowulf*,⁸ does not refer to the Finnsburg episode (the word *fæht* does not appear in it), but he does discuss the alternative of *wergild* to fighting and points out that Grendel compounds his crime against Heorot by refusing to pay compensation (ll. 154b–58). "By rejecting this system Grendel has forced Hrothgar's people nearly back into their original state of savagery." In contrast, he points to "Hroþgar's magnanimous action in paying the *wergild* for Beowulf's father involved in the greatest of feuds, 'fæhðe mæst' (l. 459), and Beowulf's willing acceptance of the obligation this incurred" (192). Too, there has been peace between the Danes and Frisians for some time, as the presence of Hildeburh and her son demonstrate. So, there is nothing intrinsically dishonorable or wrong in either Finn's offering the treaty or Hengest's accepting it.

The treaty is legitimate, practical, and it is desirable; it represents the imperative on both sides to break the stalemate honorably. It also stretches to the limit the feminine perspective of preventing further violence by proscribing certain kinds of behaviour. Finn's rider to the treaty, in which he pledges to keep his men from taunting the Danes, shows that it is clearly doomed. The emotion-laden terms of his promise expose its problems. The

⁶Although *wit* is most commonly translated here as "in conjunction with," that interpretation depends on *eotenas* being Jutes, not "enemies" in general. In Klaeber's glossary (*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn. Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath & Co., 1950), this use of *wit* is grouped with two others. One Klaeber himself questions; in the other, the wolf and raven plunder the slain, so the implication of competition can be made as easily as "as companions." Furthermore, there is no reason why *wit* should not be translated here as adversarial, so far as I am aware.

⁷*Dene* can also be plural, but it raises the question of what Finn would be honouring the Danes as a group for, for giving up their position of power? Accepting the plural alone would mean also restricting *weorþode* to "enriching," that is, reading Finn's offer solely as payment for their services.

⁸In "Feuds in *Beowulf*. A Tragic Necessity?" *Modern Philology* 69 (1972):189–98.

wealaf are to be honoured as generously as if they were Frisians; but they are not Frisians, not Finn's thanes. They are the left behind; once they were many, but now their comrades are dead, and not having died with them, they plan to join their killers. Finn promises to put a strong prohibition on taunting, but that prohibition implies that the Danes have something they are, or should be, ashamed of. The oath becomes itself a taunt. The Danes are *þeodenleas*, the bond between lord and man has been broken, a relationship has been violated; they are not simply "without a leader."⁹ And *wealaf* and *þeodenleas* together raise the question of how it is that there are any Danes still alive when their lord is dead.¹⁰ The Danes will follow, rather than kill, the *bana* of their lord, who has been generous (a ring giver) specifically to ensure the loyalty they now seem to be so easily putting aside; Finn's generosity goes beyond compensation to become bribery, and honouring Hnæf, *Dene weorþode* (1090), becomes instead enriching Hengest and the rest of the Danes. The neutrality of *bana*, "slayer," does not negate the need to avenge the death he caused, to do something to answer the breaking of the man-lord bond, and *þa him swa geþearfod wæs*, "when it was so necessary for them," becomes a hollow excuse for cowardice, a case of putting self-preservation (and maybe greed) before loyalty. Finally, any Frisian who reminds the Danes that they should be feeling a murderous hatred for Finn will be excessively punished: the Danes should not need any goading to remember their lord, to move towards avenging him, and the heavy punishment suggests less the seriousness of the crime than that it is almost irresistible. The irony is that this is exactly what Finn has just done, and in the end, the *sweordes ecg* does prove it.

It appears that what is wrong is not with the treaty itself, not with the issues it deals with, but with what it does not cover, what no treaty, no additional promises or oaths have the power to legislate, the emotions of those who were enemies and must now be friends. In Finn's oath is not only the implied failure of such an attempt to control the emotions of

⁹See G. Storms, "The Subjectivity of the Style of *Beowulf*," in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. Stanley B. Greenfield (University of Oregon Books, 1963), pp. 171-186, esp. p. 178, in which the emotional effect of a number of words referring to absence are discussed.

¹⁰That sacrificing oneself once the lord is dead is not particularly practical, as Rosemary Woolf argues (in "The ideal of men dying with their lord in the *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 5, 63-81), emphasizes rather than detracts from the emotional appeal of the scenario. To point out that the Danes have lost their leader but not their lives is more useful as an accusation of cowardice than as a code of conduct.

his men, but even his own feelings, from whom the men might be expected to take their cue, are clearly not reconciled to this most sensible resolution to the hostilities. Unable himself to keep from reminding the Danes of their unfortunate position, his words seem to speak for all the men, inadvertently revealing the choice of their hearts, to continue fighting until either one side defeats the other, or everyone is dead. This, in spite of their overt rational acceptance of the treaty. The only hope for an end to the bloodshed lies in the possibility of a way in which the grief on both sides, the feelings of impotence death gives rise to, can be released either violently against the common enemy, Finn's *eotena bearn* (1088), or failing the appearance of such a convenient external target, non-violently in some other way.

Hildeburh does not participate in any of this, and yet she is there through it all. The desolation she embodies is repeated in *wealaf* and in *þeodenleas*, even though it is transmuted into the need to meet violence with violence. She is excluded in that her loss was loss of family, those whose blood she shared, the son she bore, the son her mother bore, but in that loss is the affirmation that there is no birth without death, and affirmation of the power of women in that cycle. Not so for the men;¹¹ theirs is the loss of comrades-at-arms, a leader in battle. The relationship between fighting men comes about on account of violence, and a new leader will replace the slain one only if there is more war or the threat of war. Nevertheless, the power of Hildeburh's emotions gives healing power to theirs, and through her there is for the moment a unity of feeling. The woman and the men come together in spite of their differences, through common need, but their paths do not lead in the same direction.

	ad wæs geæfned	ond icge gold·
	ahæfen of horde	Here-Scyldinga
	betst beadorinca·	wæs on bæl gearu
1110	æt þæm ade wæs	eþgesyne
	swatfah syrce	swyn ealgylden·
	eofer irenheard	æþeling manig
	wundum awyrded	sume on wæle crungon
	het ða Hildeburh	æt Hnæfes ade
1115	hire selfre sunu	sweolode befæstan

¹¹This is not to say that men have no part in the procreative process, nor that the *Beowulf* poet and his audience were unaware of the connection. However, the bonds between the men in this story are not those of family, as they are for the woman. Finn loses thanes; Hengest loses a lord.

	banfatu bærnan	ond on bæl don
	earme on eaxle	ides gnornode
	geomrode gidnum	guðrinc astah·
	wand to wolcnum	wælfyra mæst
1120	hlynode for hlawe	hafelan multon·
	bengeato burston	ðonne blod ætspranc·
	laðbite lices	lig ealle forswealg
	gæsta gifrost	þara ðe þær guð fornam
	bega folces	wæs hira blæd scacen·

The oath was carried out, and icge gold raised from the horde. The Honour-Scyldings' best warrior was ready for the bale. On that pyre was easily seen the blood-stained sark, all-gold swine, iron-hard boar, many an atheling destroyed by wounds; many fell in the slaughter. Then Hildeburh ordered her own son made safe in the burning heat at Hnæf's pyre, bone-vat to burn and put on the bale. With arm on shoulder, ides mourned, lamented with songs; warrior rose up. Wound to the clouds the greatest of slaughter-fires, [the warrior] lay down in the mound/[the fire] made noise in the mound. Heads melted, wound-gashes burst, then blood out-sprang from hate-bites of the body. Fire swallowed all, most greedy guest/ghost¹², of those who there the battle consumed of both folk; their breath was fled/their fruit was scattered.

For now, the woman still presides. The treaty restores order, Finn's rider is designed to prevent a repetition of hostilities, and the scene before the funeral pyre completes the picture of communal power, "feminine" power. Its purpose, its contribution is to repair the damage to the relationship between the participants of the treaty, damage caused by the killing, damage that must be healed if there is to be any hope of lasting peace between them.

The pyre is built in preparation for the release of the emotions of bereavement, non-violently, into the sky. The two sides are bound together when Hildeburh orders the body of her young son, *hire selfre sunu*, placed on Hnæf's pyre, so that uncle and nephew, Dane and Frisian, lie side by side, joined both in birth and in death, by their fate. In this simple action, the woman of power who orders things done becomes also the human mother who gave him life, her *own* son, and who now makes sure that he is "made safe," as if for sleep, not for death. In the fusing of mother and *ides*, of life and death, the *ides* becomes once again the instrument of the great power of the natural world. But although she orders it done, that is, demonstrates her power among the Frisians, in *hire selfre sunu* is also the warrior's perception of Hildeburh's ineffectiveness. Hoc's daughter, she is also

¹²*gæst* = *gast*: breath; soul, spirit, life; good or bad spirit, angel, demon; Holy Ghost; man, human being. *gæst* = *giest*: guest; stranger. For a discussion of this and other such usage in *Beowulf*, see J. Edwin Whitesell, "Intentional Ambiguities in *Beowulf*," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 11 (1966): 145-9.

Hnæf's sister, and Hnæf's sister's son has a very special relationship to him.¹³ Here is the basis of Hildeburh's position as peace-weaver between the two tribes; it is also the source of her power within the hall. However, she places her son beside his uncle, both dead, a reminder that she has failed. The bond of peace has been broken already once; the biological power of the mother, and the practice of matrilineal descent have not worked; the power of the woman to influence to maintain peace seems more myth than reality.

But masculine perception does not yet dominate, and mortal powerlessness and divine power become indivisible as the *ides* comes forward to perform the public ritual of lamentation. Shedding all individuality, she becomes almost an archetypal figure, one in which grief originates and through whom it flows. The *ides* priestess, representing the/a god(dess), sends the dead on their way, and heals the pain of the living. She stands in a "characteristic posture of grief" found throughout Anglo-Saxon art,¹⁴ in a stance, with one hand on her opposite shoulder, that is both private in that her body is closed off from other people, and formal in that only one arm is used, a conscious restraint. The communal act, the formal stance, the power which flows through her song all help to release the spirits of the slain from their bodies and to separate their physical bodies from the living people they used to be.¹⁵ The description of what happens on the pyre as the *ides* sings is both vividly accurate and poetically dense. The warrior leaves the earth, borne on the rising

¹³Tacitus, in the *Germania*, XX, says that "the sons of sisters are as highly honoured by their uncles as by their own fathers. Some tribes even consider the former tie the closer and more sacred of the two." See also Albert William Aron, *Traces of Matriarchy in Germanic Hero-Lore*, (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature 9 (1920), p. 5-20); and Francis B. Gummere, "The Sister's Son," *An English Miscellany presented to Dr. Furnival* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 133-149.

¹⁴See G.A. Lester, "'Earme on Eaxle' (*Beowulf* 1117a)," *Studia Neophilologica* 50 (1986): 159-163. The other alternatives to emendation are I. taking *earme*, as Lester does, to be an instrumental dative, but using it figuratively, as "power, strength (of arm)," and the whole phrase as "With power, at the shoulder [of her son and/or of Hnæf]." and II. taking *earme* as the adverb, "miserably, badly, lacking in spirit" again at the shoulder [of her son and/or Hnæf]. The problem with this latter choice is that it clashes with *het* (1114).

¹⁵Tauno F. Mustanoja (in "'Beowulf' and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68 (1967): 1-27) discusses the nature, purpose, universality, and effectiveness of lamentation, whether performed by the family of the deceased or by professional mourners. He comments that "lamenting has always been a predominantly feminine practice" (15), but that it moves all who experience it.

column of smoke.¹⁶ By a duality of syntax, a punning on *hlynode*, he becomes one with the consuming fire (1120a).¹⁷ As his spirit leaves, the fire takes over, consuming, eating the remains, leaving nothing behind to remind the living of their death, to prevent life from going on. The density of language translates into density of emotion released to the skies; the sight of the burning bodies, for the *ides* and for all who join with her in experiencing the funeral, helps to dissociate the memory of the once-living people from their physical earthly presence.

It should all be over; there is no reason for the woman's lamentation not to work — except that while she speaks for all women, all mothers, and for all men as they are husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, even as they are rulers, like Finn, she cannot reflect the feelings of the warrior. As *ides* mother, her lamentation recognizes and accepts that death is part of being alive, and that recognition releases the helplessness. It does not remove it so much as balance it with the power of life. But for the warrior, this mix of power and powerlessness is not possible. The greediness of the fire is to him like the greediness of Grendel, eating up warriors, keeping alive the necessity to answer violence with violence, death with death, to cancel out powerlessness by physical domination. Too, the breath, the spirit of the dead has fled, but in the same words what they might have produced¹⁸ is scattered, lost. There is no continuation for them in any way, no carrying on of their blood in others, no chance to become famous by heroic deeds, no chance to live on either through children or in men's memories. Hildeburh can bear other kin to replace those she has lost. Finn has already consolidated his forces by patching up the treaty broken by the

¹⁶See William Empson's second type of ambiguity, that of shared syntax (Chapter II, pp. 48–101, of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn., London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), and Marijane Osborn, "The Finnsburh Raven and *Guðrinc Astah*," *Folklore* 81 (1970): 185–94, in which she discusses the use of bird imagery to refer to the spirits of the dead. Osborn also points out that the *ides* in this scene is functioning specifically as a priestess (whether or not this is her constant function).

¹⁷*hlynode*, pret. of *hlynian* = I. *hlynnan*: to make a noise, resound, shout, roar. Bosworth-Toller further distinguishes *hlynian*: to make a noise, roar; from *hlynnan*: to sound, make a noise, shout (e.g., war-wood, ocean, the voice). II. *hlinian*: to 'lean'; recline, lie down, rest. *Hlynode* can take both antecedents (the warrior and the fire) as subject.

¹⁸*blæd*: I. blowing, blast; inspiration; breath, spirit; life, mind; glory, dignity, splendor; prosperity, riches, success. II. = *blēd* I.: shoot, branch, flower, blossom, leaf, foliage, fruit; harvest, crops (also, *blæd*: 'blade'; leaf.); 'what is produced.'

outbreak of fighting, has re-established the tribal bonds. But, although the bond that has been broken for Hengest was also of blood, the martial bond of loyalty between men, emphasized by *wealaf* and by *þeodenleas*, is for him more significant. He makes the choice to stay through the winter because unlike Hildeburh he cannot forget, cannot repair the damage, cannot overcome the feeling of powerlessness caused by the loss of his focus of power, his leader. Her emotions come together and are released, her power regained in the swirling smoke; his are the storms of winter, bound by the power that makes a treaty possible, bound like the land locked in ice.

XVII	1125	gewiton him ða wigend	wica neosian
		freondum befeallen	Fryslanð geseon
		hamas ond heaburh	Hengest ða gyt
		wælfagne winter	wunode mid Finne
		*[ea]l unhlitme	eard gemunde
1130		þeah þe he meahte	on mere drifan
		hringedstefnan	holm storme weol
		won wið winde	winter yþe beleac
		isgebinde	oþ ðæt oþer com
		gear in geardas	swa nu gyt deð
1135		þa ðe syngales	sele bewitiað
		wuldortorhtan weder	

Went them then, the fighters, to search out dwelling places, fallen to friends, to see Friesland, homes and high-castle. Hengest then yet for a slaughter-stained winter lived with Finn, not decided by lots at all; remembered the place, even though he¹⁹ was able to drive on the sea the ring-prow. Wave raged in storm, fought against wind, winter covered waves with ice-bindings, until that other came, another year to the earth, as now yet does those glorious-bright weathers/sky/breezes which the hall always attends.

At the *fit* break, there is a radical change in the emotional dimension of the story. Where Hildeburh was the central figure, her emotions the controlling force of the first part, now Hengest replaces her. We hear about his response to the loss of lord; the poem justifies his behaviour, bringing into the narrative something that has been disturbing the emotional stratum, the creation/recognition of duality. Hengest gives the text an alternative way of looking at the world, or responding to fate, a way that in the end will exclude and deny any power to the woman. Instead of accepting the *metodsceaft*, the way things work out, instead of restructuring and healing to regain the sense of power death took away, he needs to retaliate, to express his power through aggression, aggression the *scop* says is

¹⁹See Paul B. Taylor, "Beowulf 1130, 1875 and 2006: In defense of the Manuscript," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 82 (1981): 357-9.

sanctioned by *worold ræden*, "world-ness," the way the world is.

This change of controlling persona makes its presence felt as soon as the *ides* completes her song of lamentation, as soon as the funeral fire dies down. Hildeburh's feelings of loss, so strong before and during the ceremony, appear to have vanished completely. That would not be remarkable — after all, lamentation is designed to release such emotions — except that it becomes immediately very clear that for the men this has not happened. The unifying force that held together the two sides, making them one people, that held together men and women in a common need to end the fighting, to attend to the dead, to release the feelings of loss, that made the treaty workable, disappears too. Oaths were made on both sides when Hildeburh's power was strong, but when the poem moves into Hengest's sphere of influence, the men remain *wigend*, fighting ones, men who are defined not by their peaceful activities, the activities the treaty hopes to reestablish, but by war. They are sent home, now that the fighting is over, to resume ordinary lives as husbands, fathers, farmers, merchants, fishermen, and so on, or at least some of them are. The Danes have no homes in the land of the Frisians to go to, so they are sent to share accommodations with them, assigned to friends who have recently been enemies.²⁰ But still there is no other life to go to. With the end of the fighting, they lose their identity. However, *befallen*, when it means "deprived of," applies to both Frisians and Danes, but the Danes alone are called *wealaf*, *þeodenleas*, not the Frisians. So, the unity of the two peoples evaporates, as does the equality of their loss. Again, they are separate, and now the Danes seem to have lost so much more than they have been compensated for.

In *befellan*, too, is a sense of passivity to fate that in some way recalls Hnæf's death and the deaths of Hildeburh's sons and brothers, but the emotional tenor is different. Hnæf's death was sad, and the woman mourned, but there was something constructive to be done. Hildeburh is powerless to change fate, but she has other power which compensates: not only is her realm as *ides* in the hall rather than on the battlefield, but she also has something that makes her not entirely helpless to deal with death, her power as a mother to create new life, and her power with song to mend the wounds of those who remain. For the men, the *wigend*, fate has taken away all their power, the power of the soldier to impose his

²⁰*befellan*: to fall (as in "they fell into great evil"); to fall; deprive of, bereave of; fall to, be assigned to; 'befall'. In each, the subject is passive to what happens.

will by force of arms, the power of the thane to protect his lord and his own life. However, Hengest combats that powerlessness in his own way. He chooses to stay with Finn, the slayer of his lord, chooses not to let fate decide what will happen (by the drawing of lots).²¹ He seems actually to reject the way fate offers him, that of going home. Instead, he chooses to stay, to remember the *eard*,²² to keep foremost in his mind the place of his lord's death and so also the death itself. For Hengest, remembering gives him the same power Hildeburh has, which is not the power to overcome powerlessness in the face of fate, but the power to function within its dictates, or in spite of them.²³

As soon as Hengest takes hold of the power that remembering gives him, the sense of his being bound against his will breaks through the text. The power of the treaty holds him like the land locked in winter, the sea ice-bound. But in that metaphor is also the sense that he has real power whose time will come round. Before long the binding power will lessen and his strength, which has been growing, incubating in the dark of winter, will free itself, and be born like the new year. So he also takes the woman's power in another way. From the woman's perspective, the perspective of the treaty and the lamentation, winter was to be a time of reforming bonds between Dane and Frisian, a time of healing and preparation for the new life of the tribe. For Hengest, it becomes the pregnancy of his

²¹See John F. Vickrey, "The Narrative Structure of Hengest's Revenge," *Anglo-Saxon England* 6: 91-103. Vickrey points out that "an important function of the ancient Germanic casting of lots was to ascertain the will of the powers that ruled men's fate" (92), so that for Hengest not to decide by lots implies that he makes the decision on his own, voluntarily. In "Un[h]litme 'voluntarily' in *Beowulf* Line 1097," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87 [1988]: 315-28, Vickrey also puts forward an argument for applying the same word to Finn's oath, and the emendation is tempting, especially since it is not hard to imagine a scribal mistake of continuing the "f-" alliteration from the line before (the "h" sound itself being less important to the oral performance than to its appearance on the page, for which see M.F. Vaughan, "A Reconsideration of 'Unferd'," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77 [1976]: 32-48). Nevertheless, at line 1097, *unflitme* makes sense and so must stand.

²²Vickrey (in "The Narrative Structure of Hengest's Revenge," *op. cit.*, p. 95) uses Pope's distinction between *edel* (a more neutral term referring to homeland) and *eard* (any country with which one has a physical relationship at the time, where one is or where one is heading for) (John C. Pope, "Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*," *Francis and Jane Klingberg Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Robert P. Creed, p. 182) to conclude that the *eard* Hengest *gemunde* was Finnsburh, not Denmark. This reading gives special meaning to Finn's *ham* as the place of the revenge (1147, 1156), and to the king's precinct which Hengest violates.

²³For the connotations of the *Beowulf* poet's use of *gemyndgian* throughout the poem, see Appendix B.

revenge; he will be himself reborn, empowered, a warrior who is not bound by impossible conditions. And when he does, the pyre with its rising column of smoke will give way before the fresh breezes of spring.

