
Spring 4-15-1992

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Recommended Citation

Beach, Sarah (1992) "Loss and Recompense: Responsibilities in *Beowulf*," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 18: No. 2, Article 8.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol18/iss2/8>

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Loss and Recompense: Responsibilities in *Beowulf*

Abstract

Examines “the importance of communal responsibilities, particularly dealing with matters of loss and recompense” in the supporting narrative material of the *Beowulf* poem. This theme provides “a key for understanding the relationship between the main events of the poem and the supporting sub-stories.”

Additional Keywords

Beowulf—Social and political aspects; Loss; Recompense; Responsibility

Loss and Recompense: Responsibilities in Beowulf

Sarah Beach

INTRODUCTION

Loss and recompense play important parts in much of Old English literature. The balance between the two is often central to the society presented by that literature. The balancing of losses depends largely upon the correct fulfillment of a person's responsibilities. In *Beowulf*, the interconnection of responsibilities weaves the three main episodes of the poem into one tapestry. Responsibilities to retainers, responsibilities to lord, responsibilities to kin—stretching even so far as responsibility to man-kind—are each in turn explored in the poem.

One of the main problems involved in a study of *Beowulf* is the apparent discontinuity between the main action of the work and the numerous sub-stories¹ which dot the narration. The main argument of this article supports the contention that the two central elements of the poem, *Beowulf's* three adventures and the supporting narrative material, are interrelated. A close study of the supporting material reveals the relationship, even to the point of explaining why *Beowulf* is presented so completely as a monster-fighter. The key lies in examining the importance of communal responsibilities, particularly dealing with matters of loss and recompense.

I. LORD AND RETAINER

One of the most important elements of Anglo-Saxon life was a man's relationship to his lord and kin. The various aspects of these relationships are widely treated in Old English literature. Perhaps the most poignant expression of the loss of lord and kin occurs in *The Wanderer*. In that poem, the narrator grieves for his lost kin and his dead lord, and expresses the hope of finding some lord who will treat him with kindness.

In *Beowulf* the relationships of lord and retainer and kin supply supporting material to the story of the monster-fighting hero. Repeatedly, matters of loyalty to lord and responsibility to kin are the subjects of the sub-stories. From the opening scene to the closing funeral comments, the importance of the lord figures prominently in the poem.

In Anglo-Saxon society, the life of the exile was an undesired fate. Yet, even more undesirable, because more harmful to the community, was the fate of being leaderless. The "wine-dryhten" ["friendly lord"] was important for social stability.

The opening of *Beowulf*, with its description of Scyld Scefing and his glorious descendants does more than just set the scene of Hrothgar's Heorot. It emphasizes the importance of the lord to his people from the very beginning of the poem. The opening lines describe how Scyld, alone, came to the Danes, and became their lord. In time, a son was born to him, "one God sende / folce to frofre" (13-14) ["whom God had sent / to comfort the people"]² Indeed, both father and son were sent as comfort to the Danes, a consolation—one could even say, a recompense. As the poet continues: "fyren earfe ongeat, / æthie ær dragon aldrlease / lange hwile" (14-16) ["—well had He seen / the sinful distress they suffered earlier, leaderless for long"]. To be "aldrlease", lordless, is presented from the beginning of the work as a grievous condition.

Much later in the poem, the lordless, kinless state is re-emphasized. Just prior to *Beowulf's* fight with the dragon, the poet introduces a passage which has been called "The Lay of the Last Survivor." Within this passage, the poet creates an emotional description of one who no longer has a community. He ends his days amidst the treasure his lord and kinsmen had gathered in their days of glory.

Ealle hie dēað foram
ærran mælum, ond se ān dā gēn
lēoda duguðe, sē dāer lengest hwearf,
weard winegeðmor, wende þæs ylcan,
þæt hē lyltel fæc longgestrōna
brūcan mōste. (2236-2241)

[Death swept them off
in those distant times, and the one man left
of the nation's war-troop who survived the longest,
mourning his friends, knew his fate,
that a short time only would he enjoy
the heaped treasures.]

