Formulaic Friþuwebban:

Reexamining Peace-weaving in the Light of Old English Poetics

While the small number of references to female characters in Old English is a constant source of disappointment to scholars and students interested in Anglo-Saxon women, this same audience is at once blessed that the references that do survive are frequently vibrant and engaging ones. Among these women is the peace-weaver of heroic poetry, and she, more than any of her female counterparts, has taken on a life of her own. Escaping the confines of the texts in which she appears, the peace-weaver has gone on to define modern conceptions of the role of women throughout the Anglo-Saxon world.

Capturing scholarly interest early in the nineteenth century,[1] peace-weaving has been marshaled as evidence for everything from the misogynistic bartering of women between tribes to an idealized position from which Anglo-Saxon women doled out advice, favor and, of course, a steady flow of mead. While scholarly opinions about the representation of women have continued to develop and change, the label "peace-weaver" has stuck, crystallizing into a critical model that is distinct from the Old English references to friþuwebban (peace-weavers) – a compound with only three poetic references.[2] While it is perhaps inevitable that the amount of critical attention focused on a concept with so few occurrences should leave behind the term's literary context, both the feminine and masculine forms of the Old English compound still have much to tell us on their own terms. With this in mind, after briefly surveying and reassessing the scholarship on formulaic poetics and peace-weaving, I will revisit Old English friþuwebba/e, in order to examine each occurrence of the term within its formulaic context. Careful attention to

this formulaic context will, I argue, demonstrate that the Old English weaving metaphor, while clearly restricted to figures of high status, is not necessarily gender-specific.

I. Formulaic Poetics in Context

Interest in formulaic poetics is itself marked by a dynamic and at times turbulent critical history. Early misconceptions that formulaic composition was necessarily oral were quickly challenged, with scholarly interest shifting to account for the complex textualization of Old English literature.[3] However, analyses of how formulas function remain complicated by differing approaches to the formula's definition. One of these approaches stresses the systematic nature of the formula. Influential here is Donald K. Fry's 1967 article, which defines the formula as the result of a formulaic system, a "group of half-lines, usually loosely related metrically and semantically, which are related in form by the identical relative placement of two elements, one a variable word or element of a compound usually supplying the alliteration, and the other a constant word or element of a compound, with approximately the same distribution of non-stressed elements."[4] However, the specificity of this definition has been modified over the years, prominently by John D. Niles, who identifies the formula as a "rhythmic/syntactic/semantic complex one half-line in length," which is part of a formulaic system/set verse of one metrical type with one main word-element that remains constant.[5]

In arguing for a complexity and flexibility that cannot be reduced to a single rule, other scholars have defined the formula in relation to a range of types of formulaic diction. Thus, John Miles Foley refers to the formula as "not one but a variety of types of diction: alongside the classical half-line phrase stand single words, whole-line patterns, multi-line patterns,

collocations, clusters, and themes. Likewise, even within these different categories not all members are equivalent; some formulaic systems are more variable than others, some larger patterns more restrictive than others, and so on."[6] Similarly, Elizabeth M. Tyler advocates a range of formulaic types that overlap with other sorts of verbal repetition, especially emphasizing the collocation.[7]

Basing his own approach on a model in which variable elements and word order are acceptable within the formula itself (rather than indicative of a wider system), Britt Mize defines the formula as "a shared stressed morpheme and several non-trivial grammatical, metrical, semantic, or other features repeated among instances," with a lexical element that varies "according to the needs of the immediate context, most often providing the point of contact between the formula and the alliterative pattern of the line."[8] Thus, the references to hail as the corna caldest (coldest of grains) and hwitust corna (whitest of grains) in l. 33a of The Seafarer and l. 25a of The Rune Poem, may be reduced to the formula corna x-st, where the adjective varies while retaining its superlative quality.[9] When looking at the instances of friþuwebba/e in Old English poetry, this is the definition of the formula that I will adopt.

However, it should also be noted that as flexible as Mize's definition is, this paper is also interested in the broader context of formulaic diction and collocation, as well as the use of semantically related verses with little linguistic overlap in similar contexts. Indeed, context is significant to understanding formulaic diction, as Anita Riedinger has shown. Her argument that thematic patterns of usage may be identified when the context of recurrent imagery is taken into account, as well as Mark Amodio's assertion that context determines which formulas carry traditional meaning and which do not, have equally informed this discussion.[10]

As a vibrant component of poetic composition, then, formulas and formulaic diction transcend their use and function. No longer are they to be viewed as building blocks and poetic filler, as they frequently have been in the past.[11] Rather, they are essential to our ability to access the texts in which they appear: "One cannot read Old English poetry accurately or with full appreciation of its artistry without an understanding of the connotative meaning of the formulas – an understanding to be gained primarily by an examination of the formulas in context."[12] It is for this reason that the following discussion of the Old English friþuwebba/e focuses on the compound's formulaic framework.

What this means for peace-weaving in particular is that we must first put to one side the gendered connotations that the critical model emphasizes, at least in relation to the Old English passages in which the compounds occur. This is necessary not least because we are dealing with a term with both masculine and feminine forms. Indeed, given that the feminine form has only one additional occurrence, it does not make a great deal of sense to give it prominence over its masculine counterpart. Furthermore, as noted above and demonstrated below, gender plays a minor role in the literary context of the formulaic friþuwebban, the descriptions of which are much more concerned with emphasizing high status and moral superiority.