	ða wæs winter scacen	
	fæger foldan bearm	fundode wrecca
	gīst of geardum	he to gyrnwræce
	swiðor þoht	þonne to sælade
1140	gif he torngemot	þurhteon mihte
	þæt he eotena bearn	inne gemunde
	swa he ne forwyrnde	worold rædenne
	þonne him Hunlafing	hildeleoman
	billa selest	on bearm dyde
1145	þæs wæron mid eotenum	ecge cude
	swylce ferhðfreca	Fin eft begeat
	sweordbealo sliden	æt his selfes ham
	sipðan grimne gripe	Guðlaf ond Oslaf
	æfter sæside	sorge mændon
1150	æt witon weana dæl	ne meahthe wæfre mod
	forhabban in hrepre	ða wæs heal roden
	feonda feorum	swilce Fin slægen
	cuning on corpre	ond seo cwen numen
	sceotend Scyldinga	to scypon feredon
1155	eal ingesteald	eorðcyniges
	swylce hie æt Finnes ham	findan meahthon
	sigla searogimma	hie on sælade
	drihtlice wif	to Denum feredon
	læddon to leodum	

When winter was fled, earth's bosom fair, the exile/avenger hastened, guest/spirit from the dwelling-places. He towards revenge for injury more thought than towards the sea journey, whether he would be able to carry through the anger-conflict/anger-meeting so that he inside might remember the sons of the giants/enemy: thus he did not hinder "world-ness." Thereafter, Hunlafing put on his bosom, battle-light, best blade, whose edges were known amongst eotenas. In such manner, fierce sword-harm again seized bold-minded Finn at his own home. After grim attack, Guthlaf and Oslaf after the sea-journey told of the sorrow, censured the share/region/word of evil; restless mod was not able to hold back in breast.

Then was the hall reddened with the souls of enemies,²⁴ also Finn slain, king among troop, and that queen taken. Shooters of the Scyldings took to the ship all household goods of the earth-king such as they in Finn's home were able to find of skill-gemmed necklaces. They on the sea journey the regal woman took to the Danes, led to the nation.

From the warrior's perspective, the treaty cannot hold, even if Finn's people do not break the oath. Hengest completes his act of remembering, completes his return to autonomy in the way of the warrior, by an aggressive attack on the killer of his lord. By doing this,

²⁴See Fred C. Robinson, "Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat," in *Philological Essays*, ed. James L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1970), pp. 103-4.

he repudiates the hand of fate in Hnæf's death. In the spring he remembers the sons of *eotena*. This is the third time the *eotena* are referred to in the story. Hildeburh's *eotena* are the forces of violence which lead to an outburst of fighting between Frisians and Danes in spite of the original treaty between them. Finn's *eotena* are anyone who might threaten his land and his hall by violence. But for Hengest, the sons of the *eotena* are Finn and his men, who have committed violence against Hengest personally, by killing his lord. Hengest's *eotenas* separate him from both Hildeburh and Finn. For Hildeburh, the danger comes not from one group of people or another; it is the violence itself that kills, violence that is part of *metodsceaft*. Finn's enemies are whoever threatens his hall. Like Hildeburh, he protects himself against loss of power to the *eotena* by negotiation, and by proscriptions of behaviour that might lead to further violence. But the threat of loss of power presented by Hengest's *eotena* cannot be removed by words, by defining areas of influence, by lamentation, not even by the transfer of allegiance to another leader. Choosing a new leader might have restored Hengest's sense of autonomy only if it had been done freely, not dictated by circumstances, by the inability of either side to achieve dominance.

In taking revenge, Hengest acts against the established code of behaviour, against his own word. Nevertheless, what he does is sanctioned, by *world ræden* (1143).²⁵ By thinking about revenge, about fighting against the sons of giants, he does not resist whatever makes the world what it is. Released from the bonds of winter and from Hildeburh's power, he no longer has to fight against the force that demands the act of remembering be completed by action. The sword Hunlafing ends up on his lap, ready to be used. This is a sword known among enemies, *eotenas*, whenever there is violence; it also will be known by Finn's people.²⁶ Hunlafing is part of the power of fate that is now working for Hengest, giving him power, not taking it away. He becomes powerful enough to become an instrument of his own fate, not to be crushed by it.

²⁵Taking *rædenne* as the suffix *-ræden* in the accusative, whose function it is to make abstract nouns, it would appear that "world-ness" is whatever it is that makes the world what it is (as "truth" is whatever it is that makes things "true"), something equivalent in a way to "the dictates of Nature," something stronger than mere custom, something less Christian than "temptation" (as suggested by John R. Clark Hall, "A Note on *Beowulf* 1142-1145," *MLN* 25.4 [April, 1910]: 113-4), but yet not fatalistic, either.

²⁶See John R. Clark Hall, "A Note on *Beowulf* 1142-1145," *op. cit.*

The end comes quickly for Finn in the *ham* he has worked so hard to protect, by fighting and by negotiation. Hengest's need for revenge is satisfied; he gains back what the treaty has taken away, his feeling of power. This happens immediately, even before the full effects of the slaughter are known. The accounts of Guthlaf and Oslaf²⁷ project the narrative briefly forward into the future where Hengest enters history as a heroic figure, becomes part of the tradition of the tribe. His *blæd* is assured, not by procreation but through every heroic deed that will be performed. Through *dæil*,²⁸ the treaty, its words, the settlement on the Danes, the region in which it happened (the *earð*), and the division, that is, the way things were divided up, all are now openly censored. Hengest's example becomes a gnome, a piece of wisdom that says that he did what any man might be expected to do when he has a restless *mod*. As Elaine Tuttle Hansen says of gnomes in *Beowulf*,²⁹ "the gnomish observation explicitly elevates the individual incident to the representative or universal concept of fittingness or inevitability that it embodies, and asks us to measure the immediate experience against the ideal."

Hengest is not referred to again — perhaps he is dead. Finn also dies. Only Hildeburh remains, to be led to the people, not sad or lamenting, not ordering, but passive and surrounded by the spoils of war and by the dreadful silence that is the eventual end of all fighting. Part of the power of the *ides* was that she spoke for all, that she was in that sense a universal figure. Hengest has now become the universal representative, heir to its collective power. In him, however, that power comes not from any divine source, but from himself alone, from his warrior-ness. The dualities of human/divine, of male/female are tacitly affirmed in him, and as tacitly, female power is diminished.

leoð wæs asungen

²⁷Whoever they are. The poem does not tell us, and the information, if it existed elsewhere, in the *Fragment* for instance, has been lost. Maybe they are stock characters, once well-known, or characters of the order of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, or maybe their names themselves have some significance here: Guthlaf, the left-behind after a battle (like *wealaf*); and Oslaf, a legacy of the divinity that is "the source of all speech, wisdom's wrath and sage's consolation, and to everyone of earls inner peace and hope" (*Rune Poem* 10 - 12).

²⁸*dæil*: portion, part, share, lot; division, separation; quantity, amount; region, district; part of speech, word.

²⁹In *The Solomon Complex* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1988) p. 60.

1160 gleomannes gyd gamen eft astah
 beohtode bencsweg byrelas sealdon
 win of wunderfatum

The story was sung, gleoman's song. Mirth again rose up; bench-noise brightened; cup bearers gave wine from wonderful-vats.

The return to the brightly lit, noisy hall takes place quickly, the contrast between Finnsburg and Heorot drawn sharply, the one hall reddened with blood, the other lit with mirth and good feeling. While Heorot seems almost to burst with life, in Finnsburg the equation of souls and blood (1151b - 52a) recalls Grendel to mind.³⁰ The contrast makes for uneasiness, for awareness that the violent death of warriors is not ended by the death of Grendel, any more than it was by the death of Hnæf. Hildeburh returns to "the people," to the Danes, powerless from the masculine perspective, divested even of motherhood now that brother, son and bed-companion are all dead, but *gamen astah* (1160) echoes *gūtrinc astah* (1118), recalling the *ides* lamenting before the pyre, Hildeburh at her most powerful moment in the story. The power she expressed through lamentation, power that contributes to the power of the ruler, has become cut off from the power of the warrior. Through his eyes, she can only fail because lamentation does not reflect the "reality" of masculine need for vengeance. Her words could not overcome the sense of powerlessness Hengest felt at the death of his lord, and so could not prevent the act of revenge that followed. She was unable to prevent vengeance because vengeance does not heal the grief of loss; it takes away the feeling of helplessness death brings. Lamentation only works when there is a feeling of connectedness with power that goes beyond death — it is part of the woman's power, not the warrior's.

³⁰Fred C. Robinson, in "Lexicography and Literary Criticism," p. 106, comments on the synaesthesia of the brightening bench noise, on the heightened physical awareness such a crossing of the senses gives; he also discusses blood-prohibition (p. 103-4) and its association with Grendel.

CHAPTER III

IDES WISE WOMAN

*Ancestress: the burning witch
her mouth covered by leather
to strangle words.*

*A word after a word
after a word is power*
Spelling
Margaret Atwood (1981)

*. . . I want men
To take us seriously.
I am tired of wanting them to think
about right and wrong.
I want them to fear
I want them to feel fear now
as I have felt suffering in the womb . . .*
I Like to Think of Harriet Tubman
Susan Griffin (1976)

When Hildeburh and Hengest come face to face, when we see her through his eyes for the first time, there is a ripple in the fabric of the world, and the *ides* priestess, *ides* mother becomes briefly sinister in an undefined way. Now, Wealhtheow comes forward, moving through the hall, and she, too, has a feminine power the warrior experiences as sinister. If there were only one *ides*, one story of a woman who behaved as though she could influence the events around her, one woman who failed, whose family tore itself apart by killing one another, then that might have been a story of tragedy, a story in which human nature overcomes the best of intentions. But there are two stories in which an *ides* participates in events, two scenes in which the exercise of her power precedes destruction and death, two scenes in which the woman is associated with one set of values, one perspective, and the warrior with another. Together they move us towards the moment when the warrior's perspective will confront the woman's, towards the time when the *ides* will be turned by that perspective into Grendel's mother, "distaff monster," witch, female man.

The narrative moves on as our own *scop*, the *Beowulf* poet, takes over from the singer of tales in Heorot. The bleak sea between Frisia and Denmark recedes into the distance. Wealhtheow replaces Hildeburh as *ides*, and the strength of the ancient wise woman, priestess, mother, that they share is made more tangible by the sisterhood of the two women. Wealhtheow's power is less of a manifestation of the natural world than Hildeburh's:

nephew/paternal uncle¹; then yet was kinship of them together, each to the other true. Also there Hunferth² þule sat at the feet of the ruler of the Scyldings. Each of them trusted his heart, that he had great mod. However, he was not to his kinspeople honourable/merciful at the commotion of edges. Spoke then the ides of the Scyldings.

The dark silence of the destroyed Finnsburg has been replaced by the light and noise within Heorot, alien land by the safety of home. Hildeburh's journey, as she is led passively, helplessly to the people contrasts dramatically with Wealhtheow's active passage, when, golden, she moves through the bright hall. And though Wealhtheow is only one of the players, one of the seven named characters, this scene is hers. She is the same golden queen she was when she first welcomed Beowulf to Heorot, and the two speeches she makes are of the same kind as earlier, speeches appropriate to her position as wife and queen to Hrothgar, but the frame in which we see her has changed. Grendel is dead; there is as yet no new external threat of violence to the hall. The violence that destroyed Finnsburg came not from outside aggressors, Finn's *eotena*, but from inside, from the warrior who no longer has enemies of the hall to fight against. Heorot faces a similar problem, the threat of fighting between factions, but the warrior and the *ides* have different ways of dealing with it. Wealhtheow seeks to avoid feuding through the web of responsibilities and rewards of tribal rule; Hrothgar wishes to look to the champion, the warrior of proven power, to dispose of enemies wherever they may lurk.

In the opening lines of the scene, the *Beowulf* scop sets both the visual stage and the emotional tenor, so that before Wealhtheow begins to speak he has created a sense that something significant is about to happen. The rhythm of the hypermetric lines is distinct from that of the regular lines which precede and follow them, setting them apart, heightening dramatic expectation, giving the words special weight.³ Within this differently

¹Only occurs as a compound here (1165, 1456) and in *Widsith* (46). Both poems refer to Hrothgar and Hengest. From Bosworth-Toller: *suhter*[i]ga / *suhtriga*, *suhtria*: a brother's son; *fædra*: paternal uncle (cf. *eam*: maternal uncle). [For an alternative interpretation, see Wilbur C. Abbott, "Hrothulf," *Modern Language Notes* 19 (1904): 122-25. Abbott argues for Hrothulf as Hrothgar's brother-in-law; perhaps the most important aspect of his analysis is that it reminds us that we should be very careful when translating one set of cultural values into another.]

²M. F. Vaughan, in "A Reconsideration of 'Unferd'" (*Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 77 (1976): 32-48), discusses why there is no need to change the spelling from 'Hunferd' so consistently used by the scribe to 'Unferd'.

³See B.J. Timmer, "Expanded Lines in Old English Poetry," *Neophilologus* 235 (1951): 226-30;

measured passage, the information in the word patterns of alliterative pairs, repetition and juxtaposition of opposites⁴ is exceptionally dense, their rhetorical content particularly rich. In a few words, the source of power in Heorot is described, its apparent stability as represented by Hrothgar and Hrothulf together, its dark centre, Hunferth. And in those same few words, the relationship of Wealhtheow to this ruling power is implied. In line 1163 the golden ring, which is either the place of ruling or the queen's tiara, alliterates with the two good men. Line 1164 links the specific relationship between Hrothgar and Hrothulf to the more general description of their kinship, suggesting the same kind of relationship between Hrothgar and Hrothulf we find described in *Widsith* (45–49), a successful sharing of power between them. The rule of Heorot is tribal, that is, dependent on the blood relations of the men for its composition, and it is shared: *suhtergefæderan*, describes the two men as if they were one, each taking part of his existence, his definition, from the other; and *sib ætgædere* alliterates with it. Hrothgar, we already know, is the king, and Hrothulf is son of Hrothgar's (dead) brother and oldest of the next generation to some considerable extent.⁵ The seating arrangement of the two together would suggest that he is preparing to take over the leadership, presumably as Hrothgar becomes old or sick. The mutuality of *sib ætgædere* / *æghwylc ætrum trywe* also indicates that this transfer of power will be gradual, depending on the strengths and abilities of each. As the scene is set, there seems little question of Hrothgar's sons, or even his oldest son, succeeding him: Hrethric and Hrothmund are part of a different group, the young warriors. Signifying the two perspectives, the *scop* calls them *her* sons, not Hrothgar's, but Wealhtheow will refer to them as the sons of "us two."

Interestingly, the relationship between Hrothgar and Hrothulf is not that of

³(cont'd) Constance B. Heatt, "A New Theory of Triple Rhythm in the Hypermetric Lines of Old English Verse," *Modern Philology* 67 (1969): 1–8; and Heatt, "*Judith* and the Literary Function of Old English Hypermetric Lines," *Studia Neophilologia* 52 (1980): 251–7.

⁴See Robert P. Creed, "*Beowulf* on the Brink: Information Theory as Key to the Origins of the Poem," in *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, John Miles Foley, ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1987), p. 145. Creed links alliteration to redundancy of information, and both to the special characteristics of orally transmitted poetry.

⁵Or so it would seem. Ellen Spolsky, in her examination of Anglo-Saxon relationships ("Old English Kinship Terms and *Beowulf*," *Neuophilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977): 233–38), says that "*suhterga* [Hrothulf's part of *suhtergefæderan*] is a male, close to my age, related by blood" (231).

sister's-son.⁶ At this point, Wealhtheow's sons, Hrothgar's sons, and Hrothgar's sister's sons (if there are any), all are excluded from the ruling group. But Hunferth is part of it. His position in this scene is enigmatic, for a modern audience, at least, on two counts. We do not know for certain what a *þyle* was, and there seems no reason for his presence. He plays no direct part in either of Wealhtheow's speeches as the other men do. He says nothing, does nothing, so that the alliterative set that links the place where Hunferth sits with the place he holds in the hearts of the two good men (1166 a & b) is a little unsettling. And his *mod* is linked negatively to *magum*, casting a dark though nebulous shadow on all kinship relationships, including *suhtergefæderan*. The description of Hunferth as *þyle* is bordered by a very small envelope or ring pattern⁷ made by *trywe/treowde* and the opposing *hunferþ/ferhþe*. This second confluence of words seems to make Hunferth's name a description of his character.⁸ Within the ring of trust, he has no heart, no soul, dubious loyalty to kin, and he is a *þyle*.

The meaning of the title of *þyle* at the time of the *Beowulf* poet is not understood by modern scholars with any precision. Nevertheless, like *ides*, *þyle* has an ancient ancestor,

⁶For which see Aron, *Traces of Matriarchy in Germanic Hero-Lore*, pp. 5–20 and 58, where Aron says only of the Brother's Son that: "there is nothing singular or characteristic about this relationship." See also Thomas J. Garbáty, "The Uncle-Nephew Motif: New Light into its Origins and Development," *Folklore* 88 (1977): 220–35; not to mention Hygelac-Swerting, Beowulf-Hygelac, Sigemund-Fitela, Froda-Ingeld, all sister's-son pairs.

⁷I have taken both "ring" and "envelope" terms from Adeline Courtney Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (New York, 1935): Constance B. Heatt, "Envelope Patterns and the Structure of *Beowulf*," (*English Studies in Canada* 1 [1975]: 249–65): and John D. Niles, "Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*," (*PMLA* 94 [1979]: 924–35). Even though all three refer to much more extensive patterns, the rhetorical impact made by idea or word repetitions is much the same in small as in large — it might even be more effective.

⁸The question of how to interpret Hunferth's name has been exhaustively argued by, among others, Morton W. Bloomfield (in "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," *Traditio* 7 [1951]: 410–15), F. Stanton Cawley (in "Ivarr-Unferþ?" *PMLA* XLV [1930]: 335–36), Henry Bosley Woolf (in "Unferth," *Modern Language Quarterly* 10 [1949]: 145–152), M. F. Vaughan (in "A Reconsideration of 'Unferð'," *op. cit.*), Brian Daldorph, ("Mar-Peace,' Ally: Hunferð in *Beowulf*," *Massachusetts Studies in English* 10 [1986]: 143–60); and R.D. Fulke (in "Unferth and His Name," *Modern Philology* 85 [1987]: 113–27). In "The Significance of Names in Old English Literature," (*Anglia* 86 [1968]: 14–58), Fred C. Robinson points out that even with historical names, names that cannot be changed by the poet, there are examples of a play on words throughout Old English poetry. And, at this point in *Beowulf* at least, the poet's directions are hardly subtle or mistakeable.

the magician, the pagan priest, whose power is words, who possibly participated in sacrifices of some kind (who in this capacity could be called a kin-killer without any stigma or ostracism attached). Unfortunately, the word is only used three times throughout the extant body of Anglo-Saxon poetry (in *Beowulf* 1165, 1450, referring both times to Hunferth, and in *Widsith* 24, where it is either a proper name or a title). However, partly because of the other contentious aspects of the role of Hunferth, there have been a number of investigations (both linguistic and contextual) from which it is possible to put together a field, if not to specifically pinpoint a meaning, for the word.

The Bosworth-Toller entry for *þyle* says that it has roots in the Icelandic *þylja*, to say or chant, and *þyl-cræft*, rhetoric. From contextual studies of Old Norse literature, H.M. and Nora K. Chadwick⁹ offer four general meanings for *þulr-þyle*: "(1) a poet, perhaps a specially learned poet; (2) an (old) sage, especially one who is versed in antiquarian lore; (3) a prophet; (4) a spokesman, or 'man of information'." Meaning (1) seems to apply only to later works, but in the *Eddic* poems, *þulr* appears particularly in connection with Othinn. That he is some form of heathen priest is a popular view of *Hunferð þyle*,¹⁰ in part because it resolves the dilemma of the respect apparently afforded Hunferth by the Danish court and *Beowulf*'s consigning him to hell (ll. 587-9) on account of slaying his brothers. Of *þyle* glossed by the Latin *orator* and *scurra*,¹¹ Wrenn says:

If the ON cognate has any connection with the meaning of the OE word, then *heathen priest* may be the original of which the Latin glosses *orator* and *scurra* are obvious attempts to neutralize or denigrate pagan associations.¹²

⁹In *The Growth of Literature, I: The Ancient Literatures of Europe* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 618.

¹⁰Especially, though not exclusively, among those who emphasize the Christian context of the poem. See, for instance, Morton W. Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," *op. cit.*; Adelaide Hardy, "The Christian Hero Beowulf and Unferð þyle," *Neophilologus* 53 (1969): 55-69; Ida Masters Hollowell, "Unferð the þyle in *Beowulf*," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976): 239-65; and Kemp Malone, *Modern Language Notes* 44 (1929): 129-30 (Review of "Stilgeschichte der eddischen Wissendichtung, erster Band, Der Kultredner" by Walther Heinrich Vogt).

¹¹*orator*: 1. an envoy, ambassador, spokesman; 2. a public speaker, orator, advocate. *scurra*: a fashionable city idler, 'man about town'; (the term came to be used mainly w. ref. to the offensive wit affected by such a person, and from Augustan times denoted a professional buffoon, or sim.). [*scurrilitas*: the quality of a *scurra*, untimely or offensive humour.] *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1982.

¹²P. 279, glossary entry for *þyle*.

"Heathen priest" may also be the original of which the role of "spokesman" is a function compatible with a Christianized society. On this, J. D. A. Oglivy¹³ notes that one possible reason we have no modern equivalent for *þyle* is that the place in society no longer exists. Joseph L. Baird,¹⁴ one of the critics who reads a strong Christian dimension into *Beowulf*, agrees with Oglivy, and says further of Hunferth that he "seems to have been, somewhere back in the dark matrix whence the poem arose, a servitor of the one-eyed god [Othinn]. . ."(9), that the word *þyle* "was [likely] still redolent . . . of dark unacceptable heathen associations" (5). This is not the only explanation for Hunferth's status, however. R. W. Chambers remarks on *þyle* as "official spokesman":

It was a maxim of the old Teutonic poetry, as it is of the British constitution, that the king could do no wrong: the real fault lay with the adviser.¹⁵

Beowulf's accusation of Hunferth can thus also be seen as a general criticism of the state of things in Heorot, redirected from Hrothgar to Hunferth. And to round out the full range of meanings, Norman Eliason¹⁶ argues that *þyle* is a variation of *scop*. Quite clearly, the word *þyle* is rich in possibilities, but significantly all of them connect words with power, whether the ancient pagan priest follows the path of prophet, sage, poet, entertainer, or that of orator, learned man, advisor.