The Last Survivor was perhaps an older man, beyond the age of seeking a new lord. Unlike the narrator of *The Wanderer*, the Last Survivor stays with the inanimate remnants of his community. In doing so, he avoids presenting to the world the appearance of a man who has lost his lord, his ring-giver.

The fact that the lord is expected to bestow gifts on his followers is presented early in the poem.

Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean,
fromum feohgifum on fæder bearme,

ƿæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wilgesi ƿas, þonne wig cume,
leode gelæsten; lofdædum seal
in mæg ƿa gehwære man geƿæon. (20-25)

[So ought a young man, in his father's household,
treasure up the future by his goods and goodness,
by splendid bestowals, so that later in life
his chosen men stand by him in turn,
his retainers serve him when war comes.
By such generosity any man prospers.]

This passage emphasizes the necessity for a lord (or one who will be a lord) of accumulating treasure; not for the sake of owning treasure, but for the purpose of making gifts to retainers. As the last line of the passage points out, generosity insures prosperity.

Generosity alone, however, will not insure that a lord will gain reliable retainers. A lord of no reputation is not likely to collect strong warriors as followers. A victorious battle-lord will gain many retainers. The poet makes this point while setting the scene for the confrontation in Heorot. He describes Hrothgar as such a lord.

ƿā was Hrōðgare herespēd gyfen,
wiges weorðmynd, ƿæt him his winemāgas
georne hýrdon, oðð ƿæt sēo geogð gewēox,
magodriht micel. (64-67)

[Then Hrothgar was given victory in battle,
such honor in war that the men of his house
eagerly served him, while younger kinsmen
grew into strength.]

Because he is a successful war-lord, Hrothgar draws warriors to himself. As his court is still called "great" when Beowulf visits it, one can assume that even into his old age Hrothgar maintained the recommended liberality.

Yet, a reputation as a strong warrior coupled with open-handedness might not be enough to keep the bond of loyalty between retainer and lord. One of the descriptions of Heremod presents a picture of a lord who totally failed in his responsibilities: "Hine sorhwylmas / lemede tō lange; hē his lēodum wearð, / eallum æþellingum tō aldorcearce" (904-906). [His black moods / had lasted too long; he brought to his people / a lifetime's sorrow, and death to his nobles.] Heremod's behavior is presented as a negative example of lord-retainer responsibilities. Rather than preventing loss to the people under his care, he created it. Indeed, later in the poem a fuller description of Heremod's abuse of his privileges and responsibilities is given. Hrothgar gives praise to Beowulf as a help to his people, and then relates how Heremod brought loss to his own people.

Ne wearð Heremōd swā
eaforum Ecgwelan, Ār-Scyldingum;
ne gewēox hē him tō willan, ac tō wælfæalle
ond tō dēaðcwalum Deniga lēodum;
brēat bolgenmōd bēodgenēatas,

eafgesteallan, oþ ƿæt hē āna hwearf,
mære ƿeoden mondræamum from,
ðeah ƿe hine mihtig God mægenes wynnum,
eafeþum stēpte, ofer ealle men
forð gefremede. (1709-1718)

[Not so was Heremod
to the sons of Ecgwela, the Honor-Scyldings;
grew not to their joy, but killed Danish men
in his own hall, bloodily. Swollen in heart,
he cut down companions, raging at table,
till exiled, alone, a famous prince,
was sent from man's joys, notoriously bad,
though God had given him the joys of great strength,
had set him, mighty, above all men.]

Heremod's abuse of his retainers eventually caused him to be cast out of his community. From the height of being the lord of the Danes he fell to become one of the wanderers, an exile, a man "aldorlease".

Heremod is not an isolated example, however. In a latter part of the poem, the poet briefly mentions the story of Modthrytho (or Thrytho), wife of Offa, as a contrast to the goodness of Hygd. Modthrytho would cause her father's retainers to be put to death, for alleged abuses of her person. In doing this, she was both disrupting her father's bond to his retainers and abusing her own privileges as a king's daughter. Although we are told that she reformed her ways when she wed, the poet offers a condemnation of her earlier behavior:

Ne bið swylc cwēnlic ƿeaw
ideše tō efnanne, ƿeah ðe hīo ænlicu sý,
ƿætte fædruwebbe fēores onsæce
æfterlæstorne leofne mannan. (1940-1943)

[Not queenly
customs in a lady, however beautiful—
to take the lives of beloved men,
a woman, peace-weaver, inventing false charges.]