II. The Critical Model of Peace-weaving

Before we set the critical model aside, it is worth tracing its history, both in order to define what scholarship means when it talks about peace-weaving and to contextualize the current discussion. As noted above, scholarly ideas about peace-weaving have developed in relation to changes in the field of feminist criticism and gender studies.[13] Richard Burton's early mention of

friþuwebbe, which problematically refers to the compound as "an oft recurring expression," indicates that there was already a rough scholarly consensus regarding the term's meaning in the nineteenth century.[14] This consensus focused on "the frequent part played by woman when given in marriage between hostile tribes, peace being patched up thereby, to last for a longer or shorter time."[15] The potentially powerful nature of peace-making is something with which scholarship on Anglo-Saxon women has particularly engaged.[16] Especially noteworthy here is Larry M. Sklute's 1970 analysis of the poetic instances of the Old English term, in which we, significantly, have a recognition of the diplomatic function attributed to each of the figures named as friþuwebban: "it is a poetic metaphor referring to the person whose function it seems to be to perform openly the action of making peace by weaving to the best of her art a tapestry of friendship and amnesty."[17] This reading, though defined here in terms of the feminine form of the compound is, of course, equally applicable to the masculine form's occurrence, as Sklute notes.[18]

Later scholarship is concerned less with the metaphor itself than with the social function of peace-making, as we see in the work of Stacy S. Klein. Klein's analysis argues that the Beowulf-poet critiques the masculine, militaristic society that the poem depicts and its hero so highly values. Within this context, peace-weaving

> demands that one redefine the place traditionally allotted to the domestic world within a heroic ethos – in which home and hall typically provide the rationale for battle (one fights to protect women), the impetus to battle (one is impelled to battle by whetting women), or the audience for battle (women celebrate victory or mourn failure) – and recognize women as central forces, rather than marginal supports, in the production of social order.[19]

Klein's argument develops out of an earlier vein of criticism that discusses peace-weaving as a passive social role, setting women apart from the masculine-centred warrior culture depicted in Beowulf and other poems.[20] Thus both Jane Chance and Gillian R. Overing discuss the failure of peace-weavers in a society that is defined by conflict. It should be noted that Chance, whose influential monograph makes her one of the foremothers of the critical model, uses the Old English term friþuwebbe rather freely in her discussion of peace-weaving. Thus, the following quotation implies that the context of l. 1942 involves the passing of a mead cup:

> The mead-sharing ritual and the cup-passer herself come to symbolize peace-weaving and peace because they strengthen the societal and familial bonds between lord and retainers. First, the literal action of the freoðuwebbe (peace weaver, 1942) as she passes the cup from warrior to warrior weaves an invisible web of peace: the order in which each man is served, according to his social position, reveals each man's dependence upon and responsibility toward another.[21]

The fact that we never see a friþuwebbe passing a cup in Old English (neither at the line quoted by Chance nor elsewhere) demonstrates the importance of keeping the Old English term and the critical model separate from one another. Of course, the critical model has been revised since it informed the interpretation of the female figures that Chance's monograph analyzed, but it is still worth reiterating that scholarship's "peace-weaver" is not one and the same as the Old English friþuwebba/e.

Indeed, it is surprising that a more general term like "peace-maker" has not displaced "peace-weaver" in discussions of Anglo-Saxon women's political and social roles because it encompasses a wider range of Old English depictions of women in which weaving is not

mentioned.[22] The use of the label, then, seems to speak to scholarship's ongoing desire to anchor the abstract work of diplomacy within a more traditional type of women's work.[23] Indeed, in addressing the question of why the metaphor of weaving was associated with diplomacy, Maren Clegg Hyer states: "the daily life of high-status females such as Wealhtheow or her historical Anglo-Saxon counterparts would have involved considerable devotion to spinning and weaving. Since a noble woman's role […] also requires diplomatic, community-building efforts, it is most probably her gender that provides the initial association between the textile outbuildings' literal looms and the main hall's metaphorical one."[24] It should be noted that Clegg Hyer's discussion of peace-weaving approaches the compounds from the direction of weaving metaphors rather than gender studies – that is, she is more interested in the use of textile imagery in Old English literature than the critical model of the "peace-weaver" – and so we might expect a broader picture of the Old English terms than the critical model allows. Yet the resulting focus is once again on women, this time as the producers of textiles, both actual and metaphorical.

However, the weaving element of the metaphor does not necessarily imply a similar group of agents performing both the actions of creating textiles and creating peace. Although I am not disputing the link between weaving and women in Anglo-Saxon England,[25] this is not the only association that weaving carries in Old English poetry. When it comes to descriptions of actual woven textiles, in every instance, the Old English poetic tradition emphasizes their status as objects of worth.[26] Hence we see weaving-terminology in the context of treasures,[27] weapons and armour,[28] tapestries[29] and temple veils.[30] These examples, as well as the other metaphorical uses to which weaving-terminology is applied, that is, glory,[31] creation,[32] fate[33] and language,[34] tell us that woven objects were highly valued in Old English poetry, acting as they do as evidence for human skill. What this wider context of poetic weaving implies, then, is that peace-

weaving is equally valuable and socially important. And so we can safely say that Old English friþuwebba/e points to peace as highly significant and to the construction of peace as a task of some status. However, the term does not imply that the attempted construction of peace is inherently linked to women. Indeed, Cynewulf's epilogue to Elene demonstrates a clear association between weaving and poetic composition,[35] but no one has tried to argue that the act of composing poetry in Anglo-Saxon England and its literature was predominantly a female role.[36] And so, while the critical model of the peace-weaver has led to many interesting readings of women in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, when it comes to examining the friþuwebban in their formulaic context, gender should not be our sole focus.

III. The Old English Friþuwebban

Turning now to the Old English examples of the compounds, the first instance of the feminine form in Widsið reads:

> He mid Ealhhilde,
> fælre freoþuwebban, forman siþe
> Hreðcyninges ham gesohte
> eastan of Ongle, Eormanrices,
> wraþes wærlogan. (ll. 5b–9a)
> (He with Ealhhild, the faithful peace-weaver, for the first time sought, east from the Angles, the home of the glorious king, Eormanric, the cruel oath-breaker.)

At first glance, friþuwebbe appears to be a casual epithet for Ealhhild, with the immediate narrative context being more focused on Widsið's travels to foreign lands. Although the

description of Ealhhild does not occur as part of an extended metaphor and does not shed a great deal of light on her character (which is elaborated upon in ll. 97–102), it does, of course, refer to a woman of high rank who is married to (or about to marry) the king of the Goths – hence its usefulness to the critical model of peace-weaving. In general, however, this short introduction appears to give us little to go on.