And, while we cannot pinpoint the meaning of either term, *þyle* and *ides* are rhetorically related. Both have an Old Norse equivalent, and in both cases the oldest meanings of these parallel terms are connected to the religion of Othinn, the god of war to whom human sacrifice was made, the god of occult wisdom, who communicates with the dead, the god, too, of poetry, and the god whose handmaidens are *dísir*. Both seem to have been changed by the time the *Beowulf* poet used them. Both *þyle* and *ides* seem to be roles that, if these etymologies are valid, have already lost their pagan religious power with the coming of Christianity, and are in the process of also losing the secular power that went with it. Neither word conforms to the dualities of masculine supremacist perception: *ides*

¹³In "Unferth: Foil to Beowulf?" *PMLA* 79 (1964): 370-75.

¹⁴"Unferth the *þyle*," *Medium Ævum* 39.1 (1970): 1-12.

¹⁵*Beowulf*, with a supplement by C. L. Wrenn, 3rd. Edn. (Cambridge, University Press, 1963), p. 27.

¹⁶In "The Pyle and the Scop," p. 28.

refers to both "good" women, women who try, if not always successfully, to make and keep peace, and "bad" women, Grendel's mother and Offa's queen, who actively cause disharmony through death; Hunferth *þyle* is both antagonistic towards Beowulf and helpful to him, a killer of kin and a trusted member of Hrothgar's court. This suggests that they may have come from a time and/or culture that saw the world in a very different way. *Ides* and *þyle* also appear here together for the second time. Earlier (ll. 499–641) they acted as a team to elicit from Beowulf a specific commitment to act in the interests of Hrothgar's court.¹⁷ And here, Wealhtheow forms an envelope by her actions of walking and speaking, while Hunferth commands the centre in silence. His presence is enigmatic, and like *þa gyt*, ominous because unexplained. He does not use his power, words, as spokesman or adviser, so that, when *ides scyldinga* begins to speak, to fill the role of spokesperson for the clan and adviser to the king, the power of words passes from *þyle* to *ides*. When it does, the ancient presence of a pagan priest empowers the *ides*, joins her to Hildeburh. It places them both at the centre of power in the hall, at a place the warrior will soon wish to claim for himself. And if, as Eliason suggests, Hunferth is the *scop* who has just sung about the Finnsburg slaughter, the same effect is achieved by a slightly different mechanism. Either way, empowered by Hunferth and by Hildeburh, the *ides scyldinga* begins to speak, to talk about kinship and loyalty.

	onfoh þissum fulle	freodrihten min
1170	sinces brytta	þu on sælum wes
	goldwine gumena	ond to Geatum spræc
	mildum wordum	swa sceal man don
	beo wið Geatas glæd	geofena gemyndig
	nean ond feorran	þu nu hafast
1175	me man sægde	þæt þu ðe for sunu wolde
	hererinc habban	Heorot is gefælsod
	beahsele beorhta	bruc þenden þu mote
	manigra medo	ond þinum magum læf
	folc ond rice	þonne ðu forð scyle
1180	metodsceaft seon	ic minne can
	glædne Hroþulf	þæt he þa geogode wile
	arum healdan	gyf þu ær þonne he
	wine Scildinga	worold oflættest
	wene ic þæt he mid gode	gyldan wille
1185	uncran eaferan	gif he þæt eal gemon
	hwæt wit to willan	ond to wordmyndum

¹⁷This view of the exchange of words between Hunferth, Beowulf, and Wealhtheow is put forward by Michael Murphy in "Vows, Boasts, and Taunts, and the Role of Women in Some Medieval Literature," *English Studies* 66.2 (1985): 105–112.

	umborwesendum ær	arna gefremedon
	hwearf þa bi bence	þær hyre byre wæron
	Hrēdric ond Hroðmund	ond hæleþa bearn
1190	giogoð ætgædere	þær se goda sæt
	Beowulf Geata	be þæm gebroðrum twæm

"Accept this full-cup, my lord-ruler, treasure-giver. Be you in good times goldfriend to warriors, and speak to the Geats with generous words. So must a man do. Be shining towards the Geats, remembering gifts from near and far you now have. Someone said to me that you wished to have the army commander¹³ for a son. Heorot is cleansed, bright ring-hall; use the many rewards as long as you are allowed, and to your kinspeople leave people and kingdom, when you must forth to see god's-fate. I know my generous Hrothulf, that he would want to hold those young warriors with honours, if you, friend of the Scyldings, earlier than he leave behind the world. I believe that he wishes to pay with good the heirs of us two, if he at all remembers that which we two, freely/for that purpose, and as worth-remembrances did before of respect/privileges/glory for him-being-an-infant." Turned then along the bench where those she bore were, Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the sons of warriors, the youths together; there that good man sat, Beowulf of the Geats, by those two brothers.

Wealhtheow's speech to Hrothgar and Hrothulf, like Hildeburh's song of lamentation, is a public expression of her participation in and influence over the activities in the hall. What she says reflects power as she understands it, its source in the tribal ethos, its dependence on the willingness of those in power not to abuse that power but to use it for the tribe as a whole. It, too, expresses the general consensus of the hall's inhabitants, the traditional wisdom of the tribe, the source of its strength, prosperity and continuity.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith points out that "we perform verbal acts as well as other acts . . . in order to extend our control over a world that is not naturally disposed to serve our interests."¹⁹ Wealhtheow's verbal act is wise advice as to the appropriate behaviour of the head of a clan towards his guests and family, advice that supports her lord and reminds him of the reasons for choosing one way over another. Her words are clearly not aimed at gaining ascendance over Hrothgar, nor of supplanting Hrothulf. She is concerned with protecting the tribe, with ensuring that the double bonds of benefit and responsibility remain

¹³See Klaeber, p. 456.

¹⁹*On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 85. For some of the ways in which Speech Act Theory can be applied to various kinds of literature, see Stanley E. Fish, "How to Do Things with Austin and Searle," *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 983-1025; and "Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes Without Saying, and Other Special Cases," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 625-44; and Barrie Ruth Straus, "Women's Words as Weapons: Speech as Action in 'The Wife's Lament'," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 23 (1981): 268-85.

strong, that they are not weakened or destroyed by including in the centre of power people with different loyalties. Her world is divided into "us" and "them," as Hengest's and Finn's were, with the difference that to be excluded from the woman's sense of "us" has no stigma attached to it. Beowulf and his men are not *eotena*; they are simply not Danes.

It is appropriate that Wealhtheow's advice be given to Hrothgar and Hrothulf, *sib ætgædere*. She speaks directly to Hrothgar because he is the ruler, the king, but manages to include Hrothulf in what she has to say, echoing the sentiment of *suhtergefæderan*, that the two men are not separate because they are of the same blood and share the same power. The difference is that Wealhtheow's attitude towards the two together does not have in it the sinister shadow cast by the *þyle* when the *scop* described them. She speaks about the obligations and benefits of being a member of the tribe. Both the responsibilities and the rewards of belonging have to do with treasure and with the continuity of the group, which survives in spite of the death of its individual members — Wealhtheow mentions Hrothgar's death twice, and reminds both Hrothgar and Hrothulf of activities that remain constant, and are passed on from generation to generation, as the participants grow up, grow old, and die. She reminds Hrothgar at the start of his dual function as ruler and treasure-giver. All warriors should be able to depend on him for generosity in words and in treasure, as others were generous to him when he was a warrior himself, worthy of being so rewarded for his brave deeds. It is good that he feels that Beowulf's service to the Danes merits the highest possible reward. However, his first duty is to his kin, to those on whom his position depends, and to the continuity of the clan. The role of treasure depends on the relationship between the ruler, whose function it is to use treasure in this way, and the person to whom he is giving it. To those outside the tribe, treasure serves as the fulfillment of a specific obligation for some good deed and as a general recognition of the value of such deeds to the continued existence of the hall as a functioning unit. But to the members of the tribe, because the tribe itself is on-going, the giving and receiving of treasure is also part of a continuous sharing of benefits and obligations.

The benefits of belonging to the tribe include access to treasure and power beyond that which one could accumulate alone; the obligations are those of conservation and continuity. Hrothgar has use of the benefits; they are not his, and they will not be Hrothulf's when the use of them passes to him in the orderly process of change and

renewal which keeps the clan alive. Hrothulf, too, will be expected to behave with generosity towards "those young warriors" who act bravely and do service for the hall, just as Hrothgar has. Clearly in such a situation the group takes precedence over the individual, but there is in Wealhtheow's counsel a reminder that individual continuity, through one's sons, also benefits from tribal ethos. Hrothulf's father died, but Hrothgar and Wealhtheow looked after him, remembered his value, and because of this, he in turn can be expected to do the same for their children when they no longer can. And although intimate, *uncran eaferan* (1185), "the children of us two" does not privilege the woman as bearer of those children. She uses both *gemon* and *wordmyndum*, the remembrance of worth through treasure and status, in close succession (1185b, 1186b). Both words have their origin in memory, in *gemyndgian*, and together they make evident that in the feminine perspective the actions linked by remembrance are not those of death and vengeance as they were when Hengest remembered the place, but of loyalty and generosity. For the woman, remembering is a non-aggressive instrument of tribal continuity. An extension of this is that treasure and status are not only "won" by individual effort, not only the property of man the warrior, but also come to the man who accepts the restrictions that membership in the tribe imposes.

There is nothing inherently wrong, dark or sinister in any of this. Nor is there in the act of her giving this advice. Michael D. Cherniss's defence of Eve in *Genesis B* is appropriate for Wealhtheow:

[her] duty, like that of any queen in Germanic heroic poetry, is to serve and advise her husband and to protect him, if possible from the dangers which might beset him as the result of a wrong decision.²⁰

But, the wisdom of Wealhtheow's words, like Hildeburh's lamentation, does not address the warrior's need to feel powerful, in control of his destiny. The proscriptive behaviour necessary for tribal stability, as Wealhtheow has outlined it, makes it impossible for the warrior, even a hero like Beowulf, to gain supremacy, to become a ruler, unless he is born to it. From the tribal perspective, for Hrothgar to make Beowulf his son would be a dreadful mistake; it would be passing on power, not through obligation to those who gave you that power, not to someone whose obligations would in turn be to the tribe, but to someone who has merely done you a service, someone whose relationship to those he would rule is quite

²⁰"Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1969): 479-97.

different. Beowulf is the member of another tribe, and even though that tribe is for the moment a friendly one, where would Beowulf's first loyalties be? And even within the tribe of the Danes, in case of conflict of interest, would he back one faction to keep his own power or could he be counted on to act in the best interest of a group of people to whom he owed nothing? And, with the disruption in dynastic succession, what would happen if Beowulf died without issue? In these kinds of situations, Beowulf himself would present at least as real a danger to the stability and continuity of the Danish tribe as the hinted-at Scylding feud the *scop* implies that Hrothgar's action would avert.

Wealhtheow's words are caught between the two value systems of tribe and nation.²¹ What in one is wise and impartial advice, in the other is a complete misunderstanding of the situation before her. For the hero, the warrior, protecting the hall from eventual destruction from whatever source must start with physical strength that can act as a deterrent to all potential wrong-doers. Beowulf would be the best man to inherit the custodianship of the Danes, not because he owes any particular allegiance to the tribe, but because he can be counted on to lead them, to focus their power around his own. This separates man-as-warrior from man-as-tribesman, giving pre-eminence to the first in a much more definitive way than Hengest's actions to avenge Hnæf, though those too were dependent first on military ties. Both situations, Beowulf's and Hengest's, help to centre the two ways of seeing things, the two types of loyalty, around the gender distinctions of masculine and feminine, making them the warrior's perception and the woman's. On account of him, she no longer speaks for the whole tribe but for herself alone. When this happens, for Wealhtheow to speak itself becomes to the warrior an act of aggression against his supremacy, taking away his autonomy, making him powerless. She uses the gnomic expression, "so must man

²¹I am at a bit of a loss to know what to call this kind of social ordering. Marvin Harris (in *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Culture* [New York: Random House, 1977], Ch. 7, pp. 69 ff.) calls it the "nation state." Harris' theory of the creation of modern nations from tribes, from the sharing of power between men and women to dominance by men, is most interesting, but unfortunately, he does not discuss the specific case of medieval North European Germanic peoples, and I do not know enough about anthropology to apply the one to the other. The kind of society I am referring to is made up of people who are not necessarily related. Its boundaries are geographical rather than biological, and the allegiance of its members is to the ruler, rather than to each other. It is hierarchical, and depends on the existence of a permanent military (rather than on the militia system of the tribe). In other words, it is male supremacist and very much like the type of society we take for granted in the twentieth century as "normal," and it cannot exist without war, conquest, expansion.

do," and it is both a statement of Hrothgar's role in encouraging courageous behaviour through the distribution of treasure, and, as T. A. Shippey points out, a polite way of delivering a criticism or warning.²² Gnomes, because they advocate appropriate behaviour, admit the possibility of acting inappropriately for anyone whose character is not as expressed in the gnome. As her act of giving advice is aggressive, presuming to know more about appropriate behaviour than her lord, Wealhtheow takes away his power to choose a course of action. She restores it to its rightful place in the group, but in the masculinist scheme of things, that becomes an act of exerting power, not participating in a collective action.

The warrior's perspective continues to impinge on Wealhtheow's words. To the warrior, "I know. . .that he would want. . ." and "I believe that he wishes. . ." are an expression of Wealhtheow's power and the powerlessness of Hrothgar and Hrothulf. To him, she is imposing her will, stating the desired outcome as fact, which is itself a way of imposing truth on the world. To her this is a statement of her belief in the value of the tribal ethos and the binding force of responsibility and benefit which treasure represents. To her, all power comes from collective action, not from physical strength, but that belief now clearly is in direct competition with the need for men to feel powerful, in control of their individual destinies.

The tribal ethos and the woman's perspective seem doomed to failure because they depend on what the warrior perspective does not accept, the ability of men to transcend personal ambition, and their willingness to give up autonomous action for the good of the tribe. At Finnsburg, that perception was given legitimacy by *wordlæden*; in Heorot, it is sanctioned by the *Beowulf* poet's manipulation of the scene, by the hypermetric lines that introduce an atmosphere of portent into the tableau before which the speech is given, by the potential for Wealhtheow's words to be interpreted two ways, and by the envelope of the two groups of three men which surround Wealhtheow's words. She turns toward her sons with the other young warriors, and Beowulf. This group of men mirrors the group of Hrothgar, Hrothulf and Hunferth. *Sib ætgædere* is replaced by *giogað ætgædere*; where *þa godan twegen sæton* with *Hunferð þyle*, now *se goda sæt* with *þæm gebræðrum twæm*.

²²"Maxims in Old English Narrative: Literary Art or Traditional Wisdom," in *Oral Tradition, Literary Tradition*, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Andreas Haarder, Hans Frede Nielsen, eds. Odense University Press, 1977, pp. 28-46.

Kinship bonds, the woman's concern, are specifically contrasted with martial ones, those made by men, controlled by them. The old order, that included Hunferth þyle and his unstated relationship to Wealhtheow *ides*, is replaced by the new, and by Beowulf the good, the warrior hero. Wealhtheow's status as counsellor turns into that of mother, and as with Hildeburh, the association of that role with *ides* power suggests other motives, suggests secret forces at play in what she says, and makes the warrior's reading of her advice as manipulative and self-serving sound more plausible. Significantly, the power for good in the hall passes from those who rule (*þa godan twegen*) to the hero (*se goda*). And the poet's words most clearly imply that Wealhtheow's manipulations are in vain, that the future, whatever it may bring, rests with Beowulf and with his relationship to the young warriors, not with Hrothgar and Hrothulf.

XVIII	Him wæs ful boren	ond freondlāpu
	wordum bewægned	ond wunden gold
	estum geeawed	earm reade twa
1195	hrægl ond hringas	healsbeaga mæst
	þara þe ic on foldan	gefrægen hæbbe
	nænigne ic under swegle	selran hyrde
	hordmaðum hæleþa	syðþan Hama ætwæg
	to þære byrhtan byrig	Brosinga mene
1200	sigle ond sincfæt	searonidas fealh
	Eormenrices	geceas ecne ræd
	þone hring hæfde	Higelac Geata
	nefa Swertinges	nyhstan side
	siðþan he under segne	sinc ealgode
1205	wæltreaf werede	hyne wyrd fornam
	syðþan he for wlenco	wean ahsode
	fæhde to Frysum	he þa frætwe wæg
	eorclanstanas	ofer yða ful
	rice þeoden	he under rande gecranc
1210	gehwearf þa in Francna fæþm	feorh cyninges
	breostgewædu	ond se beah somod
	wyrsan wigfreca	wæl reafedon
	æfter gudsceare	Geata leode
	hreawic heoldon	heal swege onfeng

To him was the full-cup carried, and friendly invitation with words offered, and wound gold shown with good will, two arm-ornaments, clothes and armour, the greatest of neck-rings of those I have heard of on the earth. None under the sky have I heard of better in the hoard-treasures of heroes, since Hama carried away to that bright castle the Brosing collar, necklace and rich container/beaten gold, underwent the treacherous-attack of Eormanric, chose the eternal plan/gain/council. That ring had Hygelac of the Geats, Swerting's nephew, in his last journey, after he under the banner protected treasure, defended slaughter-plunder; destiny took him away after he for pride/glory/riches asked for woe, for feud against the Frisians. He carried those treasures, precious stones, over the full-cup of waves, the powerful ruler; he fell under shield; turned then into the Franks' embrace, the king's life, breast-clothing, and

that ring-ornament together. Worse men-in-battle plundered the slaughtered; after the battle-shearing; the men of the Geats held the corpse-place. The hall received the sound.

At the *fit* break, there is a change in the relationship between masculine and feminine perspectives, between their relative potencies.²³ At Finnsburg, first there was the woman's and then the warrior's way of seeing, so that they were approximately equivalent. In Heorot, the two have been in conflict throughout the scene, and the new *fit* brings with it an increase in the power of the masculine, through the words of the *scop*. Ostensibly, he merely tells us how well Beowulf is treated by the Danes, how valuable the gifts he is given for his service to the hall. The shift in power is brought about by two stories. In both, treasure causes death; it does not maintain and encourage the unity of the tribe, nor mitigate the fear of individual death. "I heard," *ic . . . gefrægen hæbbe* (1196), signals the shift to a story outside the Beowulf narrative proper, a "digression," another story which "recovers the past,"²⁴ so that it can be used in the service of the present, the *Beowulf scop's* present, as the Finnsburg story does. Interestingly, although the *Beowulf* poet makes no distinction between "fictional" characters and "historical" ones, the two stories he presents here in connection with the neck-ring Wealhtheow gives Beowulf both involve some of the few names positively identified by scholars as historical, as having "really existed."²⁵ History, be it past or future, contradicts what Wealhtheow believes and knows, and dismisses it, denies in her the power of the *ides* wise woman, helps to make that power inseparable from feuding and death.

We are not told much about Hama. The *scop's* account is short and sharp. The bare statements contrast with the descriptive hypermetric lines earlier, whose drama was sententious, forboding. For Hama, treasure leads to fighting which leads to choosing the eternal

²³For the purposes of my discussion, it does not matter whether this confluence of events, the new *fit* and the relationship change, is intentional or co-incident. They occur at the same place, as they did in the Finnsburg story, that is all. However, for a general discussion of the purpose of *fit* divisions throughout *Beowulf*, see Eamon Carrigan, "Structure and Thematic Development in *Beowulf*," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (30 November, 1967).

²⁴See Ward Parks, "The traditional narrator and the 'I heard' formulas in Old English poetry," *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1989): 45-66.

²⁵See, for instance, Howard W. Hintz, "The 'Hama' Reference in *Beowulf*: 1197-1201," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 33 (1934): 98-102; and Godfrid Storms, "The Significance of Hygelac's Raid," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 14 (1970): 3-26.

plan/gain/council. There is no real consensus about what "choosing the eternal plan/gain/council" means, but, whether Hama went into a monastery or just died (maybe in the fighting),²⁶ the result is very much the same: he exchanges the temporal for the eternal, and there is no suggestion that his neck-ring went with him in the way that Scyld's treasure went with *him*. Wealhtheow associates treasure with continuity of the tribe, but the *scop* points out that treasure can also mean something quite different: for Hama, treasure may have actually hastened his end. In any event, he did not benefit from it in the long run. Instead, he leaves the world, making the transition from time into eternity, out of the cycle of birth and death that Wealhtheow has just been reminding Hrothgar and Hrothulf about, away from treasure and its evils, away from *sigle ond sincfæt* that is not separate from *searonktas* (1200).

The story of what happens to the neck-ring Wealhtheow gives Beowulf, the neck-ring he in turn gives to his lord, Hygelac, is more expansive, and the connections between treasure, fighting and death, are reinforced by several more alliterated pairs. *Wæltreaf* (slaughter-plunder) is linked to *wyrd* (1205), and *fæhte* (feuding) to *frætw* (treasure, 1207); between the two, the nature of *wlenco* (pride), the cause of Hygelac's destiny to die in Frisia, is changed by *wean* (woe). We would expect a heroic king like Hygelac²⁷ to act *for wlenco*: riches contribute to glory, for which pride can lead you into unfortunate (if you get killed) but profitable (if you win) feuding. But asking for woe changes that commendable heroic pride into a negative Christian kind of pride, in which, if you look for pride and glory in riches, all you will get is woe. Then, *wæltreaf* (1205) is reinforced by *wæl reafeden* (1212), "plundered the slaughtered," also degrading the motivation for killing when treasure is involved by attributing it to "worse men-in-battle," *wyrsan wigfreca*. While this may

²⁶See Klaeber's note on 1197-1201 (p. 177-9). Wyatt/Chambers (p. 62 n.) suggest the "pious" phrase has been substituted by a "monkish copyist." In "The Sigemund-Heremod and Hama-Hygelac Passages in *Beowulf*" (*PMLA* 74 [Dec., 1959]: 489-94), R.E. Kaske's translation of *ecne* as "long-lasting," ie, for the rest of Hama's life, and *geceas ecne ræd* as referring to Hama being able to hold onto the treasure for this length of time, is hard to accept, especially since the *Beowulf* poet otherwise uses *ece* as "eternal," "everlasting," or at least extending over a much greater period of time than a single lifetime (108, 1760, 2719).

