Kutztown University Interlibrary Loan

ILLiad TN: 13038

Borrower: GDC

Lending String: *KZS,IOG,IOG,WLU,BMC

Patron: Fee, Christopher

Journal Title: Neuphilologische Mitteilungen.

Volume: 97 **Issue:** 3
Month/Year: 1996 **Pages:** 285-294

Article Author:

Article Title: Fee, Christopher,; Beag & Beaghroden; Women, Treasure and the Language of Social Structure in Beowulf

Imprint: Helsinki, Neuphilologischer Verein.

ILL Number: 80456183

Call #: bound

Location:

Mail
Charge
Maxcost: $25IFM

Shipping Address:
Gettysburg College Library ILL
300 N. Washington St.
Gettysburg, PA 17325-1493
IDS 132

Fax: 717-337-7001
Ariel: 138.234.152.5

BEAG & BEAGHRODEN: WOMEN, TREASURE AND THE LANGUAGE OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN *BEOWULF*

SUMMARY. – The language used to describe treasure objects in *Beowulf* is similar to that used to describe women, and this similarity serves to underscore the analogous functions of the practices of "ring-giving" and "peace-weaving" in the cultural context of the poem. Both of these actions are used to affect social cohesion between and within groups of men, and both of these practices are ultimately flawed in that they rely on the socially construed value of the "objects" of exchange in order to insure loyalty to oaths. This article examines the cultural relationship between these social constructs, and between women and treasure items, by exploring the semantic significance of such terms as *beag*, *beaghroden*, and *goldhroden*, and by determining that there is a regular and consistent pattern of description linking women and treasure objects in the language of the poem.

Treasure objects are very important in *Beowulf*, and they play at least one central social role: the act of "ring-giving" is the primary agent of social cohesion within the comitatus. Thanes are rewarded for loyal service with rings and other valuables, and they in turn are expected to serve a good "ring-giver" with valor and selfless devotion. In Beowulf's world loyalty is, in a very real sense, purchased.[1] Likewise, social stability with groups outside the comitatus is bartered for through the agency of "peace-weavers". Women are married off to men of rival tribes in order to insure observance of peace treaties. Such women serve, in effect, as commodities which are exchanged in order to safeguard a particular social or political agenda. It is certain that these two social practices are not to be seen as precisely equivalent: one takes place within the comitatus, the other without; one involves a transaction between parties of differing social levels, the other between equals; one relies upon the gratitude of thane for a gift, the other upon the love of a prince for his wife. Yet, I see these two cultural practices as more or less analogous, at least insofar as women and objects of treasure are both used to affect social cohesion and stability. I am certainly not the first to hypothesize a relationship between woman and object, or between ring-giving and peace-weaving, in Anglo-Saxon culture;[2] the place of women in early England has been the subject of much debate, and it is not the purpose of this article to reiterate the arguments involved.[3] Rather, I propose to examine the relationship between ring-giving and peace-weaving, between material object and marital subject, in the terms of treasure-language which are employed to describe both practices and "objects" in *Beowulf*.

The dominant woman in the poem is Wealhþeow, the wife of Hroðgar, and it is with her that I will begin my discussion.[4] We are first introduced to Wealhþeow shortly after the Geats' arrival at Heorot; Beowulf has already boasted of his past exploits and his valor, and has just announced to Hroðgar his intent to rid the hall of Grendel's menace. At this point Wealhþeow comes forward and presents the drinking-cup to her lord:

Eode Wealhþeow forð,
cwen Hroðgares — cynna gemyndig,
grette goldhroden — guman on healle,
ond þa freolic wif — ful gesealde
ærest East-Dena — eþelwearde...[5]
(ll. 612–616)

[Wealhþeow went forth,
Hroðgar's queen, mindful of courtesy,
gold-adorned she welcomed the man into the hall,
and then the gracious woman gave the full cup
first to the home-guardian of the East-Danes...]