And yet, keeping in mind the importance of context in determining whether or not formulas possess traditional meaning,[37] it is worth pushing these lines further. Indeed, if a number of such formulas laden with traditional meaning are placed together, this clustering arguably serves to highlight the passage, drawing links to greater thematic patterns or associations. The need to pay close attention to the formulaic poetics of this passage becomes clear when we note the presence of a second formula, wraþ wærloga. This formula is applied to Eormanric, as well as to the devil in Andreas ll. 613a and 1297a,[38] and provides an interesting counterpoint to Ealhhild's peace-weaving. The juxtaposition of creating peace (a valuable commodity to the Anglo-Saxons) and cruelly breaking oaths (which is arguably one of the worst crimes available in the heroic and religious worlds of Old English poetry), indicates a more thoughtful use of the formula fæle friþuwebbe than might otherwise be gathered from a quick scan of these lines. The reference to Eormanric's legal failings highlights the nature of marriage as a secular and religious compact, and further points to Ealhhild's expected diplomatic function as queen.[39] Indeed, another interesting compound, friþuwær, ties together Ealhhild and Eormanric's epithets. This compound, which is exclusive to poetry, denotes a peace agreement or pact, especially "a covenant with God."[40]

The context of law and compact also draws a closer connection to the second instance of the formula, here employing the masculine form, friþuwebba. This reference occurs in Elene's depiction of the angel who comes to the war-weary Constantine in a dream:

> He wæs sona gearu
> þurh þæs halgan hæs, hreðerlocan onspeon,
> up locade, swa him se ar abead,
> fæle friðowebba. (ll. 85b–88a)
> (He was immediately ready, through the holy one's bidding, he unfastened his heart-enclosure, looked up, as the messenger commanded him, the faithful peace-weaver.)

This passage is notable for its use of enclosure terms, which links it to the poem's epilogue, the most relevant lines from which are laid out below.[41] Significantly, the epilogue also pairs a weaving metaphor with formulaic verses following the pattern: noun (of the chest/knowledge) + verb (of uncovering/unlocking).

> Elene 1237a wordcræftum wæf (wove with the craft of words)
> Elene 1242a wisdom onwreah (uncovered wisdom)
> Elene 1249a bancofan onband (unbound the bone-chamber)
> Elene 1249b breostlocan onwand (unwound the breast-enclosure)
> Elene 1250a leoðucræft onleac (unlocked poetic craft)

These references envelope a section of verses that follow the pattern: noun (of affliction) + verb (of binding/oppression).

> Elene 1243a synnum asæled (tied up by sins)
> Elene 1243b sorgum gewæled (afflicted by sorrows)

Elene 1244a bitrum gebunden (bound by bitterness)

Elene 1244b bisgum beþrungen (oppressed by cares)

This dual focus of construction and constriction can be more broadly mapped onto weaving and binding language in Old English poetry,[42] but one specific example that is also worth looking at is the formulaic depiction of the mail-coat. Similarly linked by textile, binding, and locking diction, the mail-coat is equally associated with the chest – although the mail-coat's function is to enclose the chest rather than reveal its contents.[43] The following examples demonstrate how separate formulas may overlap semantically in depicting the same object:[44]

Beowulf 1505a locene leoðosyrcan (interlocked mail-coat)

Beowulf 1890a locene leoðosyrcan (interlocked mail-coat)

Beowulf 322a heard hondlocen (hard, interlocked by hand)

Beowulf 551a heard hondlocen (hard, interlocked by hand)

Beowulf 406a searonet seowed (sewn battle-net)

Beowulf 1548a breostnet broden (braided breast-net)

Beowulf 552a beadohrægl broden (braided battle-garment)

Beowulf 1443b hondum gebroden (braided by hand)

Beowulf 2755a brogdne beadusercean (braided battle-shirt)

Elene 257a brogden byrne (braided corselet)

Elene 24b wriðene wælhlencan (intertwined slaughter-links)

It is also important to note that the enclosure terminology in Elene's friþuwebba-passage is not only formulaic because it invokes the theme of unlocking the chest's knowledge, but also because the formula, x-locan onspeon, is repeated in Juliana l. 79b: ferðlocan onspeon

(unfastened the heart-enclosure).[45] This and other closely related formulas are elsewhere invoked in relation to speech:[46]

Andreas 470b wordlocan onspeonn (unfastened the speech-enclosure)

Andreas 671b hordlocan onspeon (unfastened the hoard-enclosure)

Andreas 316b wordhord onleac (unlocked the speech-hoard)

Andreas 601b wordhord onleac (unlocked the speech-hoard)

Beowulf 259b wordhord onleac (unlocked the speech-hoard)

Widsið 1b wordhord onleac (unlocked the speech-hoard)

Metres of Boethius, Metre 6 1b wordhord onleac (unlocked the speech-hoard)

Vainglory 3a wordhord onwreah (uncovered the speech-hoard)

All of this interrelated diction implies that the angel in the above Elene passage may be designated a friþuwebba in order to emphasize a poetic association: that is, the link between textile imagery, locking, binding, the chest/knowledge, and treasure. This idea is, of course, especially supported by Cynewulf's use of similar formulaic language in the epilogue. Given this likelihood, it is notable that Widsið, which employs friþuwebba/e in the same formula as Elene does, also includes the formula wordhord onleac at l. 1b: only a few lines above friþuwebbe.

Looking closer at the formula in which friþuwebba/e appears can also provide us with useful new insights into the Old English understanding of peace-weaving. The above discussion has so far concentrated on the second element, but the first is equally important. According to the DOE, the adjective fæle means, "of people / angels / God: faithful, trusty; also, more generally: kind, beloved, pleasant."[47] The dictionary also notes that it appears "in specific alliterative collocations: fæle friþuscealc / friþuweard / friþuwebba / friþuwebbe 'faithful minister of peace / guardian of peace / peace-weaver'."[48] Here, and in all other instances in which fæle crops up –

notably almost entirely in poetry and specifically in psalms[49] – the context relates to a figure who protects or creates peace. Its other three formulaic occurrences appear in Genesis A, fæle freoðoscealc (ll. 2303a and 2499a[50]) (faithful servant of peace), and Guthlac A, fæle freoðuweard (l. 173a) (faithful guardian of peace). All of these instances refer to angels.