²⁷His heroism within the poem is assured by his relationship with Beowulf (that of maternal uncle and lord), since it is unlikely that our hero would have such great respect for someone unworthy, especially without the poet making a comment on the fact. Nor is there anything to suggest that Hygelac behaved in any way foolishly or rashly in the raid referred to (see Godfrid Storms, "The Significance of Hygelac's Raid," p. 16).

discredit the notion of warfare for expansion and profit, it leaves intact the warrior champion who fights against *eotenas*. He combats whatever threatens the hall; riches and fame are his just reward, not his prime motivation. The segment ends, the two stories that tip the scales in favour of the warrior's perspective, that disempower the *ides* wise woman by discrediting the basis of her power, the tribal ethos as a protection against violence, death and destruction, with the alliteration of *hreawic* (the place of corpses) and *heal*. And you can choose what sound you think the hall receives, men acting like animals among the slaughter, or the mirth that comes from receiving treasure, only now it is not so easy to separate them, nor to prevent the sound of the lamentation of the *ides* priestess from joining them.

1215	Wealdeo mabelode bruc ðisses beages hyse mid hæle *þeo[d]gestreona cen þec mid cræfte	heo fore þæm werede spræc Beowulf leofa ond þisses hrægles neot ond geþeoh tela ond þyssum cnyhtum wes
1220	lara liðe ic þe þæs lean geman hafast þu gefered ealne wideferhþ efne swa side windgeard weallas	ic þe þæs lean geman þæt ðe feor ond neah weras ehtigad swa sæ bebugeð wes þenden þu lifige
1225	æþeling eadig sincgestreona dædum gedefe her is æghwylc eorl modes milde	ic þe an tela beo þu suna minum dreamhealdende oþrum getrywe mandrihtne *hol[d]
1230	þegnas syndon geþwære druncne dryhtguman	þeod ealgearo doð swa ic bidde

Wealhtheow said, she before that group of fighting men spoke: "Enjoy this ring, dear Beowulf, young man, with health, and use this clothing, the people's property, and prosper well. Show yourself with skill, and to these youths be gracious/gentle in lore. I will remember reward to you for that. You have brought about that far and near for all time men will speak of this with praise, even as far away as the sea flows around the land-of-the-wind, the cliffs. Be you while you live, princeling, prosperous. I rightly bestow on you treasure-goods; be you to my sons proper in deeds, protector-of-happiness. Here each earl is to the others true, generous in character, faithful to the man-lord. Thaners are united, people prepared; having drunk, fighting-men do as I bid."

The shift in power between the perspectives of woman and warrior is very evident as Wealhtheow delivers her last speech. As before, her words are gracious and appropriate to the occasion, that is, to the thanking of a foreign guest, a hero who has done the Danes a great service. She presents him with gifts of considerable value from the tribal treasure, and wishes him well. She pays him compliments, hoping he will pass on some of his skill to

the young warriors, speculating on the great stories that will be told about the adventure. Then, having recognized the hero, she proceeds to praise the man, hoping that he will not only continue to be prosperous but also maintain his strength for a long time, so that her children can benefit from it as she has. And, as a final, almost personal, thank-you, she describes the hall at peace. As Andreas Haarder says:

she is the weaver of peace and when she offers the drinking cup to king and retainers as well as to warriors from elsewhere, togetherness and peace is called upon to manifest itself.²⁸

Wealhtheow's words are straightforward: what she says, as in her speech of advice to Hrothgar, is well-known, accepted as proper behaviour. She uses *tela* twice (1218, 1225) and *gedefe* once (1227), emphasizing that what she asks of Beowulf is appropriate to his position as warrior and as friend to the Danes. His lessons to the young men have to do with skill in fighting and in the gentler arts (*lara liċe*). She reminds him, too, that his role as warrior is protective, that what is proper in deeds is to be a protector of happiness (by the alliteration of *dædum gedefe* with *dreamhealdene* (1227) and by their syntactical congruence). Significantly, she does not characterize him as an obtainer of foreign wealth by conquest, after the examples of Hama and Hygelac, but as one whose function it is to serve.

Wealhtheow identifies the distribution of treasure with the rulers of the hall, its source what has been handed down and augmented by each ruler in turn. She speaks of the people's property, *þeodgestreona*, which not only points out its ownership but also her position, her role, in giving it to Beowulf. She speaks for the people, the tribe, the Danes, as Hildeburh spoke for all at Finnsburg. So, when she uses "I" and "my," the sense is the opposite of Queen Victoria's royal "we." She speaks for the hall, becomes the voice of the hall, and parallels Hildeburh, the *ides* priestess before the pyre. She is mother (of *my* sons, *suna minum*, 1226), and wise woman, *ides* empowered by the tribe. From this position of power, she speaks again of memory (*lean gemon*, 1220), memory in the service of the tribe, memory that functions quite differently from the memory of Hengest, memory that promotes peace, stability and prosperity, rather than death answered by more death.

In spite of this, the Wealhtheow who speaks these words is no longer the golden queen of Beowulf's arrival. The masculine perspective overrides her tribal, feminine one,

²⁸In *Beowulf: The Appeal of a Poem* (Viborg: Akademisk Forlag, 1975), p. 206.

pervverting her contribution to the safety of the hall into a power that is trying to suppress the warrior, trying to gain ascendancy over him, aspiring even to rule him. The "people's" treasure, "I," and "my sons" threaten to usurp Hrothgar's role of ruler of the Danes, his position as the one whose words are those of his people, and even his role as parent. She begins to look like someone whose "favorite subject" is power over others,²⁹ as the imperatives which say "I hope that. . ." could also mean "do as I say." Of course, even from his own perspective, man the hero is not in any real danger of being dominated, Beowulf even less than Hengest. Wealhtheow cannot control how Beowulf will behave by promising him rewards if he does as she wishes. For her to express such a belief discredits her wisdom, even though it does not alleviate the fear that it might happen. Her description of the peaceful hall sounds so false it seems ludicrous. She becomes momentarily the "poor queen," powerless, putting her faith in what cannot be, all to promote her "beloved son."³⁰ The repetition of *æghylc* [. . .] *oprum getrywe* recalls the opening of the scene, of Hrothgar and Hrothulf together, and the bond between them seems very fragile. The warrior momentarily becomes the proper heir to the loyalty of men in the hall, becomes the source of power for good, for prosperity, for peace in the hall. The continuity of the tribe depends on him, on his strength, courage, and martial prowess.

But the "poor queen" is no more permanent an image than the silenced Hildeburh. With Wealhtheow's closing words, the empowered *ides* returns: in the hall, she will be obeyed, because what she says is wise, for the good of everyone there. Again, as with Hildeburh, even though the *ides* power is different from warrior power, even though it may limit warrior power, even though it cannot guarantee a lasting peace, it does not become evil or even lose its potency, not until there is Grendel's mother, *ides aglæcwif*, warrior and woman in one body. She is the hero's version of the *ides*, a female man, a monster created

²⁹See Klaeber's comment, p. 180 n. on 1231.

³⁰This unflattering view of Wealhtheow is not uncommon, but is perhaps best expressed by Malone, in "A Note on Beowulf 1231," *Modern Language Notes* 41.7 (November, 1926): 466-7. Malone uses both "poor queen" and "beloved son" (not "sons"). I do not wish to suggest that there were in reality no queens, mothers who were involved in political manipulations on behalf of their sons, as Pauline Stafford points out (in "Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages," *Medieval Women*, Derek Baker, ed. [Oxford, 1978], pp. 79-100). In fact, without these women, the poet's vilification of Wealhtheow's motives would be less effective. It does raise the question, however, of the way historical queens have been judged.

by the warrior's belief that what he cannot dominate will dominate and subjugate him.

CHAPTER IV

IDES AGLÆCWIF, WARRIOR WOMAN

*Anger and tenderness: my selves,
And now I can believe they breathe in me
as angels, not polarities.*

*Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius
to spin and weave in the same action
from her own body, anywhere –
even from a broken web.*

Integrity

Adrienne Rich.

*Against the black
I have more fervour
than you in all the splendor of that place,
against the blackness
and the stark gray
I have more light;*

*and the flower,
if I should tell you,
you would turn from your own fit paths
towards hell,
turn again and glance back
and I would sink into a place
even more terrible than this.*

Euridice,

H. D. (1917)

The poem has shown us that Hildeburh and Wealhtheow have power to shape the lives of warriors, that their power is different from that exercised by the warrior, but that it too plays a significant part in what goes on in the hall. At both Finnsburh and Heorot, the warrior's perspective, present in the choosing of story and words as well as in the wishes and actions of Hrothgar and Hengest, is that the non-aggressive, communal power used by both *idesa* belongs only to women, and that it does not protect the hall from strife. Nevertheless, Hildeburh retains her strength even though her song does not prevent a second Finnsburg massacre. Wealhtheow keeps hers even though her wise words appear ineffective against the possibility of a Scylding feud. For them both, *ides* power has been effective; it has given them the ability to absorb their vulnerability to fate and to the violence over which they have little control. Now, the third *ides* appears.

We first experience Grendel's mother as an *ides* separated from the conditions that are the source of power for Hildeburh and Wealhtheow. She appears to be alone, a mother

whose son has been killed, and an avenger, a warrior who comes to take a life in payment for one who was lost. Separated from the community that gives the other *idesa* their power, she is neither *ides* priestess nor *ides* wise woman. The power of motherhood alone is clearly not strong enough to keep in check the aggressive masculine power of the warrior. Instead of being able to draw on the need for tribal peace and prosperity as a reason for negotiated ends to wars, on lamentation to appease the emotions of grief, on bonds of blood between men and between tribes as a guarantee of loyalty, Grendel's mother answers death with death as Hengest did. She remembers as he did and completes that memory with the same action. Nor is she another Grendel, whose unrestrained masculine aggression and love of killing¹ threaten ordinary militiamen but are easily overcome by the soldier hero. She does only what she must; she takes a single life in payment for her son, without enjoyment, and then she leaves.

Before Grendel's mother is experienced by the men in Heorot, the poet describes her to us, to the audience, showing her relationship to Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, her origins in the Finnsburg story and in the scene that followed. We see her in the process of becoming, of emerging from the *idesa* who preceded her, before she loses all humanity, before she is turned into the monster, the beast that Beowulf kills. In the darkened Heorot on her sorrowful journey, there is no indication, beyond that she is an *ides* and an *aglæca*, that Grendel's mother is not as human as the men whose home she violates. The scene itself, the killing of Æschere and the taking of the hand, emphasizes how much she is like the men who have lost kinsmen in fighting. The first indications that she might not be one of them, that her *ides* nature itself might be affected by the warrior's perspective, do not come until Hrothgar tells Beowulf what has happened. Then she becomes progressively less human, more Other, until Beowulf kills her. Then, with her dies both the perverted strength of the female man and the true *ides* nature that stands in the way of masculine/warrior/hero supremacy. So that "warrior" can become synonymous with "hero," the mother priestess wise

¹See Kathryn Hume, "The Theme and Structure of *Beowulf*," *Studies in Philology* 72.1, Jan, 1975: 1-27, for an interesting discussion of Grendel from this point of view. Hume points out that structural schemes for the poem based either on the hero or on the action do not work very well. Her approach is thematic, but ignoring the sex of Grendel's mother, she also falls into the trap of being forced to conclude that the poet was inept in this central section.

woman becomes, not a power for death and life, for regeneration, not a fury, but a hag.² But when we first encounter her, her *ides* nature is still intact. She is sister to Hildeburh in that, even though the act each carries out is different, both are rituals performed to release the pain caused by the loss of sons in combat. And she is sister to Wealhtheow in the strength of family ties that drive her to Heorot against her will, to an almost certain death.

· XVIII Sigon þa to slæpe sum sare angeald
æfenræste swa him ful oft gelamp
siþðan goldsele Grendel warode
unriht æfnðe oþ þæt ende becwom
1255 swyft æfter synnum þæt gesyne wearþ
widcup werum þætte wrecend þa gyt
lifde æfter laþum lange þrage
æfter gudceare Grendles modor
ides aglæcwif yrmþe gemunde
1260 se þe wæteregesān wunian scolde
cealde streamas siþðan *Cain weard
to ecgbānān angan breþer
fæderenmæge he þa fag gewat
morþre gemearcod mandream fleon
1265 westen warode þanon woc fela
geosceaftgasta wæs þæra Grendel sum
heorowearh hetelic se æt Heorote fand
wæccendne wer wiges bidan
þær him aglæca ætgræpe weard
1270 hwæþre he gemunde mægenes strenge
gimfæste gife ðe him God sealde
ond him to anwaldan are gelyfde
frofre ond fultum ðy he þone feond oferwom
gehnægde helle gast þa he hean gewat
1275 dreame bedæled deaþwic seon
mancynnes feond ond his modor þa gyt
gifre ond galgmod gegān wolde
sorhfulne sid sunu þeod-wrecan

Sank down then to sleep. One sorely paid for evening-quiet, as to him/them full often happened since Grendel came into the gold-hall, did/endured unright, until that end arrived, death following sin/injury/feud/crime. That became seen, widely-known to men, that an avenger then yet lived in consequence of/for the purpose of pain/harm/injury, for a long time in consequence of/for the purpose of war-trouble, Grendel's mother, ides, dangerously-powerful opponent woman; with misery remembered he who water-terror had to inhabit, cold streams. After Cain became as an edge-slayer to his only brother, paternal kinsman, he then went outlawed, marked by murder, to flee man-joy, came into the wasteland. From that time/place

²Only modern hags are ugly, malicious but essentially petty old women. In earlier times, according to the OED, they were witches, sorceresses, women of power. And even before that, they were female demons, furies, and harpies. But always, or at least for a very long time, men have seen them as part of the "other side" of things, and intrinsically antagonistic.

many awoke of already-shaped spirits; Grendel was one of them, hostile blood-thirsty wolf.³ He at Heorot met with a man watching/waiting to experience battle. There to him the dangerously-powerful opponent became seizing. However, he remembered the power of bodily strength, ample-strong gift that God gave to him and to him also the ruler gave honour/respect/help (i.e., all good things), joy/consolation and protection/help, because he that fiend/enemy overcame, vanquished/humbled the ghost/guest from hell. Then he went away despaired, deprived of joy to see the death-dwelling-place, enemy of man's kin. And his mother then yet, greedy and gallows-minded, wanted to go on a sorrowful journey to take common vengeance⁴ for son.

Grendel's mother follows the memory of Grendel into the sleeping hall, comes upon the unsuspecting men. Why do they not expect someone? Presumably they do not think that Grendel might have kin to avenge him. And before the *ides* acquired warrior characteristics, before she was shaped to act as he would act, there was no-one who would come for vengeance, because vengeance is not part of what is to this point feminine power. But Hrothgar's thwarted wish to make Beowulf his son has created Grendel's mother; Hengest's response to *worold ræden* has brought her here. That her presence depends on the second of these two events becomes immediately evident; that her existence is triggered by the first comes later and more indirectly. They call her from the darkness, and in part make her what she is, but her essence comes also from the woman who thwarted the wish, and the woman whose prayers were made doubly necessary by Hengest's behaviour.

The one who comes is first *wrecend*, the avenger of Grendel, someone who needs to take life, for whom death is both the cause and the result. Immediately, however, she is *Grendles modor*, one whose existence is inseparable from birth. A man is excluded forever from being a mother, but *wrecend* is masculine only in the expectation that acts of vengeance will be performed by men; it is possible under the right circumstances, as we see here, for a woman to become an avenger. It is very tempting to give Grendel's mother a name of her own, but to do that would be to change her relationship to the text. With a different kind of name, she would always be just another character, equivalent to Hildeburh and Wealhtheow, the way Grendel is equivalent to Beowulf, equivalent and opposite on

³This is J. R. Clark Hall's gloss for *heorowearh*, for which he cites this occurrence. The elements are *heoru*, sword, which becomes "blood-thirsty" since Grendel is known not to have anything to do with any kinds of weapons; and *wearg*, wolf, in the sense of an aggressive loner.

⁴See Kevin S. Kiernan, "Grendel's Heroic Mother," *In Geardagum* 4 (1984): 13-33, for this reading of *þeod-wrecan* (p. 25).

account of her exclusion from the hall, a negative to their positive images of what an *ides* is. And while she is in part that, "Grendel's mother" turns description into definition, characteristics into essence. It identifies her with all those who are called what she is called, but where they are *ides* with "priestess" implied, *ides* with "wise woman" indicated, she is *ides* mother. Although they are also mothers as she is, their other roles are activities that women may be more likely to perform, certainly, but to whom they are not restricted. It would appear, for instance, that the *þyle* might perform both priest and counsel functions. Whatever Grendel's mother does, the fact that a woman, a mother, does it takes precedence over the act itself.

The poet continues: this being is *ides aglæcwif*, Grendel-ness transformed and augmented by being female. In another dual, duelling variation, she acquires the impetus to masculine activity, and the ability to be effective at it in the way men/heroes/warriors are. At the same time, she retains the feminine power of the *ides*. Grendel's mother is *aglæcwif*, the female version of an *aglæca*. *Aglæca* has been investigated extensively by Doreen M. E. Gillam.⁵ Her analysis reveals that the field of applications surrounds a central core of meaning: all *aglæcan* have an aggressive physical strength not available to ordinary men, a strength outside understanding and therefore potentially dangerous and evil. More often applied to non-human or monstrous or devilish beings, in cases in which the hero is the referent, his power is increased by the linguistic tension between the goodness of the hero and the threat of the term, which his goodness is able to control. Although no other examples exist of an *aglæcwif* in Old English poetry, it would seem that to be such a creature is to have access to this same aggressive, superhuman strength with all its potential danger, while at the same time to be a woman. The conflation of *ides* and *aglæcwif* has an effect similar to that of the hero *aglæca*. The power and warriorism of the hero become more apparent when we see him as *aglæca*; so the power of the *ides* is given a new dimension by *aglæcwif*. Female power has become, in Grendel's mother, an aggressive as well as a nurturing force, and, because it is part of being *modor* and *ides*, the belief that female

⁵In "The Use of the Term 'Æglæca' in *Beowulf* at Lines 893 and 2592" (*Studia Germanica Gandensia* 3 [1961]: 145-69), and more generally in "A Method for Determining the Connotations of Old English Poetic Words" (*Studia Germanica Gandensia* 6 [1964]: 85-101). In the later work, Gillam generalizes the technique used in the earlier paper, and also includes a discussion of the interplay of monstrous and human attributes in a number of situations throughout Old English poetry.

power is aggressive is applied not only to Grendel's mother, but also to Wealhtheow and to Hildeburh, and to all women who would be active in the hall, women whose words the warrior experiences as potential actions against him and his position of superiority. Through Grendel's mother, Hildeburh's words of lamentation bind Hengest in the ice of winter, Wealhtheow's words of wisdom deny Beowulf the legacy of power, prevent Hrothgar from doing what he thinks best for the hall. For, although she never speaks, in Grendel's mother the power of words has been translated into the power that is his particular domain, that of aggressive action.

The *wrecend*, *ides*, *aglæcwif* remembers, and because she is avenger, woman of power, powerful opponent, this act, both its internal beginnings and its compulsion to complete itself, also reflects the effect of masculine perspective on feminine power, on the way the women exert their influence on the world around them. Hengest remembers and avenges; his actions are heroic. Finn suppresses his remembering, with disastrous results, both to himself and to his whole tribe. But Hildeburh tries to get rid of the destructive energy of remembrance through lamentation. For her, even the death of sons and brothers does not have to lead to more death, does not destroy her. In Heorot, Wealhtheow is the one remembering: she urges Hrothgar and Hrothulf to remember gifts and kinship, and she herself remembers gifts to Beowulf, in thanks. But the poet suggests to us that memory is not always the strongest emotion, it cannot be counted on to control the quest for personal power. Together, the situations of the two women imply that what the warrior feels is right, and will, for better or worse, triumph. But Grendel's mother remembers the way Hengest did, and even though that memory goes against the wishes of the warriors in Heorot, it empowers her, giving her not only the ability to act but a reason to do so. It also establishes that she is not a woman in the way Hildeburh and Wealhtheow are, but a female man.