This passage is pertinent to my discussion because Wealhþeow is described as "goldhroden", or "gold-adorned"; this compound form appears only three other times in the poem, and always to describe a noble woman. The term is used on one other occasion in reference to Wealhþeow, this time at the end of her first exchange with Beowulf, just after he has boasted to her and vowed that he will defeat Grendel or die in the attempt. Here she is referred to as "goldhroden freolicu folccwen"(ll. 640–641), or the "gracious, gold-adorned folk-queen". The third time this term appears it is used to help to define the change which Modþryðo underwent after she was married to Offa, King of the Angles. Modþryðo had been an exceptionally evil woman, punishing with death all those who dared to look upon her. However, "syððan ærest wearð gyfen goldhroden geongum cempan"(ll. 1947–1948), "after she was given, gold-adorned, to the young champion", she became famous for her virtue. Finally, "goldhroden" is used by Beowulf in his description of Freawaru, Hroðgar's daughter; in his speech to Hygelac, Beowulf remarks that Freawaru herself is soon to be a "peace-weaver": "Sio gehaten is, geong goldhroden, gladum suna Frodan"(ll. 2024–2025); "she is betrothed, the young gold-adorned one, to the lordly son of Froda." These last two examples seem especially significant because the women involved are described as having been "given" or "promised" by one man to another; the language involved underscores the transactional nature of their relationships with the men whom they marry.

A still more convincing argument is the nature of the term "goldhroden" itself. "Hroden" is the past participle of "hreodan" and means "laden, laden with ornaments, ornamented or adorned";[6] the three times which the word appears in *Beowulf* its meaning is usually taken as "adorned" or "decorated", and in all three instances "hroden" is used to describe the ornamentation of a material object of treasure.[7] At the first meeting of the Danes and the Geats in Heorot, a "hroden ealowæge"(l. 495) or "ornamented ale-cup" is filled with a shining drink; after Beowulf has defeated Grendel and displayed the gory arm of the demon, Hroðgar presents him with a "hroden hildecumbor"(l. 1022), an "ornamented battle-standard"; when the Geats leave their ship to travel overland to Heorot, the cheekguards of their helmets are likewise described as "gehroden golde"(l. 304), or "adorned with gold". All of these passages deal with material objects of treasure which were or might have been given from a lord to his thane, and all three examples use "hroden" to mean "adorned" in a way which is analogous with that in which "goldhroden" was used to describe women.

Another significant piece of semantic evidence concerns the use of the term "beag", meaning "ring", and that of its compound "beaghroden", or "ring-adorned". The use of "beaghroden" seems quite similar and perhaps interchangeable with that of "goldhroden", and both terms are used exclusively to describe women; the use of "beaghroden", however,

is even more significant in the context of the use of "beag". There are two main ways in which the term "beag" is used in this poem which are pertinent to my discussion: First, "beag" is used extensively throughout the narrative in most of the gift-giving and treasure description scenes. The examples are too numerous and self-evident to need to be recounted here, but I would like to point out that the term is often used in a collective fashion to denote the concept of treasure in general. Two such examples will suffice: Unferð, in his description of Beowulf's swimming contest with Breca, refers to the latter's return to his home in the land of the Brondings, "þær he folc ahte, burh ond beagas"(ll. 522–523) "where he had people, a stronghold and treasure"; after the death of Hygelac, Hygd attempts to persuade Beowulf to take the throne by offering him "hord ond rice, beagas ond bregostol"(ll. 2369–2370) "hoard and kingdom, treasure and prince-stool". In both these cases the meaning of "beag" certainly encompasses objects of material treasure including, but not limited to, actual rings. This generic use of "beag" is important in the context of my argument because it gives us a reason to believe that the term was a verbal cue from the poet to his audience used to invoke a specific set of mental images. This set would certainly include the glittering mounds of a dragon's hoard and the collected tribute and booty in a lord's mead-hall, as well as the cultural practice of "ring-giving" itself. Hence, when Wealhþeow is described as "beaghroden cwen" in line 623, or as going forth "under gyldnum beage" in line 1163, the term invokes literal and metaphorical messages simultaneously. On the literal level such terminology conjures up an image of a regal woman who is in fact wearing rings as a sign of her position. On metaphorical levels, however, such formulaic and generic terminology, which is usually used in the context of material objects, reinforces the image of such a woman as an adorned and ornamented possession; more than that, the use of "beag" in this way specifically invokes an image of the cultural practice of giving or dealing "beags", and this underscores the woman's role as an object used to affect social cohesion.