These examples demonstrate that it is the fæle (faithful) and friþu- (peace) elements that are essential to this formula, while the invocation of variable elements – servant (-scealc), guardian (-weard) and weaver (-webba/e) – is linked to individual poetic context.[51] Furthermore, just as the term wærloga generally describes enemies of Christianity,[52] fæle almost always refers to religious figures – frequently angels, Christ, God and saints – making it highly appropriate in Elene. A similar context may, perhaps, be gleaned from the Widsið passage, if we read the ritual nature of marriage as linking Ealhhild a religious figure. Such an association may lie in the language of law and compact which governs both the understanding of religion and marriage in Anglo-Saxon England,[53] with the implication that peace is the key function for all people of status and morality who enter into such compacts.[54] Certainly, the formulaic diction that contrasts Ealhhild with her oath-breaking husband also elevates her morally. Thus, an understanding of the formulaic context of both the Widsið and Elene passages indicates that peace-weaving is especially concerned with individuals of elevated status and social or moral importance.

This conclusion matches Sklute's assessment of peace-weaving as a diplomatic task, although he does not note a religious context and still refers to it as a "womanly" occupation.[55] Since the diplomatic role is one that is available to women in Old English poetry, it makes sense for us to find some of them described as friþuwebban.

While both Widsið and Elene imply that peace, rather than gender, is key to the formulaic system, Beowulf's use of friþuwebbe is more interested in war and death.[56] Here we have an ironic peace-weaver, in the form of Fremu[57]:

Modþryðo wæg
Fremu, folces cwen, firen' ondrysne;
nænig þæt dorste deor geneþan
swæsra gesiða, nefne sinfrea,
þæt hire an dæges eagum starede,
ac him wælbende weotode tealde
handgewriþene; hraþe seoþðan wæs
æfter mundgripe mece geþinged,
þæt hit sceadenmæl scyran moste,
cwealmbealu cyðan. Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw
idese to efnanne, þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy,
þætte freoðuwebbe feores onsæce
æfter ligetorne leofne mannan.
Huru þæt onhohsnod[e] Hemminges mæg. (ll. 1931b–44)
(Fremu, the queen of the people, arrogantly carried out a terrible crime;
there was no one of her own company brave enough except a great lord
who dared to look upon her with his eyes by day, but he would soon learn
that hand-woven slaughter-bonds were in store for him; quickly then after
the seizure by hand it was decided by the blade, the patterned-sword
would settle that, perform deadly punishment. Nor is such a queenly

custom for a noblewoman to perform, though she be peerless, that a peace-weaver should deprive a beloved man of life due to an imagined insult. Indeed the kinsman of Hemming put an end to that.)

As above, this passage is highlighted by formulaic diction with traditional meaning,[58] including several terms related to construction and constriction. Although this passage contains the only instance of wælbend (slaughter-bond) in Old English, other compounds with bend are prolific, especially in formulaic contexts.[59] Indeed, wælbend could easily have been substituted for the otherwise attested witebend (punishment-bond)[60] without affecting the alliteration of the line. And so, its presence emphasizes the murderous, as opposed to punitive, context of these particular bonds.

Another significant term is handgewriþene, which is once again attested only here. There are, however, other examples of similar verbs denoting object-production in collocations or compounds with hands, as we have seen in the above discussion of the mail-coat formulas, heard hondlocen and hondum gebroden. The latter of these is also used of a banner in Beowulf l. 1443b, as is locen leoðo-x: hondwundra mæst, / gelocen leoðocræftum (ll. 2768b–9a) (the greatest of hand-wonders, skillfully interlocked). All of these instances describe objects of great worth through the context of the skillful intertwining of their craftsmanship. They can be set in contrast to Fremu's binding, as well as to the only other instance of a collocation of a hand-term and -wriþan, which notably invokes the binding-verb in reaction to the presence of wæl:

Ic hine hrædlice heardan clammum
on wælbedde wriþan þohte,
þæt he for mundgripe minum scolde
licgean lifbysig, butan his lic swice (ll. 963–6).

(I intended to bind him quickly with firm grips on the slaughter-floor, so that because of my hand-grasp he would have to lie struggling for life, unless his body should escape).

Given that the only slaughter to have taken place in Heorot is that of Grendel killing the Danish warriors (and, of course, one Geat), it stands to reason that Beowulf's binding of the monster is intended as a punishment for such actions – that is, this is not simply a description of a battle-field, in whose violence both opponents are equally implicated.[61] Thus, when Fremu attempts to make use of similarly skillful, hand-crafted bonds without legitimate cause, the act is depicted as an unconditionally negative one – indeed, one that emphasizes the ironic context of this particular peace-weaver. Since a peace-weaver is someone who acts toward the construction of peace through diplomacy, we can assume that the poet is commenting that while Fremu should be constructive, she is constrictive instead. As a woman whose status places her in the ideal position to become a diplomat, Fremu's resistance to the taking on of this role and her actions, which directly contradict the role, are criticized.[62]

Once again, scholarly approaches to this passage have generally focused on gender roles. A prominent example is Overing, who argues that it is Fremu's hostility toward her own objectification that causes her to act so violently.[63] For her, Fremu's rebellion hinges upon: "her refusal to be looked at, to become an object, which necessarily results in her rejection of the female peace-weaver role."[64] While this may certainly be the case, I would also like to draw attention to, by way of conclusion, one final example of a figure in Old English poetry who refuses to be looked at. This character is the male antagonist of Judith, Holofernes[65]:

Þær wæs eallgylden

fleohnet fæger ond ymbe þæs folctogan
bed ahongen, þæt se bealofulla
mihte wlitan þurh, wigena baldor,
on æghwylcne þe ðær inne com
hæleða bearna, ond on hyne nænig
monna cynnes, nymðe se modiga hwæne
niðe rofra him þe near hete
rinca to rune gegangan. (ll. 46b–54a)
(There was an entirely golden, fair fly-net, hung around the leader of the people's bed, so that the baleful one, the ruler of warriors, could look through it upon everyone who came in there, the children of warriors, and no one of humankind could look upon him, unless the proud one should call one of the warriors, bold in battle, to go near to him for secret counsel.)