The contradictions inherent in this female man continue to add to rather than diminish her power. She is drawn to Heorot because of Grendel, because *wordl ræden* has the same effect on her as warrior it had on Hengest. But the emphasis on her avenger nature, her masculine attributes, does not lessen her femaleness, the mother nature that made her an avenger in the first place. With the recapitulation of the fight between Grendel and Beowulf, the term *aglæca* is reclaimed by them both. *He* is at first Grendel (1267), and at the end (1270) Beowulf, but in the middle, in *him aglæca*, they share the description. But Grendel's

mother is *aglæcwif*, so that their masculinity, their warrior nature, is hers, augmenting her femaleness, and giving them nothing in return. Beyond being *aglæcan*, and being male and very strong, of course, they share nothing: God is on Beowulf's side, he is the winner and gets all kinds of good things from both heavenly and mortal rulers; Grendel is from hell, he is vanquished and sent away. This is the world of winners and losers, the warrior's world. But the woman, with her contradictory power, is still there, not speaking, but remembering. She is *gifre*, that is, greedy, wanting to eat, another Grendel, but also *sorhful*, a mother, very human, very sympathetic, like Hildeburh but also like Hengest, like the men in Heorot following Grendel's visits. She comes to claim vengeance, but in the *sorhfulne sid*, who is the winner? The journey is painful for both avenger and avenged. It will not bring back the dead son, and will only make losers on both sides. And yet Grendel's mother comes, driven as clearly as Hengest was driven when he stayed in Friesland, and in the similarity, Hildeburh's lamentation to heal the pain of *her* son's death becomes an expression, not of her strength, her power, but of her powerlessness, her inability to do anything else.

	com þa to Heorote	ðær Hring-Dene
1280	geond þæt sæld swæfun	þa ðær sona weard
	edhwyrft eorlum	sipðan inne fealh
	Grendles modor	wæs se gryre læssa
	efne swa micle	swa bið mægþa cræft
	wiggryre wifes	be wæpnedmen
1285	þonne heoru bunden	hamere *geþruen
	sweord swate fah	swin ofer helme
	ecgum dyhtig	andweard scireð
	ða wæs on healle	heardecg togen
	sweord ofer setlum	sidrand manig
1290	hafen handa fæst	helm ne gemunde
	byrnan side	þa hine se broga angeat
	heo wæs on ofste	wolde ut þanon
	feore beorgan	þa heo onfunden wæs
	hrade heo æþelinga	anne hæfde
1295	fæste befangen	þa heo to fenne gang
	se wæs hroþgare	hæleþa leofost
	on gesides had	be sæm tweonum
	rice randwiga	þone ðe heo on ræste abreat
	blædfæstne beorn	næs Beowulf ðær
1300	ac wæs oþer in	ær geteohhod
	æfter maþtungife	mærum Geate
	hream weard in Heorote	heo under heolfre genam
	cupe folme	cearu wæs geniwod
	geworden in wicun	ne wæs þæt gewrixle til
1305	þæt hie on ba healfa	bicgan scoldon
	freonda feorum	

Came then to Heorot. There the Ring-Danes throughout that hall slept. Then there happened at once a return to former state of things for earls, after inside entered Grendel's mother. That horror/fierceness was less even as much as is the art/skill/strength/courage of virgin, battle fierceness of woman, alongside a weaponed-man when deadly sword bound, forged with hammer, sword stained with blood, with doughty edges, cuts opposite to swine over helmet. There was in the hall the hard-edge drawn, sword over the seats, many a broad-shield held fast in hand. Did not remember helm, wide byrnie, when that terror/danger/marvel discovered/seized him. She was in haste, wanted out from there to save life; when she was discovered/experienced, quickly she one princeling had clasped fast. Then she went towards the fen. He was to Hrothgar the most-loved warrior, in the nature of a companion, on the two seas, a powerful shield warrior [i.e., high-ranked], that one who she killed at rest, a prosperous hero. Beowulf was not there, but another place was before determined after treasure-gifts to the famous Geat. Cry of alarm/sorrow became in Heorot. She under [= beneath/by means of/in the presence of/under the rule of] blood seized the well-known hand.⁶ Care was renewed, arisen in the dwelling place. That exchange was not good that they on both sides had to buy with the lives of friends.

Grendel's mother enters the hall. The scene is one of darkness and confusion, of men not knowing what is going on, not understanding who is attacking them.⁷ Through their eyes, the *ides* is all contradictions. The Danes are in awe of her; they recognize and respond to her power over them, the power that holds them back, even when they feel threatened. They sense that she is the enemy, but also that she is like them, that they share common emotions of anguish at the loss of someone loved and respected, of fear, of the need to avenge. She is very much "other" and yet also inseparable from those who experience her. But is Grendel's mother one of Hildeburh's *eotena*, that is, embodying all violence against the hall, all threats to life, no matter what the source? Or is she one of Hengest's *eotena bearn*, a specific, identifiable "other"? Is she a warrior or an *ides*?

When we experience Grendel's mother through the eyes of the newly awakened warriors, an oppressive feminine presence becomes almost tangible. The scene lacks an orderly perception. The (il)logic of the experience is created in words that refuse to be dominated, words whose various meanings cannot be given a hierarchy, in relationships between words that convey more information than the words themselves through their interactions with the whole landscape of language and context, in chaos that is not meaningless. The first

⁶It is impossible to say whether the poet meant by this that she took the hand in a blood frenzy, that she was covered in blood when she did it, that the hand itself was covered in blood, or all three. For this reason, I have retained the original word order in its ambiguity.

⁷For the *Beowulf* poet's use of the experience of the poem's 'extras' to heighten or create suspense, see R.M. Lumiansky, "The Dramatic Audience of *Beowulf*," in *The Beowulf Poet*, Donald K. Fry, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 76-82.

impression the men have is that they are less terrified of her than of Grendel because she is a woman, therefore less strong than men, and yet their fear of Grendel has returned, as in the former state of things. She comes from outside, and yet *gyre* refers both to the horror the men feel and to what inspires that horror, Grendel's mother herself. Nothing privileges either meaning, so both stand, linking her to them, them to her, as did the *sorhfulne sīð* (1278). There are no active verbs in ll. 1282b–1291 whose subjects are not weapons, so, in contrast to the two opponents, the weapons seem to carry on battle on their own. Both *ides* and man are in the midst of this battle between the weapons. They are linked together, in common jeopardy from the sword which cuts, from the general violence of Hildeburh's *eotenas*, and yet they are also the specific enemies who wield those weapons, Hengest's kind of enemies.

Grendel's mother is now *mægd* and *wif*. In both, the warrior's perception that effectiveness and physical strength are interdependent runs into problems when it comes to evaluating the relationship between the man of power, the warrior, and the woman of power. *Mægþa cræft* can be simply the lesser physical strength of a woman, but it also suggests the *dyrne cræft* of the Cotton Gnostic *ides*, who is a *fæmne*, a "woman, maiden, virgin," which is very much the same thing as a *mægþ*, according to both Bosworth-Toller and Clark Hall. That *ides* compels men to do her bidding.⁸ Hildeburh and Wealhtheow also have lesser physical strength, but still, in their roles as *idesa*, they managed to make stronger men do as they wanted, at least for a while. Hildeburh bound the two sides at Finnsburg together by her presence and her tribal affiliations to both sides. Violence and more death followed. Wealhtheow's intervention, her adherence to the tribal ethos excluded Beowulf from the centre of power at Heorot. Violence, death and destruction are likely to follow. Until Grendel's mother enters the hall, the connection between the *idesa* and violent action has been negative — their words have been used to prevent it. In Grendel's mother, in the warrior's version of an *ides*, that relationship is reversed, for all *idesa*. They become the cause of violence and death, because by some unknown means they coerce men into acting against their natures. *Wif* is a general term for "woman," one who may or may not have *ides* power. To the warrior, therefore, this is reassuring, that Grendel's mother has no more battle fierceness than other women, women who stay at home while men go off and fight,

⁸For a discussion of which see Audrey L. Meaney, "The *Ides* of the Cotton Gnostic Poem," *Medium Ævum* 48.1 (1979): 23–39, and Appendix A. The relevant lines are 43–45.

but *wif* also reinforces *aglæcwif*, the woman who usurped the power of the *aglæca*.

So is she weaker, less dangerous than a warrior? She should be, according to his understanding of power, but his perception also tells him that this woman, like any woman of power, any *ides*, does not fit into his understanding, his "logic." She is powerful, and it does not make sense to him. Because he experiences her as illogical, she also acquires a distinct smell of the magical, the dark arts. In her presence, the instruments of protection, helmet and byrnie, are forgotten. The men of Heorot become vulnerable because the strength of their memory, the thing that kept Hengest from becoming powerless in the face of death, is gone, and they are therefore in danger of being destroyed by the woman's power. And, she is *broga*, the fear itself and the source of that fear, again binding together the woman who causes the fear, the one who should be afraid, and the warriors who are afraid but should not be. Bosworth-Toller say of *broga* that it is "a prodigy, a monster, trembling, fear, terror, horror, dread." Significantly, the *Supplement* identifies the associated verb as *brogdettan*, meaning "I. to shake, quiver; II. to glitter, be splendid" (a variation of *brogdian*), so that in the terror and fear there is more than a touch of awe. Peter Clemons⁹ points out, using this passage as example, that "narrating is about the interaction of basic natures" (p. 6). The difficulty is that the two natures are not in separate characters: Grendel's mother is both woman and warrior in all the ways in which they oppose each other.

The final impression of Grendel's mother in Heorot is her femaleness, her sisterhood with other women in spite of her masculine behaviour, and that, in spite of her warrior power, the real strength in her is the feminine, the *ides* power that the warrior can experience but not believe in. Although driven to revenge, she is afraid, as Grendel the thief was, but as Hengest the avenger was not. Grendel's reward was the satisfaction of his lust for killing. For Grendel's mother, the killing does not appease what drives her, does not explain why she comes in spite of her fear. Taking Æschere seems almost like a duty or a ritual, a satisfying of obligation rather than an emotional necessity. Æschere's death means more to Hrothgar than to her. If she had acted in a way that made sense to the warrior, like Hengest remembering the place, keeping clear in his mind and in his heart the source

⁹In "Symbolic Language in Old English Poetry," *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature*, eds. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, Fred C. Robinson (Toronto: University Press, 1986) pp. 3-14.

of the need for vengeance, she would have searched for the actual killer of her son, or the man responsible. Unlike Grendel, she has a particular grievance, and she would have been more sympathetic, in this increasingly warrior-dominated world, if she had sought out Hrothgar or Beowulf himself, instead of just any Danish warrior as substitute. The warrior in her dictates her actions, brings her to Heorot, but his power, in strength of arms, in the compulsion to act aggressively, is at the service of the woman. Cut off from the feminine *ides* power, unable to act as *ides* priestess, the focus of her attention remains, as Hildeburh's was, on the slain kin, not on the enemy who caused the death, nor on the one who paid for it. She performs the act of revenge, but her main concern is clearly the hand, her act of memory completed not by the killing but by the retrieval of part of the dead body, presumably so that the death of her son can be commemorated appropriately.

She leaves, and the men remain behind in the hall while she returns across the fen. But, the renewal of care takes place both in Heorot and in the other hall, the hall of the enemy, and *on ba healfa* is reminiscent of the two sides who mourn the dead at Finnsburg. Opposing each other, hating each other for the death of friends, they are by that common feeling brought together, made one by the thing that makes them enemies, but driven apart, not drawn together, by the *ides*. And, as at Finnsburg, the killing will continue, so long as there are two sides, neither able to dominate the other; only now there is someone other than the warrior to blame for that continuation, the *ides* as she is mother, now that she is no longer also *ides* priestess.

	þa wæs frod cyning-	
	har hilderinc	on hreon mode
	syðþan he aldrþegn	unlyfigendne
	þone deoestan	deadne wisse.
1310	hrabe wæs to bure	Beowulf fetod
	sigoreadig secg	samod ærdæge
	eode eorla sum	æþele cempa
	self mid gesidum	þær se snotera bad
	hwæpre him alfwalda	æfre wille
1315	æfter weaspelle	wyrpe gefremman
	gang ða æfter flore	fyrdwyrde man
	mid his handscale	healwudu dynede
	þæt he þone wisan	wordum hnægde
	freat Ingwina	frægn gif him wære
1320	æfter *neodlaðu[m]	niht getæse.

Then was the wise/old king, hoary war-hero, stormy in mind/heart, after he the elder-thane unliving, that dearest/noblest, knew [to be] dead. Quickly was Beowulf fetched at the

chamber, victory-rich man. At first-day went one of earls, a noble champion himself with companions, where that clever man stayed. . .¹⁰ whether for him, the elf-ruler still wanted after trouble/grief words to make recovery/improvement. Went then across the floor the man valuable-to-fyrd with his hand-companion. Hall-wood dinned. Then, he that wise man approached¹¹ with words, the ruler of the Ingwines, asked if to him were, after need-asking, the night pleasant.

As Grendel's mother retreats from Heorot, and the world returns to a kind of normality, the chaos of which she seemed to be the source also disappears. The feminine presence subsides, but not the indictment of the *ides* it was used to create. Hrothgar finds out what has happened, and Beowulf is sent for. Hrothgar is angry and upset, far more than Beowulf was at the loss of *his* thane to Grendel, far more than might be expected, perhaps, suggesting that Hrothgar too believed the hall to be invulnerable once the rogue warrior, Grendel, had been disposed of.¹²

Hrothgar's reaction is registered, then Beowulf is sent for and told. This is the second of three times that Beowulf's absence has been pointed out by the poet, so that it appears to be more than just scene-setting, more than a way to introduce the description of the mere. As with his other two opponents, Beowulf comes on the scene only after *they* have initiated the confrontation, so that his actions are always defensive, in the way that all military aggression seems to be, if seen from the perspective of those who perform it. In part, too, the delay of his encounter with the enemy separates him from ordinary men, from their mixture of fear and courage, so that while Grendel's mother brings out their fear, Beowulf will become the focus of their courage. He will act as they would have wanted to act, unaffected by what causes them to act in ways for which they are ashamed. Beowulf

¹⁰The difficulty here looks more than anything to me like a small lacuna, but that question is outside this discussion. If there are no words missing, then the syntax is extremely awkward. Raymond P. Tripp, Jr.'s note on translating this short passage ("*Beowulf* 1314a: The Hero as Alfwalda, 'Ruler of Elves'," *Neophilologus* 70.4 [1986]: 630-2) illustrates the problem.

¹¹*hnægan* = *nægan* (often with *wordum*): approach, accost, speak to.

¹²Helen Damico, in "*Þrymskvíða* and Beowulf's Second Fight: The Dressing of the Hero in Parody," (*Scandinavian Studies* 58 (1986): 407-428), says of the taking of the hand that it makes the hall vulnerable again, that having the trophy of the first fight would have been expected to protect Heorot from further attack. This might explain Hrothgar not posting a guard the night after Grendel's death, and it might also contribute to his urgent request to Beowulf to go after Grendel's avenger. But Hrothgar mentions only *Æschere's* death, Beowulf's involvement and the nature of his new adversary, never the hand. Nor does the poet refer to it; Grendel's hand is in fact forgotten until Beowulf retells the story to Hygelac much later.

will once again become a major player, but not before the transformation is completed of the *ides* from active woman of power, integrated both in herself and in her community, to the dis-integrated, excluded, evil *ides* power that seeks to destroy men. Thus transformed, Grendel's mother, monster woman, Hag, participates in his elevation from champion to Hero. And that coming to glory signals also the final attainment of supremacy by the warrior perspective, and its extension, on account of that position of dominance, to all men.

CHAPTER V

IDES, WITCH, MOTHER

*There is
an ancient priestess
whose tears make the spider lilies grow.
She knows my name is darkness.
We are sisters.*

The Mirror of a Day Chiming Marigold
Diane Wakowski (1973).

*Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.*

*Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.
Lady Lazarus,
Sylvia Plath (1965).*

Grendel's mother has entered the world of men behaving as a warrior would, avenging the death of a kinsman. She expresses the warrior's (mis)conception of what it means to be an *ides*. She is a female man, a woman whose physical strength is less than that of a man, but that does not make her any less indomitable, because acquiring masculine traits does not take away her source of power as an *ides* mother. Her transformation to warrior woman only makes her as aggressive as he is, only adds his strength (or most of it) to hers. Where before only words prevented the warrior from using his weapons whenever he felt vulnerable, now the physical presence of Grendel's mother stops him even more effectively than the words did. He ends up with less ability to exercise his autonomy in the presence of the *ides aglæcwif* than he did before the *ides* priestess, the *ides* wise woman. His domain of violent action has become hers, but she is still the woman whose strength he could not share, could not participate in.

Beowulf has played little active part in the poem for some time now. He has accepted praise and treasure from Wealhtheow but has said nothing, done nothing particular since before the song of the Finnsburg massacres. Even now, he does not become an active participant, not until the *ides* nature itself has been re-formed. Hrothgar's description affects all three *idesa*, not just Grendel's mother. Through his words, they are dis-integrated, they become "either/or." They are now either powerless, passive, helpless, in need of protection

from the warrior (and from husband, father, lord), or powerful with a perverse power that can only be checked by the warrior, in his capacity as hero. The *ides* becomes a creature of Chaos, a Hag, upsetting the "natural" hierarchy of things. Through that transformation, the warrior is also changed from an ordinary man whose role it is to fight against the enemies of the hall when necessary, who is also a tribesman, a son, a brother. He has become heroic, a very special man with very special powers, whose mission is to protect the world from evil. The contest between Grendel's mother and Beowulf enters the mythological arena. The Hero, the champion of Order, pits his strength against the forces of Chaos, and at the end of the battle, as happens in such cases, power of the loser is transferred to the triumphant conquerer. Beowulf cuts off the head of Grendel's mother, and the Hero acquires from the Hag control over his destiny. He destroys the *ides* power, clearing the way finally for masculine supremacy and for the eventual amalgamation of the roles of warrior and ruler.¹

It has been argued that the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother is a poetic interpretation of historical and religious struggles taking place in Northern Europe in and around the time the poem is presumed to have originated, sometime before 1000 AD.² There may or may not be parallels to be found, depending in part on one's assumptions concerning the origin and chronological location of *Beowulf*, and it is quite possible that influences of this kind had an effect on some of the imaginative landscape of the poem. However, these analogs are contextual rather than textual; the poem itself does not become involved directly with them. What is to be found in the text is that the defeat of Grendel's mother has a profound influence on the position of women within the hall. Beowulf kills Grendel's mother,

¹It is possible, I think, to expand this central contest once more, into the realm of the psychological, where the Youth takes from the Mother the power of life and death, and becomes a Man. Unfortunately, to include such a dimension is beyond the limits of my scholarship, and so remains here only a provocative notion.

²Terry A. Babb, for instance, sees in *Beowulf* the combat myth of Fontenrose and Eliade adapted to reflect the dissolution of both the Geats and the Danish people, and ultimately the end of the whole Nordic world ("*Beowulf*: Myth and Meaning," *Arlington Quarterly* 2 [1970]: 15-28). Robert Bly ("I Came Out of the Mother Naked," *Sleepers Joining Hands*, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, pp. 29-50) finds in the poem a reflection of the "destruction of Great Mother culture in northern Europe" (30). Bly's argument is perhaps more exuberant than scholarly, but his central hypothesis is championed by Randall Bohrer in "*Beowulf* and the Bog People," *Literary and Historical Perspectives of the Middle Ages*. Proc. of the 1981 SEMA Meeting. Patricia W. Cummins, Patrick W. Conner and Charles W. Connell, eds. (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1982), pp. 133-48.

ending the power of women, ensuring the place of supremacy for the warrior in the hall. Wealhtheow speaks no more: in marked contrast to her earlier eloquence and place of importance in the hall, she virtually ceases to exist. Her daughter, Freawaru, is little more than a servant to her father, a piece of treasure to be bartered in a peace treaty, a concubine to her husband; since she is silent, it is little wonder she is hopeless as a peaceweaver. The case can be made that the poet has simply chosen not to put direct speech into the mouths of many minor characters, especially those in "digressions." Nevertheless, there is still a distinct difference in the status of Freawaru and of her equivalent, Hildeburh,³ who "orders" and laments. Of the few active women following the death of Grendel's mother, Hygd is a wise and good mother and queen, but the only evidence we have of her wisdom and goodness is that she turns the role of ruling over to a more suitable ruler, a man.⁴ She never speaks, she does not appear to participate in the activity of the hall beyond her role as hostess.⁵ We never see in her the political independence of the earlier Wealhtheow. Not so, Offa's proud-minded queen, to whom Hygd is compared.⁶ The only woman to be titled *ides* after the death of Grendel's mother,⁷ she

³An interpolation of John D. Niles' diagram of the whole poem ("Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*," 930), shows that the segment involving Hildeburh corresponds to that in which Freawaru figures, and Wealhtheow in her hall matches Hygd in hers.

⁴See Jane Chance Nitzche, "The Anglo-Saxon Woman as Hero: The Chaste Queen and the Masculine Woman Saint," *Allegorica* 5 (1980): 139-48, for some speculation on the cause of the sexual segregation of traits this reflects. For the historical feasibility of Hygd taking over once her husband was dead, for examples in which this kind of situation did in fact occur, see Sheila C. Dietrich, "An Introduction to Women in Anglo-Saxon Society (c. 600-1066)," in *The Women of England From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present*, ed. Barbara Karner (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1979), pp. 32-82.

⁵Helen Damico argues that this is not a minor role (throughout *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, but in Chapter 2 especially, where she begins by saying that Wealhtheow's presence in the banqueting scenes "introduces a feminine principle associated with splendor and elegance" [p.17]), but no matter how much splendor and elegance is involved, hostess is still a considerable demotion from counsellor. An alternative assessment of Hygd is that she is in fact powerful because she is the one to choose who will become the next ruler of the Geats. This, however, does not indicate in the the *ides* power exercised by Wealhtheow. Hygd's choice reflects the warrior's individual power to choose a leader, not the communal power the *ides* wise woman expresses.

⁶As far as we know. The apparent lacuna in the text at this point leaves some question as to exactly what the poet intended the connection to be, as it also obscures the name of this reprehensible, though interesting, woman.

⁷There is one other occurrence of the term, at 1649. Klaeber categorically states that *þære idese* there is Wealhtheow and not Grendel's mother, but does not explain why she would

is, as Chambers puts it, the "type of the wild maiden who becomes a submissive though not always happy wife" (40). Hygd, one might conclude, was able to be both submissive and happy, and Hygd is never called *ides*. Once Grendel's mother is dead, the power of the *ides* in the hall is no more, and the warrior is no longer threatened by the outbreak of peace; he has only to worry about time, and Hrothgar's *atol yldo*⁸ – and the nameless woman who sings the last lament.