This brings me to the second important way in which "beag" is used in the poem. When "beag" is used in reference to a woman, it is used adjectivally to describe her in terms of ornamentation; this is not true of the use of the word in reference to a man. In such cases the word is most generally the object of the man's action. For instance, we learn early on that Hroðgar "beot ne aleh, beagas dælde"(l. 80) "(his) promise belied not, he dealt rings". Later, Hroðgar himself relates that Heremod, on the other hand, "nallas beagas geaf Denum æfter dome"(ll.1719–1720) "by no means gave rings to the Danes for glory". Beowulf, however, like Hroðgar, did not forget his duty as lord, and was a good ring-giver, as Wiglaf reminds the wavering thanes: "us ðas beagas geaf, þæt we him ða guðgetawa gylden wolden"(ll. 2635–2636) "he gave rings to us, so that we would wish to repay (him for) the war-equipment". These examples suffice to demonstrate the usual use of the word "beag" as a direct object of a lord's action of giving, and this sense of the term serves to illustrate a distinction in the terminology of material objects of treasure such as rings. As I have mentioned, "beaghroden" and "goldhroden" are terms exclusively used to describe women. Men are not described as "ring-" or "gold-adorned"; what men do is deal in rings and gold,

and the like objects which are the glue of their social system. This is an important distinction, because it can very reasonably be argued that the use of a term such as "beaghroden" is simply a formulaic way of describing a queen, just as "beagas geaf" is a formulaic way of describing the activities of a king. In the context of the gender-specific bias of these formulas, however, it is clear that such an argument simply highlights the specific roles of men and women in the culture described by the poem: women are described in terms of material objects, and men are not; men act as the dispensers and receivers of such objects, and women do not.[8]

Although my primary concern is with the social role of women in the cultural context of the language of this poem, at this point it would be valuable to discuss briefly perceptions of the role of women in Anglo-Saxon society at large, and how such perceptions may be defined in the terms of material culture suggested by the language of treasure in *Beowulf*. Jane Chance has argued that the role of Anglo-Saxon women was primarily complementary to that of men,[9] and she has defined various types and antitypes of the Anglo-Saxon feminine ideal.[10] Christine Fell, amongst others, has taken a view rather at odds with that of Chance, but, regardless of the political realities of Anglo-Saxon England, many of Chance's notions resonate well with the semantic context of the poem described above.[11] Chance sees Wealhþeow as a model of the Anglo-Saxon noble woman whose political role is limited to the socially-bonding functions of peace-weaving and the hierarchical passing of the mead-cup. Of particular interest in the light of my discussion of woman as material object is Chance's description of the rights and privileges of Anglo-Saxon women under law: women could generally only participate in disputes and claims concerning ownership of land, matters of inheritance, succession, and the like through the agency of a man;[12] in legal documents women were "identified mostly in terms of a relationship with a male parent, brother, or husband";[13] and, most closely analogous to my discussion of woman as chattel in *Beowulf*, in every example Chance discusses from the chronicles, women are referred to as "taken" or "given" in marriage.[14]

Michael Enright goes further in exploring and defining the political role of women in both fictional and historical Germanic contexts.[15] He departs from Chance in that, though he sees the role of women as highly ritualistic in nature, and certainly much more limited than that of men, he insists that women are central to, though not autonomous within, the Anglo-Saxon social structure. Enright argues that "the queen's activities are too thoroughly integrated, too nicely interwoven, to consider her any longer as an attending but essentially extraneous character";[16] he maintains that, though women actively wield no political power of their own, they perform a bonding social function without which the comitatus could not exist. Enright concludes that "the mortar which cements the bricks must be regarded as part of the building".[17]