Holofernes' use of another potentially constrictive textile object – a net[66] – through which he may look out but none may look on him, can be read as a parallel situation of a high status leader who takes advantage of his position by instilling fear in his men.[67] Reading these two passages together, the emphasis seems to be on the lack of accessibility that both characters entrench in their communities. Thus, the discrepancy between Fremu's perceived role and her actions may stem not only from her gender, but also from her high rank. Indeed, the poet comments that her action is not a cwenlic þeaw, a queenly custom;[68] he does not say it is not a womanly custom.[69]

As the above discussion has demonstrated, our understanding of the only three Old English friþuwebban in the written record may be greatly enhanced by an analysis that

emphasizes the intertextual close reading of related sets of formulaic diction. While the critical model of the peace-weaver has proven productive in broader discussions of the role of women in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, the Old English metaphor itself has much to tell us about the particular passages in which it appears. The formulaic framework of the friþuwebban, furthermore, makes it clear that the context, while not inherently gender specific, is very much concerned with status, moral superiority and good leadership. In the end, special attention paid to the poetics of these texts can help us to tease out Anglo-Saxon understandings that may otherwise go unnoticed.

---

[1] For more on the early historiography of peace-weaving, see Peter S. Baker, Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 103-26.

[2] It should be noted that we are actually dealing with two related compounds: the masculine friþuwebba, which occurs once in Elene l. 88a, and the feminine friþuwebbe, which occurs twice in Beowulf l. 1942a and Widsið l. 6a. Bosworth and Toller's definitions of these terms lay the groundwork for peace-weaving scholarship's focus on gender, by translating the masculine form as "a peace-weaver, an angel" and the feminine form as "a peace-weaver, woman." Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898–1921); digital edition (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2010) <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/>, s.v. friðo-webba and freoðu-webbe. This sets out a subtle distinction, which implies that, although the masculine form is used once of an angel, the feminine form is applicable to "woman" in general, and so perhaps to "all women." The Dictionary of Old English is more neutral, defining the masculine form as: "weaver of peace (referring to an angel); [in the formula] fæle friþuwebba 'faithful peace-weaver'," and the

feminine as: "(female) weaver of peace; honorific or epithet for a (high-ranking) woman; fæle friþuwebbe 'faithful peace-weaver'." Dictionary of Old English: A–G Online, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2007), s.v. friþu-webba and friþu-webbe; hereafter, DOE. Perhaps sensibly, J. R. Clark Hall avoids engaging with the debate entirely, translating both compounds together as "peace-maker." A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 4th ed. (Toronto: Toronto Univ. Press, 1960), s.v. friðo-webba. All references to and quotations from Old English poetry refer to the ASPR editions, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931–1942), except for Beowulf and Judith, which are from Klaeber's Beowulf, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008); and Judith, ed. Mark S. Griffith, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 1997). All translations are my own.

[3] For a survey of the oral-formulaic debate, see Alain Renoir, A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 49-63; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Diction, Variation, the Formula," in A Beowulf Handbook, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 85–104; Andy Orchard, "Oral Tradition," in Reading Old English Texts, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 101–23; and Elizabeth M. Tyler, Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), pp. 101–22. For more on textualization and the relationship between orality and literacy, see Mark Amodio, Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2004), pp. 1–32.

[4] "Old English Formulas and Systems," English Studies, 48 (1967), 203.

[5] "Formula and Formulaic System in Beowulf," in Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord, ed. John Miles Foley (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1981), p. 399.

[6] Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), p. 235. He has revisited this in his companion monograph, Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 30–33; and recent article with Peter Ramey, "Oral Theory and Medieval Literature," in Medieval Oral Literature, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 80–82.

[7] Tyler, Old English Poetics, p. 101.

[8] Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 92.

[9] Traditional Subjectivities, p. 92. Mize denotes the variable element with a q rather than an x.

[10] Riedinger, "The Old English Formula in Context," Speculum, 60 (1985), 294–317; and Amodio, Writing the Oral Tradition, pp. 65–67. In discussing traditional meaning, Amodio draws on Foley's concept of "traditional referentiality." See Immanent Art, pp. 6–7.

[11] Tyler, Old English Poetics, pp. 101–22.

[12] Riedinger, "Old English Formula in Context," p. 303.

[13] For a useful survey of peace-weaving and Old English gender studies up to the early 1990s, see Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Gender Roles," in A Beowulf Handbook, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 311–24; and Helen Bennett, "From Peace Weaver to Text Weaver: Feminist Approaches to Old English Studies," in Twenty Years of The Year's Work in Old English Studies: A Session from the Program of the Old English

Division at the 1988 Modern Language Association Convention, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, Old English Newsletter Subsidia, 15 (Binghamton, NY: CEMERS, 1989), pp. 23–42. For more recent discussions, see Allen J. Frantzen, Anglo-Saxon Keywords (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 209–12; and Baker, Honour, Exchange and Violence, 103–26.

[14] Richard Burton, "Woman in Old English Poetry," Sewanee Review, 4 (1895), p. 6.

[15] "Woman in Old English Poetry," p. 6. This interpretation was clearly influential, as its presence in much later scholarship indicates. See, for example, Janet T. Buck, "Pre-Feudal Women," Journal of the Rutgers University Library, 34 (1971), 46–51; Andrew Welsh, "Branwen, Beowulf, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale," Viator, 22 (1991), 1–13; Christopher Fee, "Beag and Beaghroden: Women, Treasure and the Language of Social Structure in Beowulf," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 97 (1996), 285; and Patricia Clare Ingham, "From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender, and Anglo-Saxon Community," in Grief and Gender: 700–1700, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 17–31.

[16] See Larry M. Sklute, "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 71 (1970), 534–41, repr. in New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 204–10; Bernice W. Kliman, "Women in Early English Literature, Beowulf to the Ancrene Wisse," Nottingham Medieval Studies, 21 (1977), 32–49; 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: Interpretive Bibliographical Essays, ed. Barbara Kanner (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), pp. 32–56; Michael J. Enright, Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age (Dublin: Four Courts,

1996), pp. 21–37; and Stacy S. Klein, Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 87–123.

[17] Sklute, "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry," p. 208. The influential nature of this article is evident from its reprinting in a 1990 volume of new readings of women in Old English – that is, twenty years after it first appeared in print (and following an explosion of feminist criticism), it was still considered relevant enough to be placed among new interpretations.