XX	Hroðgar mæpelode	helm Scyldinga
	ne frin þu æfter sælum	sorh is geniwod
	Denigea leodum	dead is Æschere
	Yrmenlafes	yldra broþor
1325	min runwita	ond min rædbora
	eaxlgestealla	ðonne we on orlege
	hafelan weredon	þonne hniton feþan
	eoferas cynsedan	*swylc scolde eorl wesan
	[. . .] ærgod	swylc Æschere wæs
1330	weard him on Heorote	to handbanan
	wælgæst wæfre	ic ne wat hwæþer
	atol æse wlanc	eftsides teah
	fylle gefægnod	heo þa fæhde wræc
	þe þu gystran niht	Grendel cwealdest
1335	þurh hæstne had	heardum clammum
	forþan he to lange	leode mine
	wanode ond wyrde	he æt wige gecrang
	ealdres scyldig	ond nu oþer cwom
	mihtig manscaða	wolde hyre mæg wrecan
1340	ge feor hafad	fæhde gestæled
	þæs þe þincean mæg	þegne monegum
	se þe æfter sincgyfan	on sefan greoteþ
	hreþerbealo hearde	

Hrothgar said, protector of the Scyldings: "Do not you ask about joys. Sorrow is renewed for the people of the Danes. Dead is Æschere, Yrmenlaf's elder brother, my counsellor and my advice-ruler, shoulder-stander when we in battle guarded the head, when footsoldiers came into collision, boars crashed together. Such must an earl be, [. . .] good from old times; such was Æschere. Became then to him in Heorot as a hand-slayer a wandering/flickering slaughter-ghost/guest. I do not know whether took horrid food/carrion, proud of the return journey, having rejoiced in fullness-of-food/destruction. She delivered that revenge because you yestern-night killed Grendel by means of violence, with strong grips, because he too long took from and violated my people. He in battle fell, having forfeited life, and now another

⁷(cont'd) be so specifically included in this scene, nor why in such an oblique manner. On the other hand, Grendel's mother is an important part of the occasion, especially since the premature celebration began *without* the body of the slain enemy; the second celebration has no such cloud of uncertainty hanging over it if the heads of both Grendel and his mother are on display. It is also proof that Beowulf has earned his reward, both the treasure Hrothgar promised and his Hero status confirmed.

⁸See Dean Loganbill, "Time and the Monsters in *Beowulf*," in *In Geardagum: Essays on Old English* 3 (1979): 26–35.

came, a mighty evil-warrior, wanted to avenge her kin; also, moreover, has advanced the vendetta, that may seem, to many a thane, he who on account of the treasure-giver laments in spirit with strong heart-sorrow.

Hrothgar begins to tell Beowulf about Æschere's death and about Grendel's mother. The third masculine voice to speak for the warrior, he responds to the aggressive behaviour of the warrior woman by attacking her with words. No longer trying only to dominate or restrain her, the warrior in him sets about changing even his own perception of her to fit his aspirations to supremacy.⁹ Both what she is and what she has done are recreated: she becomes first another Grendel, then a creature from beyond the world of men, and finally an elemental power capable of destroying all that is human.

The situation is very much like the one at Finnsburg on the morning after the first slaughter, only the perspective is not that of the *ides* but of the warrior. Æschere is brother and comrade-at-arms; in contrast to the *ides* whose loss was brothers and sons, the emphasis is on the bond from which women are excluded, the bond of fellow-fighters. The "generic plural" of brothers and sons contrasts with the singular death of the one man who is both brother and comrade, the focussed emotion, expressed first as fact by the poet and then repeated in Hrothgar's impassioned speech, distinctly different from the generalized, shared experience found in Hildeburh's sorrow and lamentation at the pyre. Instead of the fate which determined the death of those same brothers and sons, the agent is now the specific killer, Grendel's mother, who advances the feud. Hildeburh could only regret and accept the *metodsceaft* of which the deaths were a part; although Æschere's thanes may lament as she did, Beowulf has the power to do what he wants about it.

The question of what exactly Beowulf would want to do also indicates the change in perspective. He is not a Dane; Æschere is no relation to him. There was no vendetta between Beowulf, between the Geats, and Grendel – Beowulf acted in Hrothgar's name, so there is no obligation for him to do anything. Hrothgar recognizes this when he asks for Beowulf's help, and offers money (1380–83).¹⁰ But even before that happens, there is no real

⁹That Hrothgar is himself already a ruler does not make him a strange advocate for the warrior who is ostensibly his servant; he too has been held in check by *ides* power, by the tribal wisdom of the wise woman who opposed his choice of son and heir.

¹⁰One critic, Stephen J. Herben (in "Beowulf, Hrothgar and Grendel," *Archive für das Studien der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 173 (1938): 24–30) refers to Beowulf as a

question that Beowulf will fight this new challenge to the hall; he really has no option, not if he is to become a hero. For, with a change in the nature of the *ides* comes also a change in the nature of the warrior. He grows from champion, whose motives are fame and wealth for his lord, his people, into Hero, who performs great deeds, risks his life, uses his superior strength, for the single purpose of opposing Evil. If something can be shown to be evil, he is against it, and will use his powers to destroy it. So it is with Grendel's mother, *ides aglæcwif*.

Throughout her incursion into Heorot, Grendel's mother is clearly an enemy, a danger, but Hrothgar turns her into the walking Evil to whom the Hero responds. She is, according to Hrothgar, *wælgæst wæfre*, a wandering/flickering insubstantial slaughter-guest/ghost, that is, she visits men in spirit form and takes their lives. While this suggests a somewhat different image from the one experienced by the men first-hand, it nicely exonerates them, gives them an excuse for not fighting back. It does not erase their fear, but it separates them from it — no longer are they afraid *for* their lives, as a man might be, if a warrior would not, but *of* Grendel's mother. Wandering, the *wælgæst* strikes when they are not prepared for it; otherworldly, its human victims cannot protect themselves from it. Without a body that is limited by physical restrictions, she becomes immediately Other, a creature even a warrior would be justified in fearing. She is separated from the inhabitants of the hall, from the men for whom the exercise of martial response is beneficial, and from the women, the *idesa*, who become unnoticed casualties.

Hrothgar says that he thinks Æschere has not only been killed but eaten.¹¹ He has no proof whatsoever of this,¹² and the expanded perspective that recognizes what there is to lose

¹⁰(cont'd) "foreign mercenary." However, even leaving aside any differences in the connotations of "mercenary" between the tenth and twentieth centuries, while Beowulf does get treasure for his deeds, even negotiates for it beforehand, monetary considerations do not, particularly with Grendel's mother, seem to be his motive, as they were for Hygelac or Hama, or even perhaps for Hengest in the beginning. Herben is, as far as I know, alone in his assessment.

¹¹Stanley B. Greenfield defends the MS *hwæper*, pointing out that "Hrothgar does not know *whether* Grendel's mother has indeed *eaten* Æschere — all he knows is that she has *taken* him." ("Three *Beowulf* Notes: Lines 736b ff., 1331b ff., 1341–1344," in *Medieval Studies in Honor of Lillian Herlands Hornstein*, eds. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Robert R. Raymo, New York: University Press, 1976, pp. 169–72).

¹²Either now or later — the finding of the head on the cliff suggests equally a token to guard against retaliation, as Damico suggests the arm might have been to Heorot (in

here, asks on what does he base this accusation, on something in himself or something intrinsic to the vilified woman? The effect is clear enough. Grendel is brought back to life in what is almost a grotesque parody of the cycle of birth and death, and the sense of Grendel-ness augmented in the *ides aglæcwif* is confirmed. But why does Hrothgar say that he does not know if his accusation is true? The emphasis that the syntactical construction places on *wat*,¹³ along with its participation in the alliteration of the line, imply that some things do not need proof for the obvious conclusions to be drawn. It does not matter what Grendel's mother *is* so much as what she seems to be, what men would have her be. So, the source of what Hrothgar says about her, the source of her evil, on which everything else depends, is not the *ides* herself but the masculine warrior's assumptions of what should be true. This transition is made quite easily and conveniently, and the presence that prevented heroic action (that is, action that is masculine, violent, aggressive, but in the service of the hall and its ruler) is given the shape of uncontrolled, aggressive power, power whose virulence is augmented by its female dimension.

Following the characterization of the power of Grendel's mother, by association, as uncontrolled, pathological, Hrothgar's next words transfer to her the most negative attribute of feuding, its continuation with no apparent end short of the complete annihilation of both sides. Beowulf has been the direct cause of Grendel's death, the direct cause therefore of the existence of Grendel's avenger, but the aspect of him that excluded him from power when Wealhtheow spoke, that he is a Geat and not a Dane, now protects him. If he had been a Dane, Æschere's kin, *he* might also have been accused of advancing the feud, but he is not. Not being related becomes an asset, in direct contrast to the *ides* who is driven by tribal ties to commit atrocities.

1345	ic þæt londbuend	leode mine
	selerædende	secgan hyrde
	þæt hie gesawon	swylce twegen
	micle mearcstapan	moras healdan
	ellorgæstas	ðæra oðer wæs
1350	þæs þe hie gewislicost	gewitan meahton
	idese onlic næs	oðer earmsceapen
	on weres wæstmum	wræclastas træd

¹²(cont'd) "Prymskvíða and Beowulf's Second Fight").

¹³For which see Mary Blockley, "Constraints on Negative Contraction with the Finite Verb and the Syntax of Old English Poetry," *Studies in Philology* 85 (1988): 428–50.

	næfne he wæs mara	bonne ænig man oðer
	þone on geardagum	Grendel nemdon
1355	foldbuende	no hie fæder cunnon
	hwæþer him ænig wæs	ær acenned
	dyrnra gasta	

I land-dwellers heard say that, to my people, to hall-ruler, that they saw two such great march-stalkers hold the moors, other-spirits. Of those, the one was, according as they most certainly could have known, like an ides not at all. The other, created-miserable/power-shaped, in the growth of a man, trod exile-paths, except that he was more than any other man. That one in olden days was named Grendel by earth-dwellers. Not at all did they know of a father, whether there was any to them before born of hidden/secret/obscure/remote/magical spirits.

Hrothgar's lack of knowledge has allowed him to attribute feuding and uncontrolled aggression to this new threat to his hall, to the *ides aglæcwif*, to link tribal ties to female power and to violence, with the effect of ultimately undermining Wealhtheow's wise words. He continues not to know for certain, building a picture of evil from that lack of knowledge, using his own ignorance as a vehicle for distancing the *ides*, by implication attributing to both the priestess and the wise woman knowledge that is suspect because it is secret, isolating them from the rest of the hall.

He does not know, but has heard of these two creatures. The source of his information is not the wise men in the hall, but the people who live on the edges of civilization, out on the land, people he does not even consider "my people." *Lond* (= *land*), in *londbuend* (1345), refers to specific physical spaces and to the country rather than to the town; *fold*, in *foldbuende* (1355), has a broader use, extending at one extreme to the soil in particular and to the world at large at the other. The proximity of the two terms, their common referent, their common ending of *-buend*, say that these people are not of the hall, but neither are they outcasts like the march-stalkers on the moors. They stand between the centre (the hall) and the edges of the world, the marches, in a place analogous to the position of the *ides* priestess mediating between gods and men. They themselves are somewhat unknown quantities. Too their knowledge is both immediate (*hie gesawon* [1347]) and from long ago, (*on geardagum* [1354]), so that it appears that they know things in a different way, know about different things than townspeople know about. That kind of knowledge is not exactly suspect, but it is hard to assess in terms of reliability and applicability to a world that does not have the same degree of intimacy with nature they seem to experience. At the same time, because their knowledge is of this special kind, it

reflects on the *ides* herself. That they know about this *ides* who patrols the moors puts her also into a special category, one involving nature and mystery and ancient lore.

Having seen the two march-stalkers on the moor, these land people report that she is not like an *ides*.¹⁴ But we know for certain that she *is* an *ides*, and the Danes have experienced her as having the qualities of a *mægd*, although their perception is understandably clouded and not entirely to be relied on. If these land people have a sensitivity, an understanding different to hall-people, then what does it mean for her to be an *ides* and yet not to be like one? Has the taking of *Æschere* changed what she is? Or can she change shape at will? There are no answers to these questions, for Hrothgar or for the *Beowulf* audience, no way of knowing what this creature is, no way of separating bewitched perception from reality, superstition from truth. And in that inability to know, the *ides* who is a priestess, who is wise with the wisdom of time past, begins to change, not by her own volition but by the will of the warrior and his ruler, into what we in the twentieth century understand by a witch, a woman who uses the powers of the devil to gain power for herself, who uses *dyrne cræft* to enslave or even kill men who do not willingly do her bidding.¹⁵

The particular kind of mysteriousness that surrounds his mother now includes Grendel, too, in the father who was not known, in the *dyrne gasta* to which they may or may not be related. Here, too, is the sense of secret things, mysteries outside the ken of ordinary, trustworthy people. And in the absence or unimportance of a father is matrilinearity become matriarchy. The *ides*, as she is priestess, has changed into someone with arcane knowledge, and as she is a wise woman, a hall counsellor, a mother, she has become someone who uses that knowledge for her own ends. Never again can Wealhtheow participate in the ruling of her hall, never again can she say "men do as I say," never again can she exercise her power as an *ides*, without being seen to be a matriarch, a tyrant, a woman who dominates men and orders their lives to increase her own personal power. And Hildeburh too is cut

¹⁴Taking *næs* as an adverb, see Clark Hall dictionary entry, an alternative to emending *onlic næs* to *onlicnes*, the effect of which is to eliminate the negative.

¹⁵See Meaney ("The *Ides* of the Cotton Gnostic Poem") on the *ides* who uses *dyrne cræft* to get her man. The recent movement to regain the original status of witchcraft (or *wicce cræft*) has unfortunately not yet become widely enough accepted or understood to change common usage or perception.

off from the power to intercede between men and the gods; she can never again become the medium through which men can experience a power greater than themselves without being labelled "witch."

	hie dygel lond	
	warigeađ wulfhleoþu	windige næssas
	frecne fengelad	đær fyrgenstream
1360	under næssa genipu	niper gewited
	flod under foldan	nis þæt feor heonon
	milgemeanrces	þæt se mere *standeđ
	ofer þæm hongiađ	hrinde bearwas
	wudu wyrstum fæst	wæter oferhelmađ
1365	þær mæg nihta gehwæm	nidwundor seon
	fyr on flode	no þæs frod leofađ
	gumena bearna	þæt þone grund wite
	đeah þe hæđstapa	hundum geswenced
	heorot hornum trum	holtwudu sece
1370	feorran geflymed	ær he feorh seleđ
	aldor on ofre	ær he in wille
	hafelan [. . .]:	nis þæt heoru stow-
	þonon yđgeblond	up astigeđ
	won to wolcnum	þonne wind styreþ
1375	lađ gewidru	ođ þæt lyft drysmaþ
	roderas reotađ	

They guard a hidden/secret/obscure/remote/mysterious land, wolf-slopes, windy cliffs, dangerous/savage fen-paths, where the fyrgen-stream under the cliff darknesses guards underneath, flood under the ground. Is not that far away in mile-measures that that mere stands. Over that hang (sacred) groves of bark, woods dense/fixed/enclosed/fortified with vegetation/roots overshadow the water. There can every night an evil-wonder be seen, fire on the flood. Not at all exists a wise/old [one] of the children of men that knows that bottom of that. Although a heath-stalker, tormented by hounds, a hart with strong horns, searches for the grove, driven from afar, sooner he gives up his living being, life-at-its-end on the bank, than he wishes in [to ...?] the head. That (holy) place is not secure. From there/then a wave-surge rises up, dark to the clouds. Then wind stirs evil/hostile weather, until that air becomes obscure, heavens weep.

Hildeburh, Wealhtheow, and Grendel's mother are all *idesa*, and until Hrothgar's description of Grendel's mother to Beowulf, there has remained a connection between them, a partial if not complete identity. But Hrothgar's not-knowing separates Grendel's mother from the other two. Making ignorance a positive force, he makes *ides* power evil, dangerous, anti-social. But Wealhtheow is not a matriarch, and Hildeburh is not a witch. Grendel's mother becomes finally something other even than them. Then, like the spring breakup that freed Hengest's spirit from the bonds of non-aggressive behaviour, the full power of Hrothgar's words is released to mould and shape this newly alien power, this *ides* power, into the very essence of evil.

The description of the mere has been justifiably called one of the finest pieces of Old English lyric poetry left to us.¹⁶ No longer bound to even relatively human terms, it expands to create a whole landscape over which the influence of Grendel's mother can be felt. The influence is reciprocal, as Edward B. Irving, Jr. observes: "it is where she lives that gives her most of her being."¹⁷ *Dygel lond* alliterates with *dyrne gæsta*, and the sense of dangerous mysteries expands, taking us immediately into an unsympathetic landscape whose characteristics are not separate from the creatures that inhabit it. It is magical, alien, and full of unidentifiable dangers, a landscape of the imagination, perhaps, but one that has more reality than the most vivid of nightmares. It also has a concreteness, a feeling of being a physical place, a place anyone might encounter when they were fully wide awake. The shape of the evil that inhabits this place is also of the physical earth. The wolf-slopes, the windy cliffs, the perilous fen-paths are all reflections of a sentient earth. Donald K. Fry¹⁸ points to the many elements of the formulaic "cliff of death" in Hrothgar's description: the cliffs themselves, wolves, darkness and wind. According to Fry, cliffs were associated in this way by both the English and the Scandinavians with death, especially death by suicide (he cites Bede and Roger of Wendover, among others). We can only speculate on the causes of these associations, and whether they would have meant much more to the original *Beowulf* audience than to us, though there is considerable evidence that pagan practices did not fade out of the public domain until as late as the thirteenth century.¹⁹ However, even for people hearing the poem without specific pagan knowledge of this kind, the cliffs are linked to both the mysterious power of the whole landscape and to the detail of the paths, usually the only safe part of a fen, lying in wait for those trusting souls who come their way. Between the two, the cliffs also resonate with danger and evil. In fact, right from the beginning, the place is so Other that it comes as a bit of a surprise that it is not physically very far away. And that, too, becomes part of the awful mystery, that such a place could be so

¹⁶As demonstrated by Charles Frey in "Lyric in Epic: Hrothgar's Depiction of the Haunted Mere (*Beowulf*: 1357b-76a)," *English Studies* 58 (1977): 296-303.

¹⁷In *A Reading of Beowulf*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968, p. 115.

¹⁸In "The Cliff of Death In Old English Poetry," *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, John Miles Foley, ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1987), pp. 213-233.

¹⁹See William A. Chaney, "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England," *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960): 197-217.

close to home.

If it is nearby, then where is this terrible place in which lives the power of the *ides*? Arguments have located it on an inlet of the sea, as a freshwater lake away from the sea, with mountains (on account of the cliffs and the *fyrgenstream* [1359]²⁰) and so on. Because of the *wulfhleapu*, the *fengelad*, the *flod under foldan*, and later the *fyr on flode*, the will-o'-the-wisp, the ghost-fire (1366), the physical place appears to be fenland, its "cliffs" more sharp drop-offs into watery holes or craggy outcroppings than towering slabs of rock. Between solid land and open sea, fen is both earth and water, and it is neither, a treacherous place where those who do not know their way could easily disappear without a trace. It is a land most suitable to house the aggressive alien *ides* power that is the warrior's creation.

This place of contradictions is also, according to Hrothgar's choice of words, a place whose surface might seem rather ordinary to the unwary. But beneath that surface there lies a dark danger, mysterious and ancient. Hrothgar is considerably non-specific about the nature and source of this danger, this evil power. That lack of detail, of specific reference, like his lack of knowledge about the events in the hall, contributes to the overall effect of evil so destructive that only very special people can even bear to know it in more than a very general way. The place seems concrete enough: it is a *mere* surrounded by a *bearu* which is either firmly rooted in the earth or almost impenetrably dense. However, Roberta Frank²¹ points out that only in prose did *mere* stand for "specific, real-life or literary, pools or

²⁰A great deal has been written about the meaning of *fyrgen-*, none of it unfortunately conclusive. It figures large in the scholarly argument between W.W. Lawrence and W.S. Mackie over the placement of the mere (inland or by the sea) and the placement of the hall (underwater or under a waterfall), and therefore over the nature of the setting for the confrontation (see W.S. Mackie, "The Demons' Home in Beowulf," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 37 [1938]: 455-61, and William Witherle Lawrence, "Grendel's Lair," *JEGP* 38 [1939]: 477-80). Lawrence translates *fyrgen-* as "mountain-," the most usual translation — Wrenn, Wyatt-Chambers, Klaeber, Clark Hall, and Bosworth-Toller, for instance, all prefer this meaning. Bosworth-Toller give as a reference, as their reason for choosing "mountain" or "mountain-woodland," *Þor on fyrgen hæfde*: Thor had a dwelling on a mountain. *Place Names II* also chooses "mountain," but admits that "the ultimate etymology is obscure"(p. 171). Mackie argues that *fyrgen-* probably had lost whatever meaning it might once have had, because outside *Beowulf fyrgenstream* "seems always to mean 'the sea'."

²¹In "'Mere' and 'Sund': Two Sea-Changes in *Beowulf*," *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature*, Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, Fred C. Robinson, eds. (Toronto: University Press, 1986), pp. 153-172.

lakes, whose locations, dimensions, and qualities were known." In Old English poetry, the word signified "terrestrial water, elemental, corporeal and churning" (154). This makes it an appropriate term to be used for the sea in general, as one characteristic of large bodies of water is always the sense one gets of intrinsic power, manifest during stormy weather but present even on the calmest summer day. The *Beowulf* poet generally uses *mere*, either as a simplex or in combination, in this way.²² And here, at 1362, at the bottom of the death cliff, *mere* appears especially potent, elemental, naturally powerful. And *bearu* is similarly both an ordinary clump of trees and a very special place, a place, as Turville-Petre points out,²³ that refers to a forest, a sacred grove, or even a temple where there are rock and stones at which sacrifices to the spirits of the land were made.

Taking the two prosaic meanings together, the place is a lake or a pond that is a little bit forbidding on account of the dense vegetation. However, the other meanings make quite a different impression. The water has all the power of the sea confined within a fortification of trees, and a once-sacred place literally draws that elemental power from the depths of the earth by deep roots. The lack of knowledge of the old/wise men confirms Hrothgar's implication that not-knowing is trustworthy, to know suspect. Together, the two superimposed images reflect *ides* power as it has been "demonstrated" in Hildeburh, then in Wealhtheow, and now in Grendel's mother. It is an apparently harmless, though somewhat awe-inspiring thing in the *ides* priestess and the *ides* wise woman, who perhaps experience but do not necessarily understand the nature of the power they have. But it reveals its true evil in unspeakable mysteries through the *ides aglæcwif* mother. As with the *mere*, the women themselves are not evil, only the power that flows through them when they behave as aggressive *idesa*, only when they join hands with Grendel's mother.