A case in point would be Wealhþeow's involvement in the gift-giving ritual which takes place after Beowulf's slaying of Grendel. First she approaches Hroðgar, offering him the cup (another social ritual) and reminding him of his social obligation towards the Geats: "Beo

wið Geatas glæd, geofena gemyndig, nean ond feorran þu nu hafast"(ll.1173-1174): "Be gracious to the Geats, mindful of the gifts, from near and afar you now have". She also reminds him, however, that his obligation to his sons outweighs that to Beowulf, and that, when Hroðgar dies, his "folc ond rice" should fall to "þinum magum", not Beowulf or Hroþulf, whose obligation to Hroðgar she invokes indirectly. The cup is then borne to Beowulf, and the gifts are presented to him:

Him wæs ful boren, ond freondlaþu
wordum bewægned, ond wunden gold
estum geeawed, earmhreade twa,
hrægl ond hringas, healsbeaga mæst
þara þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe.
(ll. 1192–1196)

[To him a cup was borne, and invitation
offered with words, and coiled gold
kindly bestowed, two arm-adornments,
a corslet and rings, (and) of neck-rings the greatest
of those which I have heard on earth.]

It is important to note that the cup "wæs boren", as the gold and treasure "(wæs) geeawed"; the use of the passive voice here obscures the agency involved, and this may be significant. We may safely assume that Wealhþeow bore the cup to Beowulf, but the identity of the one who actually presented the gifts is unclear, and, in fact, probably incidental. The point is the ritual of gift-giving itself, and the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the practice. Wealhþeow's social function includes reminding lord and thane of their responsibilities, but does not extend to actual ring-giving itself; that, as she has just reminded him, is Hroðgar's function. Finally, Wealhþeow addresses Beowulf himself, bidding him to enjoy the use of these gifts, and assuring him of his lasting fame for his deeds. Here she also goes so far as to articulate one of her primary social roles – that of a reminder of obligation. Wealhþeow's words "Ic þe þæs lean geman"(l.1220) could be read" I shall bear this in mind for you"; in a very real way, a gift from a lord to a thane is a tactile reminder of the loyalty owed to the lord. Here Wealhþeow, who performs a social function analogous to that of the torque, gives voice to that common function. These words might well be engraved on such a gift. Early in this article I raised the issue of the bonding role of women between hostile war bands; here I have explored how a woman may serve a bonding role within the comitatus. I agree with Enright that this social function is central to the culture which is described for us in *Beowulf*, and it seems to me of equal importance that these central, socially-bonding figures wield no real power independently; once again I would insist that this underscores the analogy between the role of women and that of treasure within the context of the poem. In both cases we see a society of men bound together through the giving and receiving of objects which have no power or autonomy outside of their narrowly proscribed social roles.

This leads me to a discussion of the ways in which women are actually referred to as or

associated with objects of material value. Paul Beekman Taylor attempts to draw parallels between the terminology of treasure in *Beowulf* and primitive Germanic beliefs in the life-giving and sustaining power of treasure objects;[18] the relationship he describes between material objects of treasure and mystical life-giving forces is particularly suited to a discussion of perceptions of the roles of women, who are obviously to be associated with myths of life-force. Tom Hill, however, provides us with a more concrete way by which we can associate women with material objects of treasure within the context of the poem.[19] Hill discusses the controversy concerning the exact meaning and derivation of the name of Hroðgar's queen; he points out quite clearly that, despite the best efforts of many critics to prove otherwise, the most obvious rendering of "Wealhþeow" is "foreign servant or slave", an admittedly awkward name for a queen. Hill examines this name in the light of the practice of some Frankish kings of marrying just such foreign slaves, and feels that Wealhþeow's name serves to prove that "her family and associates continued to be mindful of her foreign and servile origins".[20] I would go further and insist that her name also serves to remind the audience of Wealhþeow's status as war booty. Just as weapons, tribute and treasure are won by a king on the battlefield, so also are slaves, which are valued in much the same way. Slaves are a tangible source of wealth, just as rings and swords are, and, in fact, it might be argued that swords often are held in greater esteem. Implicit in the institution of slavery is the philosophy that human beings may actually be equated with material objects in terms of value, and Wealhþeow is unique in *Beowulf* in that her very name reinforces the association between women, even (or perhaps especially) queens, and objects of material value.