As did Heremod, Modthrytho caused death and loss within her own community. This was not only unqueenly behavior, it was ungenerous.

The poem presents generosity as one of a lord's more important virtues. The giving of gifts by the lord to his followers is so central to the society that one of the more frequent kennings for "lord" in the poetry is "ring-giver". Much treasure is given in recognition of deeds of valor. Apparently, a virtuous king was able to recognize occasions where his liberality was to be exercised. When Beowulf first appears in Hrothgar's court, Hrothgar divines the purpose of the visit and declares: "Ic ƿæm gōðan seal / for his mōð ƿæce mādmas bēodan" (384-385) ["I must offer this man / excellent treasures for his daring courage"].

Before Beowulf has even lifted hand and sword in defense of Heorot, Hrothgar has recognized him as worthy of the king's munificence. Following Beowulf's battle with

Grendel, Hrothgar proves that a king's generosity need not be confined to mere rings of gold.

Nū ic, Bēowulf, ꝥec
secg betsta, mē for susu wylle
frēogan on ferhꝥe; heald forð tela
nūwe sibbe. Ne bið ȝe nænigre gād
worolde wilna, ꝥe ic gewæld hæbbe.
Ful oft ic for læssan lēan teohode,
hordweorȝunge hnāhran rince,
sāmran æt sæcce. Ȝū ȝe self hafast
dædum gefremed, ȝæt ȝin dōm lyfað
āwa to aldre. (946-955)

[Now, my Beowulf,
best of men, I will love you like a son,
cherish you for life. Keep this new kinship
deep in your heart. Nothing I own,
of my worldly goods, would I keep from you.
Often for less I have given treasures,
honorable gifts to lesser warriors,
poorer at battle. But now, by yourself,
you have done such a deed that your fame is assured,
will live forever.]

This is, perhaps, the ultimate in generosity. In addition to declaring that he will withhold nothing of his material goods from Beowulf, he adds a bond of kinship: he will love and cherish the hero like a son. In a society where death came easily, the bonds of adopted kinship were often no less strong than those of blood kinship.

At least three times between this passage and Beowulf's return to his homeland Hrothgar is shown either bestowing gifts on Beowulf or promising him rewards of treasure.

Forgeaf ȝā Bēowulfe bearn Healfdenes
segen gylðenne sigores to lēane,
hroden hildcumbor, helm ond byrnan;
mære māȝðumsweord manige gesāwon
beforan beorn beran. (1020-1024)

[Then Healfdene's sword-son gave to Beowulf
a golden war-standard, ensign of victory
with plated ornament, helmet and mail-shirt,
a jewel-cruised long-sword, and many saw these
laid before the man.]

War-standard, helmet and mail-shirt, and sword: certainly these are worthy gifts for a king to give a successful warrior.

Swā manlice mære ȝeoden,
hordweard hæleȝa heaȝorðasas gæald
mearum ond mādum, swā hȝ nāfre man lyhð,
sē ȝe segan wile sōð æfter rihte. (1046-1049)

[Manfully, generously,
that famous king, hoard-guard of heroes,
repaid the battle-rush with those fine gifts,
such horse and treasure that no man will fault them
who has the least care to tell the truth.]

These gifts are certainly the mark of liberality. They are over and above the gifts of finely grafted tools of the warrior's trade. Yet, the open-handed Hrothgar does not stop here. Before Beowulf goes to fight Grendel's mother, the Dane-lord promises further generosity:

ic ȝe ȝā fæhðe fēo lēanige,
ealdgestrēonum, swā ic ær dyde,
wundnum golde, gȝf ȝū on weg cymest. (1380-1382)

[I will reward your feud with payments,
most valued treasures, as I did before,
old twisted gold, if you live to return.]