To this place in the fen comes the *heorot*, the deer that seeks out the grove. Here, too, is further indication of a power whose quality is unknown and therefore not to be

²²There are 5 occurrences (all in complex words) in the Breca stories, taking Hunferth's and Beowulf's versions together: 502, 514, 533, 549, 558. Beowulf coming to Denmark and returning each have one (also complex), at 255 and 1905. Twice the simplex describes the place Grendel goes to die (845, 855), and once it refers to the sea Hengest chose not to cross (1130). And five times it is used in connection with Grendel's mother: 1362, 1663, *mere*; 1449, 2100 *meregrund*; 1519, *merewif*.

²³In *Myth and Religion of the North*, p. 236.

trusted. It might be that the deer is looking for any sanctuary, but would rather face the hunters than encounter the evil it senses in this place. It might also be that it stands, through its name, for Heorot, the hall, or for the generalized Christian man exposed to the evils of pagan worship, which is equivalent to the evils of hell.²⁴ Or, it may be, as Helterman describes it, an animal, particularly a deer, being used in pre-Christian times to identify a sacred place²⁵ — Helterman assumes the sacred place to be Heorot. However, the first thing it is called is heath-stalker, *hæðstapa*, just as Grendel's mother and Grendel were called by Hrothgar *mearcstapan* of the *moras*, march-stalkers of the moors (1348). So, it might also be that this deer is somehow connected to Grendel's mother instead of to the hall, to the implied but unstated mysteries.²⁶ And, too, *stow*, like *bearu*, originally referred (also in pre-Christian times) to just such a place, somewhere that was holy, either outdoors or a temple, a place of assembly.²⁷ So, which deer is Hrothgar referring to? He does not know, knows only that the deer behaved strangely, or he has chosen not to say what he means. Either way, by not being specific, by being mysterious he contributes more terror, more evil, to the scene than even the most explicit references to devil worship or ancient animal or even human sacrifices could come close to doing.

Hrothgar completes his description of this place of veiled evil that characterizes Grendel's mother with an image of the physical, elemental power that is held confined, and which periodically flows out over the world in the form of bad weather. This is the culmination of the evil power of the *ides*, of the real danger that Grendel's mother represents to man. For here, in this place, arises, not all weather, not the bright breezes of spring, not the fair winds that hurry the ring-prowed ships along. From here comes only

²⁴For which interpretations see D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medæval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," *Speculum* 26 (1951): 24 ff.; and Paul Beekman Taylor, "Heorot, Earth, and Asgard: Christian Poetry and Pagan Myth," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 11 (1966): 119–130.

²⁵"*Beowulf*: The Archetype Enters History," p. 12. Helterman cites Mircea Eliade (*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 369) on this point.

²⁶Marija Gimbutas, in *The Language of the Goddess*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) Chapter 13, describes various ways, for instance in which the deer was linked to very old fertility goddess cults throughout Europe.

²⁷See A.H. Smith, *The Place-Name Elements*, Part II, *The English Place-Name Society*, Volume 26 (Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 158–161.

bad weather, winter storms, the kind of weather that expresses a nature actively unfriendly to man, not a nature of which man is simply a part. The power of nature that was in *ides* mother, that augmented the power of the *ides* priestess, the *ides* wise woman, has in Grendel's mother become a force specifically and fundamentally against men. And in the image of the wave-surge that rises to the clouds is the third and final echo that ties together, not Hildeburh, Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother, but the *ides* priestess before whom the warriors *astah* (1118) to the clouds, the *ides* wise woman before whose passage through the bright hall the mirth *astah* (1160), and the *ides* mother, from whose home the winds continually *astigæð* (1373). They are no longer one, but their power is, and in each of them that power is now evil in a way that it was not before the warrior's perspective shaped a monster from his own fear of domination, from his own need to be important.

	nu is se ræd gelang	
eft æt þe anum	eard git no const	
frecne stowe	ðær þu findan miht	
felasinnigne secg	sec gif þu dyrre	
1380 ic þe þa fæhde	feo leanige	
ealdgestreorum	swa ic ær dyde	
*wund[num] golde	gyf þu on weg cymest	

Now is that help available a second time from you. The place yet you do not know, the dangerous (holy) place where you can find the very wicked warrior/sea/sedge, seek if you dare. I then with riches will repay you for the vendetta, with ancient treasure, as I before did, wound gold, if you go on the journey."

Only now, now that the *ides* power that is Grendel's mother has been completely characterized as evil, only now does Hrothgar ask for Beowulf's help. He offers riches for Beowulf's services, and while this is appropriate for both Hrothgar to offer and Beowulf to receive as tribute, it makes apparent that the warrior has been changed as much as the *ides* has. The more she has become part of the place in which she lives, the more "international" he looks, the less important the distinction between Dane and Geat that stood between warrior and ruler. The more dangerous she appears, the safer the power of the warrior, the more likely it seems only to be used against the enemies of the hall, the less likely to cause violence and death within it. The more she becomes the epitome of evil, the more he looks like the embodiment of all that is good in the world. The more she characterizes the power of all women, the more he becomes all men, and the more it is certain that he must be the one to deal with her.

Hrothgar asks Beowulf to seek out the *eard*, which is a *stow*, where there is *secg*. He does not tell him what he wants done there, nor does he have to. *Eard* has a concrete meaning. It refers to physical ground, solid earth, "land, as opposed to water," according to the Bosworth-Toller entry, a place with which one has a physical relationship. The plea for help, the conditional *gif* (1379), and the promise of treasure, suggest that Beowulf has yet to decide whether or not he will seek out this place. But *eard*, as a place with which one has a physical relationship, suggests instead that somehow he is already linked to it, that there is no question that he is already on his way there. But the *eard* is also a *stow*, a place that is both everyday and once-holy. When *stow*, as a variation of *eard*, is only a geographical location, then there is no terror. Its dangers are only topographical, the secrets of the *dygel lond* are only there because it has not yet been explored, and the *mere* is simply a pond. On the other hand, when *stow* is a place of ancient rites, then as a variation of *eard* it makes sinister whatever it is that draws Beowulf towards it. When it is both, the *eard* that is a *stow* sums up what Hrothgar has been describing, an apparently innocuous place that for some unknown and probably unknowable reason, radiates a dangerous power.

The third element in this series is *secg*, which as a masculine noun can be "sedge" (the plant that grows in fenland), "man," or rather the warrior whose spear is shaped like the leaf of a sedge plant (Bosworth-Toller entry), or "sea," but the usual gloss here is only "man," not even "warrior." However, "man" would make Hrothgar's statement a little suspect, since there has been no indication to this point that in all his not-knowing he has had any doubts as to the sex of the person who has invaded his hall, and killed his thane (not unless not looking like an *ides* makes one appear to be a man).²⁸ But, Grendel's mother is a warrior, even though she is a woman. Applied to her, the term, like *wrecend*, becomes the description of an activity that men consider their personal domain, rather than the designation of the person who performs that activity. Unlike *wrecend* that was intimately tied to *grendles modor*, tied also to *ides* who was *aglæcwif*, *secg* stands alone, not adding masculine power to feminine, but supplanting it. Grendel's mother has already been identified with the place she inhabits, already separated from the women in the hall. She now loses even the female nature of her power. And with that loss is also a loss of recognition that

²⁸In spite of Paul Beckman Taylor's argument, in "Beowulf's Second Grendel Fight," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86.1 (1985): 62-69, that his characterization of Grendel's mother is not clear.

there is such a thing as female power, as *ides* power under the sun. The other women lose whatever power remained in *their* femininity, to be bonds-of-peace through motherhood, to participate in the power of the earth through the bringing of new life into the world.

"Warrior" is one meaning of *secg* that is appropriate to Grendel's mother, and both "sedge" and "sea," although not equivalent to each other, are independently appropriate to the place Hrothgar has been describing. *Secg* as "sea" recalls the *mere* waters, the enclosure of the sea's might in a small place. *Secg* as "sedge" is the fenland, watery land, land in which the presence of water makes it dangerous. The triple meaning of *secg* therefore brings together and makes one the place and its inhabitant, its physical presence and its elemental power. This is no longer even a place inhabited by evil creatures who have transformed it by their presence. It has become something far more ancient, a place that *is* the creature, a place that makes even calling it a *stow*, a place of worship, seem almost modern. And yet all this lies below the surface of an innocuous *eard*, its dangers hidden from the innocent, from those who have no knowledge of its nature. Those dangers evidently are quite real, nevertheless, and are now inseparable from the dangers of the *ides*, who too appears harmless to those who do not know what lies beneath the surface.

By the time Hrothgar has finished describing Grendel's mother, and particularly the place in which she is to be found, there is no question that Beowulf will go after her, nor is there any question about the way the fight will turn out. Beowulf is no longer a young man out to prove himself, nor even a champion winning fame and fortune for his people. The power of the *ides* has been successfully converted from a non-aggressive, positive feminine force within the hall into an aggressive, masculine force outside it. The aggressive masculine force within the hall has, by this transformation, become able to take over whatever spaces the evacuation of *ides* power left behind, has become the only force for order, has made possible the promotion of warrior to hero, and the entrenchment of masculine supremacy in all aspects of hall life, even in the perception of its inhabitants.

* * *

The warrior perspective that separated itself from the general human perspective of the hall has succeeded in imposing itself on the world, has succeeded in creating its own version

of an *ides*, which as Hrothgar observes does not look like one at all, but which nonetheless has a more profound and lasting effect on everyone inside Heorot than the *idesa* from whom she was made. As a result of her existence, the priestess has become a witch, the wise woman a matriarch, and the mother a passive receptacle where man can plant his seed.

Beowulf replaces Wealtheow as wise counsel to the ruler, and Hildeburh as healer of the wounds of death. He counters Hrothgar's lyric poetry with a series of gnomic statements that verge on the prosaic. He sounds very statesmanly, willing to take on leadership when necessary, and he does so by expressing an everyday wisdom in generalized form. The three statements he chooses are appropriate to the situation, reflecting social reality, reinforcing social mores, and delivering gentle criticism in the most diplomatic way possible.²⁹ The social reality is that *Æschere* is dead, and worthy of being avenged; he lived his life fully; and he gained glory during that life. According to the customs of heroic society, Grendel's mother acted as can be expected, and as Beowulf will act on Hrothgar's behalf; like *Æschere*, Beowulf wishes to live his life to the end and gain glory — this situation provides him with the opportunity. And finally, Hrothgar has been over-reacting, making too much of both *Æschere*'s death and his killer. He should accept death as inevitable and concentrate on life. Beowulf's words replace those of both Hildeburh and Wealtheow, the advisor and the one who consoles. Their power has been driven from the hall; the warrior's has expanded to fill the void.

Beowulf rushes eagerly over the difficult ground, leading the way³⁰ with the wise men Hrothgar has provided. The place towards which they speed retains the general physical features of the place Hrothgar described, but without its supernatural power. The killing of the *nicor* is more of a hunt than a battle.³¹ The ascent to Hero is acknowledged by the

²⁹T. A. Shippey discusses these functions of the gnome in "Maxims in Old English Narrative," pp. 34, 40.

³⁰See Kenneth Kee, "*Beowulf* 1408 ff.: A Discussion and a Suggestion" *MLN* 75.5: May, 1960): 385-9, on Beowulf as the one who leads, rather than Hrothgar.

³¹As Laurel Braswell points out, in "The Horn at Grendel's Mere: *Beowulf* 1417-41" (*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 [1973]: 466-72). Bernard Huppé sees things the other way round: "implicit in the image of the deadly hunting game is the reflection of the menacing monsters in mutually menacing men" (in "Nature in *Beowulf* and *Roland*," *Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages*, Lawrence D. Roberts, ed., Binghamton, N.Y.: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies [SUNY], 1982, p. 11).

ritual arming, which also confirms Beowulf's human-ness and his masculine superiority. In this, too, he takes over the more general role of the *idesa*, their active creative contribution to the continuation of the tribe. Damico remarks that "the arming of Beowulf prior to his battle with Grendel's mother marks the prince as the champion and savior of his world. His byrnie. . . distinguishes him as the heir and, hence, the defender of both supernatural and historical order."³² And George Clark comments that "arms and armor in *Beowulf* are human artifacts, instances of *man's* creative power and *his* control over nature; they are status symbols, tokens of order and degree in human society; they are heirlooms, reminders of the continuity of the race and the mortality of the individual."³³ In other words, they are the masculine equivalent of female reproductive power.

The presenting of Hrunting by Hunferth suggests nothing ominous, rather the power of the Hero to win over and to represent all those in the hall against the awesome power of the lake we have just felt, for Hrunting is a great sword. The statement of his capitulation and the acceptance of his own inability to protect the hall, in conjunction with the giving of the sword, effectively adds the power he once had, the power he shared with the *ides*, to Beowulf's own power in battle. Hrunting eventually fails, of course, but is replaced by another sword, the magic sword whose hilt commemorates the Flood (1688-1698), the sword whose blade melts like ice, in repetition of the loosening of the bonds around Hengest's heart, the sword that above all affirms the power of the Father (1609), the true God (1611). It would seem that Hrunting, the sword of the *þyle*, takes the Hero as far as it can and then is succeeded by the weapon of a higher god. But they are both swords, both weapons, both instruments of masculine aggressive power. And, as if the struggle for masculine supremacy had already been won, before he leaves, Beowulf overrules Wealhtheow's earlier advice by accepting Hrothgar as his foster-father, and dispenses treasure to Hunferth as a reward for service.

So now the stage is set for the classic mythological battle between the forces of good (male-dominant, hierarchical, martial) and the forces of evil (female-participatory, co-responsible, family-based), and it runs pretty much according to form. There is a clear

³²In "Þrymskvíða and Beowulf's Second Fight," p. 419.

³³"Beowulf's Armor," *ELH* 32.4 (Dec. 1965): 409-441. Emphasis mine.

distinction between who/what is good and who/what is evil. And there is no doubt as to the final outcome of the contest. It has been noted that this is the only one of the three fights in which the poet does not tell us beforehand who will win. But then this is the only fight in which there is no question. As Adrien Bonjour points out, "the only element of surprise in that second adventure is to be found in the fierceness of the fight, and the hero's narrow escape, not in the outcome itself which is never really questioned."³⁴ When Beowulf fought Grendel, he was untested. The story of Breca had two interpretations, so we could not be sure of the outcome, no matter how impressive Beowulf's bearing and verbal skills. He might conceivably have not been up to the task. Against the dragon, Beowulf is now a certified hero, having proven himself in many situations, but he is old, and so again the outcome is not entirely certain. But this central fight is different. Here, Beowulf is not the young man proving himself to the world, nor is he the old king facing the inevitability of death (in one form or other). He is the Hero and his opponent the Hag, woman made over to reflect, not woman as she is, but a grotesque exaggeration of all the aspects of woman that threaten man the warrior, man the ruler.³⁵ And when she dies, the world changes.

³⁴In "The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*," in *Twelve Beowulf Papers 1940-1960 with Additional Comments* (Neuchâtel: University Press, 1962), p. 24. Bonjour's is a reevaluation of his own earlier observation that it is the only one of the three fights whose outcome is not known before it happens ("Grendel's Dam and the Composition of *Beowulf*," *English Studies* 30 [1949]: 117-8).

³⁵Arthur G. Brodeur's explanation for the trouble Beowulf has against her, *even though* her strength is less, is telling: "What gives the combat its quality of singular danger, and brings the hero close to death, is that he must fight under conditions which, at two critical points [the water blurs his vision, and after grabbing Grendel's mother, he stumbles], make it impossible for him to exert his full strength," (in "Design for Terror in the Purging of Heorot," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 53 [1954]:503-13). Apparently, this is more difficult than being unarmed in a darkened hall against a proven killer of thirty men. Or is the problem that Grendel's mother is just not behaving as a woman should?

APPENDIX A: IDES

Originally (according to Jacob Grimm and endorsed by Bosworth-Toller),

the OHG. *itis* pl. *itisi*, OS. *ides* pl. *idisi*, AS. *ides* pl. *idesa*, denotes *femina* in general, and can be used of maids or matrons, rich or poor. Yet, like the Greek *νύμφη*, it seems even in the earliest times to have been applied to superhuman beings, who [were] considered lower than goddesses and higher than earthly women.¹

Also, "The OHG. *itis*, AS. *ides*, is the same as the ON. *dís* pl. *dísir*" (402). More recently, E.O.G. Turville-Petre has pointed out that this etymology is not accepted by all philologists, but he is also quick to note that even if *ides* is not a derivative of ON. *dís*, there is enough similarity between the two for their meanings to have influenced each other, and especially for poets to have taken advantage of it.²

But who are these *dísir* who are probably the closest thing we have to ancestors of the Old English *idesa*? Grimm says of them only that they are half-goddesses, handmaids to the gods, prophetesses to men (397). H. R. Ellis Davidson includes them with land-spirits, guardian spirits and fertility deities.³ She points out that the term *dísir* covers a lot of territory, and attributes this to what appears to be a confusion of characteristics between *dísir* and valkyries. Turville-Petre also recognizes a blending of *dísir* and *norns* (fate-goddesses), of *dísir* and *landvættir* (protective spirits associated with a particular location). Nevertheless, his best evidence suggests that *dísir* in general were guardian spirits of a family or of a single person or of an area. They were fertility goddesses, possibly as part of their function of supporting and helping the clan to prosper both through abundant food and through the fertility of its women. The *dísir* were protectors of the gods as well. Freyja, a goddess in her own right of gold and jewels, a witch and a magician, was the *dís* of the Vanir (fertility gods and goddesses). And the valkyries were the *dísir* of Óðinn, god of war, suggesting not only a link between birth and death, but also between protector and servant or hand-maiden. Finally, Turville-Petre notes that the term was sometimes used to refer also

¹In *Teutonic Mythology*, Vol. 1., trans. James Steven Stallybrass (London: George Bell & Sons, 1882), p. 397.

²See *Myth and Religion of the North* (New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1964), pp. 221-7.

³In *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse: University Press, 1988), Chapter IV.

to high-ranked earthly women, to which loss of divinity he attributes the influence of the Old English *ides* (OHG. *itis*), who he claims were definitely mortal. Nevertheless, even for the two (*disir* and *idesa*) to interact in this way, there would have to have been an intrinsic notional connection between the mortal *ides* and the divine *dis*, a connection of the kind, perhaps, described by Tacitus. Of the Germanic tribes of the first century, he says:

. . . they believe that there resides in women an element of holiness and a gift of prophecy; and so they do not scorn to ask their advice, or lightly disregard their replies.

They showed women "a reverence untainted by servile flattery or any pretense of turning women into goddesses." [That is, goddesses after the Roman style.]⁴ The interweaving of mortal and divine characteristics is reflected in the gods as well, as Grimm's description of the valkyries shows. He says of them that

to perform their office, they must have wisdom and supernatural powers at their command: their wisdom spies out, nay, guides and arranges complications in our destiny, warns of danger, advises in difficulty. . . therefore they are called wise women (400).

Nowhere in Old English poetry, with the exception of Grendel's mother, is *ides* used to refer to any kind of superhuman being, so they are not *disir*, not goddesses. They are, however, powerful. There are a few poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record* in which no particular conclusions can be drawn about the extended meaning of *ides*,⁵ but for the rest, the *ides* is always a woman of power. She is not a woman who exercises the masculine kind of power we have to come to look on as the only kind there is. Her power is feminine, the kind of power that is also reflected in the feminine power of *disir*, *landvættir*, *norns* and *valkyries*. The power of the *ides* is frequently related to fertility, to maternity and to sexuality. *Idesa* use words rather than weapons,⁶ and they exercise power most often by

⁴*The Agricola and the Germania*, trans. H. Mattingly, rev. S.A. Handford (London: Penguin, 1948), p. 108.

⁵*Creed* 14: the Virgin Mary is "immaculate" *ides*;

Andreas 1638: "newly-converted" *ides*;

Guthlac 983: Eve is *ides* when, having been herself poisoned, she in turn poisons Adam;

Guthlac 1232: *weras ond idesa*, men and women "unenlightened by God;"

Juliana 116: Juliana herself is not referred to, but "some other *ides*" from whom Eleusius can get love. Both Mary (the mother of God) and Eve (the mother of Man) might, of course, be said to be women of power, but there is nothing in these poems to tell us whether or not *ides* is being used to indicate this particular trait.

⁶The two exceptions to this are Judith and Grendel's mother. Judith uses a sword and kills

winning over (or seducing) their opponents rather than dominating or conquering them by force, either physical or political. And for this they value the learning, the *lar*, that makes them wise women.

Judith (Table I) has the feminine sexual power of the *ides*, but because she uses it in the service of God, she is apparently protected from its evil.⁷ A virgin, she is an *ides* whose sexual attractiveness and wisdom are a weapon against Holofernus.⁸ He can only see her sexuality: at l. 14, through Holofernus' eyes she is "elf-shining *ides*."⁹ Later when she is brought to his tent, that image of her is corrected by the poet — she is "wise *ides*," but

⁶(cont'd) a man, but her actions can hardly be called warrior-like, since Holofernus is comatose with drink when she does it. And Grendel's mother owes her aggressiveness to being both *ides* and *aglæcwif*, a relationship that is discussed at some length in Chapter IV.