It seems clear that some analogy exists between objects of material treasure and objectified women in the culture of the poem; nowhere is this analogy more clear than in the thematic parallels between "ring-giving" and "peace-weaving". Both practices involve the exchange between men of "objects", the role of which is, in both cases, central to the cohesion of the social structure, but the power of which is, also in both cases, limited to that specific social role. Through "ring-giving" a king attempts to purchase, if you will, the loyalty of his thanes with material bribes; through "peace-weaving" he attempts to barter for peace through the sale of a daughter or other female. If the terms "purchase", "bribe", "barter" and "sale" seem excessively harsh and mercantile, it may be because such a view dispels many dearly-held romantic assumptions concerning the role of the comitatus in *Beowulf*.[21] Semantic considerations aside, we see in both social practices a commodification of that which is exchanged; in other words, in both cases the significance of the practice is in the cultural value assigned to the exchange itself, not the integral value of a ring or of a woman.

It is perhaps particularly ironic that both of these parallel social structures break down in similar ways within the context of the poem. In his speech to Higelac upon his return from the land of the Danes, Beowulf discusses the impending "peace-weaving" marriage between Freawaru, Hroðgar's daughter, and the son of Froda:

(h)afað þæs geworden   wine Scyldinga,
rices hyrde,   ond þæt ræd talað,
þæt he mid ðy wife   wælfæhða dæl,
sæcca gesette.
(ll. 2026–2029)

[he has therefore decided   the friend of Scyldings,
the guardian of the kingdom,   and that counsel accepted,
that he by means of that woman   some slaughters,
some feuds might settle.]

In this speech Beowulf himself questions the value and wisdom of such an attempt to guarantee peace; Hroðgar is attempting to purchase peace by giving Froda a beautiful bride, just as earlier he attempted to win the loyalty of his thanes by giving them good rings.[22] Beowulf notes that such attempts are usually doomed to failure, and his words also underscore the woman's role as an object of value, rather than as an equal in an emotional partnership:

Oft seldan hwær
æfter leodhryre   lytle hwile
bongar bugeð,   þeah seo bryd duge!
(ll. 2029–2031)

[Very rarely anywhere
after the fall of a prince does the deadly spear
rest a little while,   though the bride is good!]

The problem is that "peace-weaving" relies on the value of the exchange itself, and on the emotional commitment which may grow out of that exchange. However, no matter how well-intentioned both parties may be, old grievances are certain to surface, and, as "weallað wælniðas"(l. 2065) "slaughter-emnities surge", so "wiflufan...colran weorðað"(ll. 2065–2066) "wife-love becomes cooler". In other words, the emotional commitment between the man and his wife, which in the first place apparently is limited to the prince's desire to possess an attractive wife and to produce heirs, generally breaks down under pressure. Since we may assume that "peace-weaving" would not be necessary in situations which were not subject to such pressure, Beowulf is in fact pointing out the fundamental flaw in the logic of such a social practice: the social cohesion provided by "peace-weaving" is only effective in situations where such cohesion is not necessary in the first place.

These words are doubly ironic coming from the mouth of Beowulf. After all, if the analogous social practice of "ring-giving" (to which Beowulf does subscribe) were any more successful than "peace-weaving", Hroðgar's thanes would have rewarded his "ring-giving" with good service, and Beowulf would never have had to travel to Heorot in the first place.[23] Likewise, though there is ample evidence, especially in the speeches of Wiglaf,[24] that Beowulf was himself a good "ring-giver", in his final battle with the dragon only Wiglaf stands by his side; the other retainers, later called "tydre treowlogan"(l. 2847), or "craven

troth-breakers",[25] "on holt bugon, ealdre burgan"(ll. 2598–2599) "fled into the grove to save life".[26] Thus, in Beowulf's condemnation of the "peace-weaving" system, and his description of its breakdown, we have both an ironic analogy to the breakdown of the "ring-giving" system in general, and a foreshadowing of its ultimate failure which will lead to the death of Beowulf. We have then within the context of the poem two social practices which are analogous in structure; further, an examination of the analogy between "ring-giving" and "peace-weaving" serves to illuminate the role of woman as material object in the culture of *Beowulf.*

University of Glasgow CHRISTOPHER FEE

NOTES

[1] It might be argued that such a "mercantile" perspective is anachronistic, projecting modern valences onto a medieval value system. In the context of the poem, however, both ring-giving and peace-weaving prove themselves to be less than successful social practices, and so it is altogether possible that the poet questioned these values, as well. See my discussion of "bribery" below.