[18] Later interpretations of peace-weaving as a gendered role also argue for analogy in the way the angel acts as "intermediary between man and God, just as woman acts as intermediary, at least politically and socially, between tribe and tribe, retainer and lord, or individual to individual." Jane Chance, Woman as Hero in Old English Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986), p. 5. See also Baker, Honour, Exchange and Violence, p. 136.

[19] Klein, Ruling Women, p. 104.

[20] See Jane (Nitzsche) Chance, "The Structural Unity in Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel's Mother," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 22 (1980), 287–303, repr. in New Readings on Women, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, pp. 248–61; Chance, Woman as Hero, pp. xiv, 10, 100 and 106; Setsuko Haruta, "The Women in Beowulf," Poetica (Tokyo), 23 (1986), 1–15; and Gillian R. Overing, Language, Sign and Gender in Beowulf (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1990), pp. xxiii–xxvi and 68–107. Maren Clegg Hyer, however, rejects the active-passive binary, choosing instead to focus on the constructive-destructive nature of the metaphorical textile-making that the texts she discusses depict. See "Textiles and Textile Imagery in Old English Literature" (unpubl. PhD diss, University of Toronto, 1998), pp. 98–154. Finally, Shari Horner discusses the way Beowulf's depictions of various female figures build upon and gloss the peace-weaver motif in order to normalize the poem's construction of

femininity. See The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 2001), pp. 65–100.

[21] Woman as Hero, p. 98.

[22] This label would cover, for instance, characters like Wealhtheow (who is referred to as a friþusibb (peace-pledge) in Beowulf l. 2017a) and possibly the foster-mother of the cuckoo (who is called a friþe mæg (protective woman) in Riddle 9 l. 9a). On the translation of the latter, see DOE, s.v. ? frīþ. With regard to the former, Wealhtheow is, of course, already generally discussed in relation to peace-weaving, despite the differing connotations of friþusibb. The differences between these two compounds are treated briefly in John M. Hill, The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2000), p. 64 and 153, n. 8; and Dorothy Carr Porter, "The Social Centrality of Women in Beowulf," Heroic Age, 5 (2001), n.pag., section II <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/5/porter1.html>. Hill's differentiation is in reaction to Sklute's earlier analysis, which conflates the two terms. Indeed, his translation of friþusibb as "peace-bond" implies an additional overlap between the second elements of the two compounds, as is clear from his use of "bond" in his definition of friþuwebbe: "the idea of weaving bonds of peace by means of personal behavior or action." "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry," p. 208. In actuality, friþusibb is only connected to the concept of "peace," and not with either bonds or weaving, and should rather be translated as "peace-peace," "protection-peace" or "peace/protection-relationship," with the repetition of similar elements acting as an intensifier. See DOE, s.v. friþ(u); and Bosworth and Toller, Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, s.v. sib. Alaric Hall similarly problematizes Sklute's translation of friþusibb, noting the semantic differences between

this compound and friþuwebbe. See "Hygelac's Only Daughter: A Present, a Potentate and a Peaceweaver in Beowulf," Studia Neophilologica, 78 (2006), 85.

[23] Frantzen also notes and problematizes this association in Anglo-Saxon Keywords, p. 210.

[24] "Textiles and Textile Imagery," p. 120. Although this quotation is not directly repeated in Clegg Hyer's published articles, the same undercurrent is present in "Textiles and Textile Imagery in the Exeter Book," Medieval Clothing and Textiles, 1 (2004), 35 and 38; and her article with Gale R. Owen-Crocker, "Woven Works: Making and Using Textiles," in The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2011), p. 184.

[25] Most major studies of textile production in Anglo-Saxon England identify weaving as a predominantly female activity. See, for example, Gale R. Owen-Crocker, Dress in Anglo-Saxon England (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1986); Penelope Walton Rogers, Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England: AD 450–700 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2006); and Nick Stoodley, The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical Enquiry into the Construction and Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite, BAR, British Series, 288 (Oxford: Hedges/Archaeopress, 1999), esp. pp. 31, 33, 75 and 136. However, it should be noted that a search of the Dictionary of Old English online corpus actually yields more references to historical male weavers than female ones. See Dictionary of Old English Corpus on the World Wide Web, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey, John Price Wilkin, and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), s.v. webba, webbe. The fact that men also practiced weaving in Anglo-Saxon England is made clear by the references to named weavers in manumission documents. See H. H. E. Craster, "Some Anglo-Saxon Records of the See of

Durham," Archaeologia Aeliana, Series 4, 1 (1925), 190; and J. A. Earle, Hand-Book to the Land Charters and Other Saxonic Documents (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), pp. 257 and 259.

[26] See Megan Cavell, "Looming Danger and Dangerous Looms: Violence and Weaving in Exeter Book Riddle 56," Leeds Studies in English, 42 (2011), 29–42.

[27] Metres of Boethius, Metre 8 ll. 24b–5a; and Exodus l. 588a.

[28] Riddle 56 and Riddle 35, as well as the latter's Northumbrian counterpart, The Leiden Riddle, and Latin source, Aldhelm's De lorica. Aldhelm's enigmata can be found in Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis, ed. and trans. F. Glorie, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 133 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).

[29] Beowulf ll. 994b–5.

[30] Christ III l. 1134b.

[31] Riddle 84 l. 32a.

[32] Riddle 40 l. 85a and its Latin source, Aldhelm's De creatura ll. 59–62.

[33] Riming Poem l. 70a; Guthlac B l. 1351a; and Riddle 35, as well as the Northumbrian Leiden Riddle ll. 9–10, but not Aldhelm's De lorica.

[34] Elene l. 1237a.

[35] See especially ll. 1236–37a: Þus ic frod ond fus þurh þæt fæcne hus / wordcræftum wæf (Thus I, experienced and ready, through that deceitful house [i.e. body] wove with the craft of words).