⁷Beowulf performs the same alchemy with the power of the *aglæca*, converting its potential for evil into positive strength and prowess, something only possible for someone with heroic status. See Doreen M.E. Gillam, "The Use of the Term 'Æglæca' in *Beowulf* at Lines 893 and 2592," *Studia Germanica Gandensia* 3 (1961): 145-69; and "A Method for Determining the Connotations of Old English Words," *Studia Germanica Gandensia* 6 (1964): 85-101. See also the Sigemund-Heremod "digression," of which Jeff Opland (in "From Horseback to Monastic Cell: The Impact on English Literature of the Introduction of Writing," in *Old English Literature in Context*. John D. Niles, ed. [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980] p. 33) says "Sigemund and Heremod serve as poetic metaphors for Beowulf: his prowess is as great as Sigemund's, but he should beware of inviting a fate similar to Heremod's." This is only one of the ways in which Beowulf and Judith are alike. There are many comparisons: see for instance, Jane Mushabac, "*Judith* and the Theme of *Sapientia et Fortitudo*," *Massachusetts Studies in English* 4 (1973): 3-12; R. E. Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*," *Studia Philologia* 5 (1958): 423-56, and "*Sapientia et Fortitudo* in the Old English *Judith*," in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early in Early English in Honor of Morton W. Blomfield*, Larry D. Benson & Siegfried Wenzel, eds. (Western Mich. University, Kalamazoo: Medieval Inst. Publications, 1982) pp. 13-29, 264-8; David K. Crowne, "The Hero on the Beach," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 61 (1960): 362-72; Donald K. Fry, "The Heroine on the Beach in *Judith*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68 (1967): 168-84; and for an analysis of phrases common to both, see William Whallon, *Formula, Character and Context* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1969), pp. 98-101.

⁸One kind of virgin, according to the OED, is a woman who has been widowed and who has not taken another husband, ref. the Vulgate story from which the Old English *Judith* takes its origin if not its style. Judith is also called a *mægd* and a *meowle*, suggesting that our understanding of these other words may be as incomplete as it is for *ides*. Even if we assume the poet simply erased Judith's marriage, her choice to put herself and her maid in the kind of jeopardy she does is in the least unmaidenly, unvirginal, in the modern understanding of those words.

⁹According to Tolkien ("On Fairy Stories," in "*The Monsters and the Critics*" and *Other Essays*, Christopher Tolkien, ed. [London:George Allen & Unwin, 1983], pp. 109-161) because elves are part of nature lore, "elfish" or "elf-shining" has an undertone of sexual attraction about it when applied to humans: "at least part of the magic that they wield for the good or evil of man is power to play on the desires of his body and his heart" (113).

TABLE I: Judith, Genesis B, Elene

<i>Ides</i> occurrence	Variations	Other designations for women called <i>ides</i>
<u>JUDITH: Judith and her maid</u>		
(14) <i>ides ælfscinu</i>		(35) <i>eadigan mægð</i>
(55) <i>snoteran idese</i>	(56) <i>halige meowle</i>	(43) <i>torhtan mægð</i>
(58) <i>beorhtan idese</i>		(74) <i>nergendes þeowen þrymful</i>
(109) <i>ides ellenrof</i>		(78) <i>scyppendes mægð</i>
(128) <i>blachleor ides</i>	(127) <i>foregenda</i>	(125) <i>snotere mægð</i>
(133) <i>idesa</i>	(135) <i>eadhreðige mægð</i>	(171) <i>gleawe</i>
(146) <i>ides ellenrof</i>	(145) <i>searðoncol mægð</i>	(172) <i>ðinenne</i>
	(148) <i>gleawhydig wif</i>	(176) <i>æðele</i>
		(334) <i>mægð modigre</i>
<u>GENESIS B: Eve</u>		
(589) <i>idese</i>		(456) <i>wif</i>
(626) <i>idesa scenost</i>	<i>wifa wlitegost, handgeweorc heofoncyninges</i>	(457) <i>freo fægroste</i>
(700) <i>idese sciene</i>	<i>wifa wlitegost</i>	(526) <i>bryd</i>
(704) <i>idesa sceanost</i>	<i>handweorc godes, wif</i>	(526) <i>wlitesciene wif</i>
		(547) <i>wif</i>
(821) <i>idesa scienost</i>	<i>wifa wlitegost, geweorc godes</i>	(649) <i>wif</i>
		(717) <i>wif</i>
		(770) <i>wif</i>
<u>ELENE: Elene</u>		
(229) <i>idesa</i>		<i>wif</i> (223)
(241) <i>ides</i>		<i>cwen</i> (275, 378, 384, 411, 416, 551, 605, 662, 715, 848, 979, 1017, 1129, 1135, 1204, 1169)
(405) <i>ides</i>		<i>leoflic wif</i> (286)
		<i>caeseres mæg</i> (669)
		<i>hæledum scead</i> (719)
		<i>wif</i> (1131)
		<i>þeodcwen</i> (1155)

Holofernus sees only that as before she is a "bright *ides*" (55, 58). Once Holofernus is dead, we see Judith (and at times her attendant) as *ides* who is brave (209), bold (133), "with pale cheeks" (128), that is, beautiful without the same sense of radiant sexuality, and heroic (133, 146). Finally, as Judith receives treasure in thanks from the Hebrew warriors,

she is *ides*, both bright and ready-witted (340). Because she is heroic, she is able to turn the dangerous sexual magnetism that goes with the wisdom of the *ides* to her advantage and to the advantage of her people.¹⁰

In *Genesis B*, Eve is *ides* first when Satan has perverted her thinking (589), and from then on she is *ides scienost*, most shingly beautiful woman (626, 700, 704, 821). This emphasis on her beauty coincides with her seduction of Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. As well as *ides*, she is *wif*, the most all-encompassing word for "woman," an indication that she represents all women, that all women are made by God, are beautiful, but that we have all been perverted by the devil's *lar*, by non-Christian wisdom. Margaret J. Ehrhart¹¹ argues that the weapon the devil uses to pervert Eve in *Genesis B* is *lar* (knowledge/counsel); this *lar* then becomes Eve's weapon against Adam, and hence "the temptation [becomes] a power play between Adam and Eve." In conjunction with her receiving Satan's perverted *lar*, Eve becomes a shining *ides*.

Elene, mother of Constantine, is called *ides* (ll. 229, 241) when she is leading a sea expedition on a holy war to find the true cross; she is also *ides* (405) when she commands the Jews to find someone to answer her questions. She influences the destinies of men, as mother, and as wise woman, woman whose words are equivalent to the weapons of men. All three times, *ides* stands alone to characterize her, as if that were all that was necessary. Elsewhere, she is usually *cwen*.

¹⁰Helen Damico provides an alternative view of the *idesa*, finding in the poet's handling of Elene, Judith, Juliana and Wealhtheow martial overtones (In *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, [Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984] Ch. 4, pp. 58-86, and in "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature," *Allegorica* 5.2 [Winter, 1980]: 149-167.) appropriate to the association of *disir* with the valkyries. Given the blending, or confusion, of attributes described by Davidson, this is quite possible and in keeping with the total picture each poem gives of the *ides*. However, Elene, Juliana, and Wealhtheow fight only with words, and the beheading of the unconscious Holofernus, although undoubtedly lethal, can hardly be said to be the act of a heroic warrior (compared, for instance, with Beowulf's decision not to wear armour because Grendel does not). And Nietzsche's statement that "she wields a sword to decapitate him in a warlike action more common to the battlefield than the boudoir" (Ch. 3, p. 40, of *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* [Syracuse, NY: University Press, 1986].) does not take into account the scene as the poet paints it.

¹¹"Tempter as Teacher: Some Observations on the Vocabulary of the Old English *Genesis B*," *Neophilologus* 59: 435-45.

TABLE II: Riddles, Maxims II, Precepts

'Ides' Occurrence	Variations
<u>Riddle 46</u> eorla ond idesa	wifum, dohtor
<u>Riddle 61</u> ides	freolicu meowle
<u>Riddle 76</u> idese	
<u>Maxims II</u> ides	fæmne
<u>Precepts</u> idese	

In the poems of wisdom and folk learning (Table II), women are frequently *idesa* in situations in which sexual attractiveness and/or reproductive power are being emphasized. Audrey L. Meaney¹² argues that the *ides* of *Maxims II* is "a woman with magical powers" that she uses to acquire a "friend," a man, for herself. Meaney cites the common belief in folk-lore that there is a bond between human women and the power of magic, especially when it comes to sex.¹³ *Idesa* and sex come together in two of the Riddles as well. In Riddle 46, which is generally accepted as referring to the incestuous family of Lot,¹⁴ the *idesa* are simultaneously daughters and bed companions to the same man, mothers to his children. In the story, the women, the *idesa*, take over the job of continuing the race by seducing their own father (the only member of their tribe available). In them, the nurturing spirit, protector of Lot's family, combines with the Judaic practice of patrilinearity to express this bizarre situation. Riddle 76 is too fragmentary to give any indication of the meaning of *ides*. All we know is that the *ides* sits/presides. The third Riddle in which *ides* is found, #61, is one of the "obscene" riddles. As Edith Whitehurst Williams notes,¹⁵ the riddle

¹²"The *Ides* of the Cotton Gnostic Poem," *Medium Ævum* 48.1 (1979): 23-39.

¹³See also Erica Jong, *Witches* (New York: Abrams, n.d.). Jong attributes the belief to masculine fear of impotence.

¹⁴For which, see *Gen.* 19: 30-38.

¹⁵In "What's So New About the Sexual Revolution?" *Texas Quarterly* 18 (1975): 46-55.

describes sex between an *ides*, and her husband/lord (*frea*), told apparently from the point of view of the vagina, who seems to enjoy the event more than a little. In it, the *ides* is a *meowle*, a maiden or virgin, a woman who perhaps does not yet "belong" to a man. The poem seems quite definitely in favour of women being in control of their own sexual lives, being active participants rather than passive receptacles for male "seed."

The *Genesis A* poet is by far the most frequent user of the term *ides* (28 occurrences from a total of 63, see Table III). The poem is predominantly the history of the establishment of the tribes of Israel, justifying their claim to God's special attention through a direct biological descent from Adam, and so *ides* is repeatedly linked to procreation. A few cases are worth noting. The negative Judeo-Christian attitude towards sexuality in women is reflected in several *idesa*: Eve is disgraced/shameless/indecent, *ides æwiscmod* (896); Cain's wife is *ides* (1054); the devil enters into woman's beauty, *idesa ansien* (the face of the *ides*, 1261), as they marry men from the race of Cain; the women of Sodom and Gomorrah are *idesa*, as are Lot's daughters. Among the women whose main (or only) participation in the chronicle is procreative, Sarah, Abraham's sister/wife, is throughout the long saga of her attempts to bear a son to be Abraham's legitimate heir frequently an *ides*, and so is Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave. Hagar is drawn into the frantic need for an heir for Abraham; she bears him Ishmael and is sent away for her trouble. Hagar, though a servant is *idesa larum*, *bryde larum* (a woman of learning, 2234).

Wealhtheow, the first *ides* of *Beowulf* (Table IV), is queen and bedfellow to a powerful chief (665). She is *ides* wise woman, and clearly has political/social power. *Wisfast wordum*, "strong-in-wisdom with words" (626), she welcomes Beowulf. Last in the line of Danes who extend a welcome to him, her acknowledgement is the most important, bringing together all his qualifications. As Damico¹⁶ cautiously notes: "One can infer . . . that there is an intrinsic significance in Beowulf's making his solemn vow in the presence of Wealhtheow." The coast guard recognizes his heroic appearance, Wulfstan recognizes Beowulf's noble descent; Hrothgar recognizes the ties between the Geats and the Danes that make Beowulf's offer of help appropriate. Hunferth's jealousy is a tacit recognition of Beowulf's potential for fame and glory; and Beowulf's version of the Breca adventure is his own implied judgement of his capabilities. But Wealhtheow, *ides helminga*, names him champion of

¹⁶In *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, p. 12.

TABLE III: Genesis A

'Ides' Occurrence	Variations	Who so designated
(896) ides æwiscmod	freolecu mæg	Eve
(1054) ides æfter æðelum	freolecu mæg	Cain's wife
(1076) idesa	bryda	Lamech's daughters
(1234) eaforan and idesa		descendents of Lamech
(1261) idesa ansien	wifa wlite	beautiful women married to the race of Cain
(1720) idesa	wif, fæger and freowlic	Sarah
(1728) wlite beorht ides		Sarah
(1774) idesa	swæse gebeddan	Sarah
(1853) idesa		Egyptian women
(1875) ellenrof idese	bryd	Sarah
(1970) blachleor ides	bryda	women of Sodom and Gomorrah
(2086) idesa	wif	Lot's wife
(2157) leoda idesa	healsmægēð	Sarah
(2229) ides egyptisc	fæmne, freolecu mæg	Hagar
(2234) idese larum	þeowmennen, bryd larum	Hagar
(2249) ides laste	þeowmennen	Hagar
(2271) feasceaft ides		Hagar
(2394) idese		Hagar
(2468) idesa		Lot's daughters
(2502) idesum		Lot's wife and daughters
(2514) idesum		Lot's wife and daughters
(2537) idesum	bryd	Lot's wife and daughters
(2607) idesa	willgesweostor	Lot's daughters
(2638) Abrahames idese	bryde	Sarah
(2655) idese	wif	Sarah
(2703) idese	sweostor	Sarah
(2764) eaforan and idese		Abraham's descendents
(2806) idese		Hagar

TABLE IV: Beowulf

<i>Ides</i> occurrence	Variations	Other designations for women called <i>ides</i>
(620) ides helminga	cwen	cwen (613, 665)
(1075) geomuru ides	Hoces dohtor	wif (615, 639, 1158)
(1117) ides gnornode		freolicu folccwen (641)
(1168) ides scyldinga		gebetta (665)
(1259) ides aglæcwif	Grendles modor	maga (1391)*
(1351) ides		merewif mihtig (1519)*
(1649) idese		
(1941) idese	no bið cwenlic, freoðuwebbe	[*Grendel's mother]

the Danish people, the one who can relieve their suffering (625–628a). *Ides helminga* also indicates that she has come from another tribe, has status there as well. *Gebetta* indicates

not that she is the king's playmate but that part of her function as queen is sexual and procreative, that to be a *folccwen* and to speak wisely are not separate from these things.

Hildeburh is the only *ides* anywhere who acts specifically as a priestess. However, for the *Beowulf* poet to categorize an *ides* as priestess is in keeping with the poem's pre-Christian setting and with its general air of a tradition emerging from the mists of a distant past. Clearly a mortal woman, Hildeburh as priestess expresses the power of nature to regenerate, to incorporate death into the life process, expresses therefore one of the most fundamental and earliest revered aspects of women, their association with the cycle of life and death.

In Grendel's mother, the feminine power of the *ides* stands side by side with the masculine power of the *aglæca*, the warrior, making her power truly awesome. And Offa's queen, the only remaining *ides* in *Beowulf*, expresses a very literal, fatal feminine attraction, a power incidentally "cured" effectively by marriage.

APPENDIX B: GEMYNDGIAN

In modern English, remembering is a private act, complete in itself. Not so *gemyndgian*. Within *Beowulf*, there are 28 instances of the use of some form of *myndgian* or *gemyndgian*, and in all of them remembering is related to action in some way. There are two identifiably different kinds of remembering: the kind in which death generates more death, through vengeance, and the remembering of loyalty and service through the giving and receiving of treasure. Each is influenced by the perspective from which it is experienced. To the warrior, remembering of any kind is positive, so long as it is carried out by men. When men remember, it seems to give them some kind of control over their own destinies, some power to act, that the prevention or denial of memory somehow blocks. From the feminine perspective, all remembering that generates more violence is negative. The only kind that is positive is the remembrance that joins treasure and glory to obligation and to non-violent activities, that contributes to the future and prosperity of the tribe.

The aspect of "remembering" that has to do with the public memory, with keeping alive the oral history of a people, seems at first to be different from the other kinds of remembering and their subsequent actions. For one thing, remembering the past contains within it its own activity, the telling of songs.

- (868) *Scop* remembers songs.
- (870) *Scop* remembers old sagas.
- (2114) Hrothgar remembers on the harp.

But when a master singer tells a tale, he causes it to be re-enacted in the memories of his audience, which in turn is expected to cause those who hear him to learn the lesson of the story, how to behave heroically, appropriately, when the time comes. This will in turn generate new stories of heroism to continue the cycle, and is akin to the act of treasure-giving; creating memory generates loyal action and, if all is as it should be, more giving/receiving of treasure. These are the attributes of memory which benefit the tribe, and the warrior. They are perpetual, perpetuating, and are valued by both masculine and feminine perspectives.

The act of memory that is associated with vengeance is, on the other hand, destructive to the tribe, from the woman's perspective, even though it may be necessary for the individual (the warrior's view of it). The act that is to be avenged lives in the memory of the avenger only until the act of vengeance releases it. Unfortunately, it, too, is self-perpetuating in that one act of vengeance creates another that needs to be avenged. Of all the ways memory and action are linked in *Beowulf*, most often remembering is the inner beginnings of a compulsion which must express itself in an act of vengeance.

- (758) Beowulf remembers Hondscio, and kills Grendel.
- (1129) Hengest remembers the place, and stays to destroy Finnsburg.
- (1141) Hengest remembers the sons of enemies, and destroys Finn's home.
- (1259) Grendel's mother remembers with misery, and kills Æschere.
- (2391) Beowulf remembers retribution for conquest.
- (2488) Ongentheow's hand remembers the feud against Eofer.
- (2689) The fire-dragon remembers the feud, and makes his third journey.

In the story of the second Finnsburg massacre, the Frisians are prohibited (1105) from "reminding" the Danes what position they are in (having lost leader and comrades, trapped in a foreign land by oncoming winter, accepting the hospitality of their lord's slayer), prohibited from goading the Danes into violent action. In the similar story of Ingeld and Freawaru, the old warrior first mourns inwardly (2044) and then remembers with words (2057), "reminding" the young man beside him of his father's death, goading him into avenging that death. In both stories, the positive effects of a treaty are obliterated by the warrior's need to avenge, by remembering seemingly separated from an act of vengeance by the treaty until reunited by an outside agent who "reminds."

Then there are situations in which it is impossible to work out the compulsion to remember death by revenge. At the height of Grendel's persecution of Heorot, the Danes, because they are heathen, because they keep hell, not God, in their hearts/minds, can do nothing to get rid of him. In Christian terms (and here the poet is clearly speaking as a Christian directly to his Christian audience¹), the place Grendel comes from is the hell the

¹See Marijane Osborne, "The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*," *PMLA*

Danes remember, that is, hell dictates how they act. By being heathen, they have brought hell and therefore Grendel into their own hall, where he responds neither to his responsibility to pay *wergild*, nor to threats of violence. An unwelcome guest who will not leave, who will not allow the deaths he has caused to be forgotten nor avenged, Grendel eats away at the Danes in more than one sense; he becomes the enemy within. Similarly with the story of the old man whose son was hanged. He remembers (2450), but is unable to avenge the death, because it is a punishment for homicide. Here, too, there is no chance of a reprieve, no "reminder" to begin the process of vengeance as there was for the Danes at Finnsburg and for the Heathobards, no way around the remembering and no way through it. As with Grendel and the Danes, there is no-one "out there," no-one not himself to be the object of the vengeance. The law sentenced his son; the law is the reflection of all the members of the community. So the father, the son, the executioner, the lord, are all responsible. Therefore, he mourns, makes song, but still he remembers without being able to complete the memory with action, and this dilemma destroys him.

Remembering kinship creates the emotional link between treasure and loyalty, that is, between giving gifts and having warriors to count on in time of need, between getting gifts and fighting for one's lord.

(613) *Wealhtheow* remembers kin in *Heorot*.

(1173) *Wealhtheow* tells *Hrothgar* to remember the gifts he has at his disposal and the allegiances to kin they represent.

(2171) *Beowulf* loyally remembers benefits from *Hygelac*.

(2431) *Hrethel* remembers kinship by giving gifts.

(2606) *Wiglaf* remembers the honours *Beowulf* gave him as he prepares to give back loyal service in return.

The compound *weorðmynd* (8, 65, 1559, 1752) appears to reflect this kind of remembering metaphorically, as a "remembrance of worth," a tangible sign of value in the form of the rewards for success in battle and its concomitant treasures. (J. R. Clark Hall glosses *weorðmynd*: honor, dignity; mark of distinction.)

Remembering fame either before or during a fight leads to conquest for heroes,

¹(cont'd) 93 (1978): 973-81, for a discussion of the various positions of the poet with regard to Christianity and paganism throughout the poem.

(659) Hrothgar tells Beowulf to remember fame; Beowulf kills Grendel.
(1270) Beowulf remembers his strength (the source of his fame, the gift from God) against Grendel.
(1530) Beowulf remembers fame when Hrunting fails; Beowulf kills Grendel's mother.
(2678)? Beowulf remembers [. . .] and kills the dragon. Actually, because of damage to the edge of the MS page, we do not know for certain what Beowulf remembers before he strikes the dragon; it could be fame, but then again, it might not be — the dragon remembers the feud (2689), and dies.

while remembering (2082) for Grendel leads to his defeat. Where there is no remembering, there is no action, suggesting that under normal conditions the two are inseparable.

(1290) Does not remember helmet, wide byrnie. Not only is the agent of remembering missing (or confused), but also there is no remembering and therefore no battle when Grendel's mother carries *Æschere* from the hall.
(1465) Unferth does not remember his own boast, that is, he does not follow through with action.

And in two cases, both at the end of the poem, both referring to how Beowulf's death will be treated, remembering takes the form of a noun. For the dying Beowulf (at l. 2804), the action is intrinsic to the thing which calls it to mind; for Wiglaf (3016), they have come apart. Beowulf sees the treasure horde as fairly won for his people, his pyre a remembrance and a call to action for sailors as they set out on voyages of adventure, conquest, and other heroic exploits — as Beowulf himself did in his youth. But in Wiglaf's speech is a recognition that the world has changed, that treasure will not spur men to action, that loyalty can no longer be bought with promises of fame and fortune. Scyld's funeral will not be repeated in Beowulf's, though all the treasure be burned in his honour. The cycle no longer comes round; there is no renewal.² Though Beowulf expects it and Wiglaf recognizes its passing, at the centre is the belief that remembering and acting on that memory are (or should be) inseparable. In Wiglaf's recognition of their separation, in the isolating of action from object, in their dualization, is a great sense of loss, and a future less bright than the past.

²See Jeffrey Helterman, "*Beowulf*: The Archetype Enters History," *ELH* 35 (1968): 1-20, on the shift in setting from the timeless mythic world to a timebound historical one.

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