[2] For a prime example, see Chance's discussion of the Anglo-Saxon terminology of marriage, discussed below.

[3] See discussion of Chance, Fell, Klinck, and Enright, below, for the context of this debate.

[4] Grendel's mother, of course, is a dominant female figure, but hardly a "woman". She provides an interesting inversion of womanhood in the poem, however; see Chance, below.

[5] Klaeber, Fr., ed. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg.* 3rd ed. Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Co., 1950. All citations are from Klaeber; all translations are the author's.

[6] Bosworth, Joseph and T. Northcote Toller, ed. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1898. Rptd. 1988. Page 562.

[7] Klaeber, 360.

[8] It has been suggested to me that an obvious and significant exception to this observation might be Wealhþeow's speech concerning the presentation of the necklace and other treasures to Beowulf after his slaying of Grendel. I argue, however, that, rather than playing an autonomous political role here, hers is a ritualized (though indispensible) social function (as per Michael Enright). She *reminds* Hroðgar of his social obligations and she *reminds* both Beowulf and Hroþulf (just as the necklace around Beowulf's neck should remind him) of the social positions of her sons, and of the debts of loyalty owed to Hroðgar and his line. She does not, however, give Beowulf a gift of her own accord and under her own authority. See my discussion of these passages and of Enright below.

[9] Nitzsche, Jane Chance. "The Anglo-Saxon Woman as Hero: The Chaste Queen and the Masculine Woman Saint," *Allegorica* 5 (1980): 139-148. Key to this concept of complementary roles is the passive and non-political nature of the feminine, which Chance equates with "passion and passivity, leading to a reduction of political activity" (144). This article later evolved into the fourth chapter of *Woman as Hero* (see below). Especially useful is the historical information which offers insight into the legal position of aristocratic Anglo-Saxon women.

[10] Chance, Jane. *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1986. Addresses the roles of aristocratic women in Old English poetry and prose; the breadth of the roles with which Chance deals range from those of the peace-weaver, the secular and ecclesiastical feminine ideal, and the allegorical figure of the church, to their anti-types. Especially pertinent to this discussion is Chance's discussion of Wealhþeow as the ideal Anglo-Saxon aristocratic woman, and her chapter describing Grendel's mother as an inversion of this ideal.

[11] Fell, Christine. *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. The thrust of Fell's thesis is a reiteration of the long-standing (though often debated) belief that Anglo-Saxon women held a position of authority and autonomy in their culture (relative to other medieval cultures), and that the impact of the Conquest upon those rights and that position was quite severe:

> We see traces of anti-female propaganda in [Anglo-Saxon] letters or homilies from the pens of clergy and in the penitentials, but these seem to have been ineffectual in practice. Even Wulfstan in the eleventh century is denouncing sexual immorality in general, not women in particular. But the impact of the Norman Conquest...is almost instantly followed by the impact of the Gregorian reform, when theological concept hardens into canon law, and canon law acquires control of much legislation concerning women. The combination of the new military-based civil law and the increasing effectiveness of anti-female canon law produced a society in which the role of women was very sharply differentiated from that in the pre-1066 era (13–14).

In her introduction, Fell frames her position with the arguments of historians from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, and examines how those arguments were tempered by contemporaneous opinions on the role of women. Fell is especially interested in the relationship between the "literary image" of gender roles in Anglo-Saxon society and the "factual evidence", which suggests the day-to-day realities of the role of women in that culture; she sees a sharp distinction between this relationship and the analogous one in Norman England. She only cites *Beowulf* a handful of times, however, and certainly does not mount an argument contending that this poem provides us with much evidence that Anglo-Saxon women were particularly autonomous. In my view, the poetic context of *Beowulf* tends to support Chance. Fell cites Anne Klinck as a dissenting voice; Klinck states that the difference between the situation of women in late Anglo-Saxon England and that in Norman England is not so pronounced as Fell thinks (Fell 21).