[36] However, in Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 117–21, Catherine A. M. Clarke has suggested that the invocation of weaving in Elene's epilogue feminizes Cynewulf. In doing so, she draws on Joyce Tally Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender in Cynewulf's Elene," Exemplaria, 10 (1998), 51–68. This article argues that "Cynewulf's "masculine" task of writing

poetry […] is metaphorically described in terms of a task culturally coded as feminine in Germanic culture, that of weaving" (p. 67). However, her discussion is problematic in places, particularly where she refers to the angel as "characterized by the traditionally and grammatically feminine epithet friðowebba" (p. 53). This instance of the compound is masculine and the rare use of the feminine form cannot prove "traditional" associations in Old English. Taking Lionarons' work as a starting point, Clarke's own reading approaches Cynewulf's word-weaving as a feminization that ties in with what she argues is typical Marian imagery, especially the clavis David (key of David) in the Advent Antiphons and Christ I. Her argument is certainly interesting and would be more compelling if the texts she compared contained specific overlapping imagery and if locking and unlocking imagery were not used in so many other contexts in which gender is not at issue. Indeed, the physicality that Clarke argues marks the unlocking of Cynewulf's inspiration could equally be linked to the many other Old English accounts of bodily binding and release, such as those in Andreas and Guthlac B, as well as to the formulaic depiction of the mind as a locked wordhord (speech-hoard) (see below, p. 00). Furthermore, should the idea that weaving automatically invokes femininity be accepted, we would also have to extend this feminization to God. In Riddle 40, a poem replete with references to God as creator, creation is referred to as wrætlice gewefen wundorcræfte (l. 85) (miraculously woven with wondrous skill). This passage is, notably, not a direct translation of Aldhelm's Anglo-Latin enigma, De creatura, which emphasizes the breadth of creation by comparing it to a spread out piece of silk. Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum, ed. Glorie, ll. 59–62 (p. 537). The skill associated with the production of metaphorical cloth by weaving could well, therefore, be seen as an analogue for Cynewulf's own composition process.

[37] See above, p. 0.

[38] Wærloga appears twice in prose and sixteen times in poetry: Wulfstan's "Larspell," Homily 50, in Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit, ed. A. S. Napier, Sammlung englischer Denkmäler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883); repr. with appendix by Klaus Ostheeren (1967), p. 266, l. 29; Wulfstan's "Be hæðendome," Homily 60, in Wulfstan, ed. Napier, p. 310, l. 6; Andreas ll. 71a, 108a, 613a, 1297a; Genesis A ll. 1266a, 2411b, 2505b, 2532a; Christ III l. 1561b; Guthlac A ll. 298a, 623a, 911a; Judith l. 71b; Juliana l. 455a; Whale l. 37a; and, of course, Widsið l. 9a. Except for this Widsið instance, the occurrences refer exclusively to enemies of Christianity and God.

[39] Indeed, in addition to political compacts, wær is attested both in relation to covenants with God and oaths between husband and wife in Old English. For poetic references to religious covenants, see Andreas 211–14a and 415–16; Christ II 583b–5; Daniel 10–13a; Elene 818b–24a; and Genesis A 2816b–23. For poetic references to marital oaths, see Maxims I 100a; and Husband's Message 49–53. For more on pledge-terms used in relation to both marriage and religious covenants, see Matthias Ammon "Pledges and Agreements in Old English: A Semantic Field Study" (unpubl. PhD diss., Univ. of Cambridge, 2010), pp. 7, 23, 29 and 75–129. E. Gordon Whatley also notes that friþowebba "is normally found in contexts […] where covenants, treaties – protective relationships between nations or people – are at issue." "The Figure of Constantine the Great in Cynewulf's Elene," Traditio, 37 (1981), 183.

[40] DOE, s.v. friþu-wær, sense c. The term appears with this sense in Andreas l. 1630b; and Exodus l. 306b. It appears in the context of other feuds and covenants in Paris Psalter, Psalm 118 l. 472a; and Beowulf ll. 1096a and 2282b.

[41] For more on this context of mental enclosure, see Leslie Lockett, Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2011), esp. pp. 54–109;

Britt Mize, "The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in The Dream of the Rood," Studies in Philology, 107 (2010), 157–61; and Mize, "The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry," Anglo-Saxon England, 35 (2006), 57-90. Links between these two passages have also been recognized before; thus, Antonina Harbus argues that Cynewulf purposefully draws parallels between his own and Constantine's revelations, in "Text as Revelation: Constantine's Dream in Elene," Neophilologus, 78.4 (1994), 651. This builds on suggestions that the diction of the poem's epilogue links Cynewulf to both Constantine and Judas (particularly note that Judas is similarly depicted as crafty with words at ll. 419a and 592a). See Varda Fish, "Theme and Pattern in Cynewulf's Elene," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 76 (1975), 22–3; Dolores Warwick Frese, "The Art of Cynewulf's Runic Signatures," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 324–7; and Daniel G. Calder, Cynewulf (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p. 135.

[42] See Cavell, "Weaving and Binding," p. 3.

[43] The association of the chest with the metaphorical treasure-hoard of words and knowledge is discussed in Eric Jager, "Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?" Speculum, 65 (1990), 845–59.

[44] For an extended use of weaving imagery as related to the mail-coat, see Riddle 35, Leiden Riddle and De lorica.

[45] The element, -loca, is once again placed in relation to the chest in Battle of Maldon l. 145a's reference to the mail-coat: þurh ða hringlocan. This verse is an example of the formula preposition + x-locan, which is common in contexts of confinement and imprisonment. See Lori

Ann Garner, Structuring Spaces: Oral Poetics and Architecture in Early Medieval England (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2011), pp. 79–82.

[46] Also related are Guthlac B l. 956a: lichord onlocen (unlocked the body-hoard); and Solomon and Saturn I l. 4a: larcræftas onlocen (unlocked knowledge).

[47] s.v. fæle, sense 1.

[48] s.v. fæle, sense 1.a.

[49] For the thirty-five other poetic and one prose instance, see DOE, s.v. fæle.

[50] Note also that this angel's speech refers to the enemies of Lot as wærlogan (oath-breakers) at l. 2505b, tying it closely to the Widsið passage.

[51] This variability makes it possible to argue that it is, in fact, Ealhhild's gender that demands the use of -webbe (as traditionally gendered labour) rather than one of the other terms used in other instances of this formulaic system. However, such an argument is problematized by Elene's reference to a male angel as a -webba and to Cynewulf as a weaver of words.

[52] See above, p. 00, n. 38.