A repetition of the negative example of Heremod emphasizes again the importance of this virtue of liberality: "Hwæȝere him on ferhȝe grēow / brēosthord blōðrēow; nallas bēagas geaf / Denum æfter dōme" (1718-1720) [Despite good fortune his thought grew savage, / his heart blood-thirsty; never a ring / did he give, for glory, to the Danish men.] It is obvious that Heremod's closed-fistedness was not the result of empty coffers: he had been favored by "mihtig God" and set over all men. One can safely assume that a suitable treasure went with this divine good-will.

The generosity of a lord was not, however, without its responsibilities. In a long passage just before he goes to fight Grendel's mother, Beowulf reminds Hrothgar of the responsibilities he has taken on in adopting the hero.

"Geȝenc nū, se mæra maga Healfdenes,
snottra fengel, nū ic eom siðes fūs,
goldwine gumena, hwæt wit geō spræcon,
gif ic æt ȝearfe ȝinre scolde
aldre linnan, ȝæt ȝū mē ā wære
forðgewitenum on fæder stæle.
Wes ȝū mundbora mīnum magoȝegnum,
hondgesellum, gif mec hild nime;
swylce ȝū ðā mādmas, ȝe ȝū mē sealdest,
Hrōðgār lēofa, Higellāce onsend.
Mæg ȝonne on ȝæm golde ongitan Gēata dryhten,
gesēon sunu Hræddes, ȝonne hē on ȝæt sinc starað,
ȝæt ic gumcystum gōðne funde
bēaga bryttan, brēc ȝonne mōste." (1474-1487)

[Famed son of Healfdene, wisest of princes,
remember all well, now that I am ready,
gold-friend of warriors, what we spoke of before,
that if I lose my life while at work in your cause,
you will still be to me as a father always.
Be shield and protector of my young men here,
close battle-comrades, if this fight claims me;
and also the treasures which you have given me,
beloved Hrothgar, send back to Hygelac,
lord of the Geats. He will understand
when he sees such gold, the son of Hrethel
will know full well that I had found
a ring-giving lord of all manly virtues,
rejoiced in his good while I was able.]

Recalling Hrothgar's promise to stand as a father to the Geat, Beowulf also reminds the Danish king that should the hero die in the conflict with Grendel's mother, Hrothgar becomes responsible for Beowulf's followers. If Beowulf dies, Hrothgar is obligated to the hero's companions, that they not be left "aldrorless". Beowulf also asks that the treasure Hrothgar has already given him be sent to Hygelac, in order that the Geatish king might know that Beowulf did not die far removed from the favor of a generous lord. Perhaps the sentiment expressed by the final part of this passage could be stated thus: "Do not let my lord Hygelac imagine that I died an exile's death, lordless and alone."

The responsibilities with which Beowulf charges Hrothgar deal with the nature of recompense. The protection he asks for his followers is a recompense for the loss of their lord. Having the treasures sent to Hygelac redresses the Geatish king for the loss of his kinsman and retainer. The payment of wer-gyld is shown as part of a lord's responsibilities.

One form of repayment which plays a large part in the sub-stories of *Beowulf* belongs to the category of "an eye for an eye". However, here it might be phrased "a life for a life". This recompense receives small approval from the poet: "Ne was þæt gewrixle til, / þæt hie on bā healfa bigan scoldon / frēonda fēorum." (1304-1306) [No good exchange, / that those on both sides had to pay with the lives of kinsmen and friends.]

The poet recognizes that gold does little to alleviate the loss of a beloved companion. Yet, such a material recognition of the value of the lost one is better than ignoring the dead. The custom of wer-gyld is an acknowledgement of the individual's importance to the community. The death of a member of the community will not pass unnoticed. When Hrothgar honors Beowulf's followers, gold is given as recompense for the man Grendel killed.

Ðā gýt æghwylcum eorla drihten
þāra þe mid Bēowulfce brimlāde tēah,
on þære medubence mājðum gesealde,
yrfel æfe, and þone ænne heht
golde forgyldan, þone ðe Grendel ær
māne ācwealde (1050-1055)

[Then, still more, to those on the mead-bench
who made the sea-journey, Beowulf's followers,
the lord of warriors gave each a treasure,
true old heirlooms, and ordered that gold
be paid for the man that Grendel killed
before in his sin ...]