[12] Nitzsche, 140–141.

[13] Nitzsche, 140.

[14] Nitzsche, 146.

[15] Enright, Michael J. "Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 170–203. Through his exploration of the relationship between the Germanic queen, her king and his comitatus, Enright attempts to shed light on the place of figures such as Wealhþeow in the context of the poem. His conclusion is that such roles are limited to ritualistic ones such as the passing of the mead-cup, and advising but non-participatory ones including persuasion and pleading; still, he sees these roles as central in a cohesive way.

[16] Enright, 202.

[17] Enright, 202.

[18] Taylor, Paul Beekman. "The Traditional Language of Treasure in *Beowulf*'" *JEGP* 85 (1986): 191–205. Taylor's article is largely philological, and he examines various etymological connections between words concerned with treasure and words concerned with life-force. He draws further parallels with similar relationships in Old Norse, and traces their common source to Germanic folk beliefs. Taylor begins his argument with an examination of Beowulf's speech to Wiglaf on lines 2794–2798. After Wiglaf displays to Beowulf the dragon's hoard which he has won, Beowulf offers a prayer of thanksgiving for the treasure which he has been able to win for his people. What is important about this prayer to Taylor is Beowulf's use of the verb "gestrynan", "to win", which "does double duty here...for its primary sense in Old English is 'to beget, to engender'"(191). Beowulf, of course, has never begotten himself a son, which would have guaranteed the succession and protected his people. This is a major failing in a king, and Taylor maintains that in his prayer of thanksgiving "Beowulf is consoling himself with the notion that a treasure won is a benefit to a people comparable to, if not equal to, a son"(191). Taylor examines quite a number of other word-plays throughout the poem which evoke an association between treasure goods and life-forces, concluding that "there is a conventional stock" of such associations (197). The pertinence of such associations to my argument is self-evident: treasure may be equated with life-force, and may be seen as perpetuating the social order in a way similar to

that of succession. Women are traditionally equated with both life-force and succession, for obvious reasons; woman as treasure object, then, is a common-sense association.

[19] Hill, Thomas D. "'Wealhþeow' as a Foreign Slave: Some Continental Analogues," *PQ* 69 (1990): 106–112. Hill is primarily interested in the practice of some Merovingian kings who married peasants; in the context of the meaning of Wealhþeow's name (most likely "foreign servant or slave"), her seeming obsession with the succession makes a new kind of sense.

[20] Hill, 107.

[21] It has been suggested to me that the concept of ring-giving as "bribery", if extended, threatens to engulf the poem in cynicism. It seems clear, however, that in the literary world of *Beowulf* this social practice presupposes a quid pro quo relationship; he who gives good rings is deserving of good service, while he who does not is not. Conversely, a thane who remembers his obligation to his lord is good, while he who does not is "craven troth-breaker". I do not mean to polarize the issue; clearly, a good lord dispenses treasure for a variety of reasons, and a good thane is loyal to his lord for reasons which include (but are by no means limited to) personal profit. I think that the same may be said of peace-weaving. I simply mean to point out that we are reminded again and again that there is a degree of commodification involved in both ring-giving and peace-weaving.

[22] "beot ne aleh, beagas dælde" (l. 80).

[23] See the poet's description of the ravages of Grendel and the apparent cowardice of the Danes (ll. 138–143); see also Beowulf's reproachment of Unferð (ll. 590–601).

[24] See especially Wiglaf's attempt to rouse the retainers' loyalty (ll. 2631–2660) and his reproachment of them (ll. 2864–2891).

[25] Just one example of a pejorative epithet used to describe the warriors who fail Beowulf.

[26] Although Beowulf commands his retainers to await him by the barrow while he battles the dragon alone (ll. 2529-2532), it is apparent from the poet's ensuing description of them and, in contrast, of Wiglaf, that they should have disregarded this instruction.