[53] See above, pp. 00–00 and n. 39.

[54] This works nicely with Klein's reading of marriage alliances and the Christian conversion: "[Bede] refigures such entrenched Anglo-Saxon queenly roles as secular peaceweaver and catalyst for dynastic alliances, suggesting that royal women might be used, instead, to weave peace with God and to forge alliances between kings and clergy." Ruling Women, p. 19.

[55] Sklute, "Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry," p. 209.

[56] The context of the following passage has also caused a great deal of speculation about Grendel's mother; however, it should be noted that she does not collocate with either peace or weaving in the poem. Her association with Fremu (see note on name below) derives from the

fact that she is an active and aggressive female character, which makes her useful to the critical model of peace-weaving. Thus, for Chance, Fremu and Grendel's mother are "anti-types of the peace-weaving queen [who] behave like kings, using the sword to rid their halls of intruders or unwanted 'hall-guests'" (Woman as Hero, p. 106). For further discussions of Fremu and Grendel's mother, see Helen Damico, Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 46–51; Clegg Hyer, "Textiles and Textile Imagery," pp. 132–34; Klein, Ruling Women, pp. 105–111; and Overing, Language, Sign and Gender, pp. 101–7.

[57] Formerly known as "(Mod)thryth," the fourth edition of Klaeber renames this character. See Klaeber's Beowulf, ed. Fulk, et al., pp. 224–26. The suggestion was originally offered by Ernst A. Kock, in "Interpretations and Emendations of Early English Texts," Anglia, 44 (1920), 103, and was taken up by R. D. Fulk, in "The Name of Offa's Queen: Beowulf 1931–2," Anglia, 122 (2004), 614–39. Fulk argues convincingly that modþryðo wæg simply means "acted arrogantly," with the irregular noun, fremu, at l. 1932a, being the character's name.

[58] Note especially collocations of folc and cwen: Beowulf ll. 641a, 1932a, 2016b–17a; swæs and gesiða: Beowulf ll. 29a, 2040a, 2518a; eage and starian: Beowulf l. 1781a and Christ and Satan l. 139b; mund and grip: Beowulf ll. 380b, 753a, 1534a; cwealm and bealu: Beowulf ll. 2265b and Christ III ll. 1425b–6a; and leof and manna: Beowulf ll. 297b, 1915b, 1994a, 2080a, 2127a, 3108a, Genesis B ll. 1656b, 2589a, Guthlac B l. 1173a and Soul and Body I l. 152b. These verses are further highlighted by an interesting repetition of consonant sounds at a key point: the consonance on "d" at the end of most of the stressed syllables in l. 1936 (wælbende/weotode/tealde) morphs into a repetition of "þ" in the following line (handgewriþene/hraþe/seoþðan).

[59] See, for example, orþancbend (Riddle 42 l. 15a) and searubend (Beowulf l. 2086b), all the elements of which appear in collocation with one another in the Beowulf passage; leoðubend (Andreas ll. 100b, 164a, 1033b, 1373b, 1564b; Genesis B l. 382b; Old Saxon Heliand ll. 3797a, 4927a, 5268b); and isenbend (Genesis B l. 371b; Beowulf ll. 774b, 998b).

[60] See Andreas ll. 108b and 1561a; and Christ and Satan ll. 48b–9a.

[61] This binding may be literal or metaphorical; death is associated with fetters and bonds in Exodus ll. 469–70a, Christ III l. 1041b and Paris Psalter, Psalm 106 ll. 26–29.

[62] Although Baker's questioning of the binary that associates violence with evil figures and peace with good ones is a useful corrective (p. 155), I do not agree with his argument that Fremu's violent act is "perfectly comprehensible in the context of a social system in which the defence of one's honour is all but mandatory" (Honour, Exchange and Violence, p. 153). Regardless of whether Fremu later becomes a good queen, her inciting of violence is clearly depicted as a firen (wicked deed/crime).

[63] Language, Sign and Gender in Beowulf, pp. 103–4.

[64] Overing, p. 250.

[65] Arguments have, however, been made that his gender is also being questioned. See discussions of his symbolic castration in John P. Hermann, Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1989), pp. 189–98; and Susan Kim, "Bloody Signs: Circumcision and Pregnancy in the Old English Judith," Exemplaria, 11 (1999), 285–307.

[66] For more on this passage, see Carl T. Berkhout and James F. Doubleday, "The Net in Judith 46b–54a," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 630–34; and Judith, ed. Griffth, p. 65. Other nets in Old English poetry include the fetters that the Mermedonians place upon Matthew

in Andreas ll. 63–64a and 943a; the ensnaring net of contrivance warned against in Beowulf l. 2167a; hell in Paris Psalter, Psalm 140 l. 38b; a fair few mail-coats in Beowulf ll. 406a, 1547a, 1553a, 1889b, 2754b, and Exodus ll. 202a, 236b; as well as the protective veil by which the Israelites are sheltered from the burning heavens in Exodus l. 74a; a fishing net in Metres of Boethius, Metre 19 l. 11a; and the fragile spider's web in Paris Psalter, Psalm 89 l. 28b.

[67] This passage proves that a similar sort of criticism was available to both male and female characters in Old English poetry; indeed, punishing your subordinates for looking at you, no matter your gender, is not a sign of heroic governance. Klein similarly takes issue with readings that attribute to Beowulf a fear over female-specific aggression: "That both Grendel's mother and Thryth are fiercely prohibited from particular forms of masculine behavior that involve retributive violence stands as a thinly veiled assertion on the part of the poet that this is a kind of masculinity that should, perhaps, not be replicated" (Ruling Women, p. 109).

[68] The reference here is to cwēn, as opposed to cwene (although the DOE notes that the forms are sometimes difficult to distinguish). While cwēn, like cwene, can refer to "a woman" or "a wife," it much more commonly refers to ruling women or women of secular/spiritual nobility, both in poetry and prose. For more examples of the term's usage, see DOE, s.v. cwēn.

[69] Indeed, even the term ides (lady) refers not simply to womanhood but to nobility, perhaps having once invoked a supernatural sort of power. See Audrey L. Meaney, "The Ides of the Cotton Gnomic Poem," Medium Ævum, 48 (1979), 23–39.