Perhaps the most important example of offered recompense is the Finnsburg episode. This story is included because of the interesting problems of recompense involved in the incident.³ A brief recapitulation of the story sets the scene thus: In early winter, Finn, king of the Frisians, has provoked a battle with the Danes, his wife's kinsmen and countrymen, who are visiting in his hall. In

the battle, many of the Danes are killed, as are many of the Frisians. Because winter is setting in, the surviving Danes cannot leave, and Finn cannot reinforce his depleted company of retainers.

Because the Danes cannot be removed without incurring greater loss in his own host, Finn is forced to offer some kind of recompense. The Danes must be included in the Frisian community for the duration of the winter. Therefore Finn attempts to make peace.

Finn Hengeste
elne unflitne āðum benemde,
þæt hē þā wēalāfe weotena dōme
ārum hēolde, þæt ðær ænig mon
wordum nē worcum wære ne bræce,
nē þurh inwitsearo æfre gemānden,
ðeah hie hira bēaggyfan banan folgedon
ðēodenlēase, þā him swā gelyearfod wæs;
gyf þonne Frýsna hwylic frēcnan sprāce
ðæs morþorhētes myndgiend wære,
þonne hit sweordes ecg sēðan scolde. (1096-1106)

[Earnestly Finn
took oath before Hengest to hold in such honor,
by his counselors' judgment, those sad survivors
that no man should ever, by word or deed,
break off the truce, nor plotting in malice
give them any affront, though now they followed
the lord who had killed their own ring-giver —
without a leader, out of necessity;
that if any Frisian, in provocation,
should call to mind the murderous feud,
the edge of the sword should settle it for good.]

In his oath, Finn promises to treat the Danes as he does his Frisians, declaring that no one will provoke the Danes, even though they are presently obliged to follow the king who killed their own lord.

Although this attempted recompense failed, the story in no way loses its force as an example of repayment. It occurs because the Danes had temporarily become a part of the Frisian community. In this situation, Finn could not afford to ignore the kin-loss and lord-loss which the Danes had suffered.

It is because community is so important in the giving of wer-gyld that the poet can state that the Danes will get no recompense from Grendel.

sibbe ne wolde
wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
feorhbealo feorran, fēa þingian,
nē þær nænig witenā wēnan þorfte
beorhtre bōte tō banan folmum (154-158)

[He wanted no peace
with any of the men in the Danish host,
to put off his killing, settle it by payment;
none of the counselors had any great need
to look for bright gifts from his reddened hands.]

Grendel has been presented as existing outside the community of the Danes, indeed, as being outside the community of mankind itself. Because he is such an extreme outsider, no one can or does expect the workings of wer-gyld to apply to the monster, Grendel.

Grendel's mother presents a slightly different situation. Grendel is, one might say, her community. Therefore she seeks blood-payment for his death: "Ond his mōdor þā gýt / gífre and galgmōd gegān wolde / sorhfulne sið, sunu deoð wrecan" (1276-1278) [And now his mother, / still greedy for slaughter, wanted to visit, / make a grievous journey, avenge her son's death.]. Her deed is an example of how the search for recompense crosses the line into vengeance. However, because she is a monster and therefore outside the community of mankind, no one truly believes she deserves to receive wer-gyld. Her deeds of horror are only slightly less than Grendel's.

The responsibilities of a lord to his retainers have been shown to include generous gift-giving and, if necessary, the payment of wer-gyld. However, the responsibilities of the relationship do not all lie with the lord. The retainer is expected to give support to his lord and to remain loyal.

When Beowulf returns to the Geatish court, he praises Hrothgar's generosity to Hygelac. He then offers his lord the treasures he has won from the Danish king.

"Swā se ðeodcýning þæawum lyfde;
nealles ic ðām lēanum forloren hæfde,
mægnes mēde, ac hē mē māðmas gearf,
sunu Healfdenes on mīnne sylfes dōm;
ðā ic ðē, beorcýning, bringan wylle,
ēstum geýwan." (2144-2149)

[That nation's king thus kept to good custom;
indeed, I have hardly lost all that booty,
reward for strength— the son of Healfdene
gave me treasures at my own choice,
which I wish, great king, to bring to you,
to show my good will.]

By this act, Beowulf proves his continuing loyalty to Hygelac. His reasons for it conclude the passage: "Gen is eall æt e / lissa gelong; ic lyt hafo / heafodmaga nefne, Hygelac, ec" (2149-2151) ["All my joys / still depend on you: I have few relatives, / and no chief kinsman except you, Hygelac."]. Having no other kinsmen, Beowulf will exert himself to maintain his relationship with his lord.

The poet re-emphasizes Beowulf's loyalty to his kinsman and lord. Hygelac, also, is shown to behave properly toward Beowulf. "Hygelāce was / nūða heardum nefa swýðe hold, / ond gehwæðer oðrum hrōþra gemýdig" (2169-2171) [With war-bold Hygelac / his nephew kept faith, his man ever loyal, / and each always worked for the other's welfare.]. Hygelac and Beowulf continued to hold each other's welfare in mind. Indeed, Beowulf, is shown to stand scrupulously by his responsibilities as a retainer.

Beowulf's recognition of his responsibilities is strong.

At Hygelac's death, he is offered the lordship of the Geats. Yet, as retainer and kinsman to Hygelac, he refuses this so long as Hygelac's son Heardred is alive.

Nō ðý ær fēascafte findan meahston
æt ðām æðelinge ænige ðinga,
þæt hē Heardrēde hlāford wære,
oððe þone cýnedōm cīosan wolde;
hwæðre hē hine on folce frēondlārum hēold,
ēstum mid ære, oððæt hē ylðra wearð,
Weder-Gēatum wēold. (2373-2379)

[No sooner for that, through any counsel,
could the wretched nobles convince the hero
to be Heardred's lord; he would not take
the royal power. Still he supported him
among his people with friendly wisdom,
kept him in honor, until he grew older,
could rule the Geats.]

Beowulf supports his young cousin with his wisdom, serving as one of Heardred's counselors. He again proves himself to be a good retainer.

The strong loyalty of the retainers for their lord can be seen in the companions who went with Beowulf into Denmark. When Beowulf goes into the mere to fight Grendel's mother, his men, along with the lords of Hrothgar's court, wait for him at the edge of the water. When the waters are stirred up with blood, the Danes give Beowulf up as lost. Not so the Geats.

Næs ofgeafon
hwate Scyldingas; gewāt him hām þonon
goldwine gumena. Gistas sētan
mōdes sēoce ond on mere staredon;
wīston ond ne wēndon, þæt hīc heora winedrihten
sefne gesāwon. (1600-1605)

[The valiant Scyldings
gave up the cliff-watch; the gold-friend departed,
went home with his men. The Geatish visitors
still sat, heartsick, stared at the mere.
They wished, without hope, they could see their lord,
their great friend himself.]

These followers of Beowulf's continued their vigil by the water, even though they did not expect to see their lord alive again. In spite of hopelessness, they kept faith with their lord.

Even the best of lords, however, is not always guaranteed to have such faithful retainers. Even Beowulf was not free from faithless followers.

Nealles him on hēape handgesteallan,
æðeliga bearn ymbe gestōdon
hildcýstum, ac hý on holt bugon,
ealdre burgan. Hiora in ānum wēoll
sefa wið sorgum; sibb æfre ne mæg
wiht onwenden þām ðe wēl þenceð. (2596-2601)

[But not at all did the sons of nobles,

hand-picked comrades, his troop stand round him with battle-courage: they fled to the wood to save their lives. Only one felt shame and sorrow. Nothing can ever hold back kinship in a right-thinking man.]

Of the hand-picked company he took with him when he went to face the dragon, only one kept faith with Beowulf. The others ran to save their lives, while one "right thinking man" remained. The poet thus dramatically points out that retainers are expected to stand by their lord through all strife.

Wiglaf, the single faithful companion, voices the responsibility of the retainer before he goes to Beowulf's aid. He reminds his fellows of the gifts which Beowulf has given them. He then declares:

Nū is sē dæg cumen,
þæt ure mandryhten mægenes behofað,
gōdra gūrinca; wutun gongan tō,
helpan hlifuman, þenden hyt sý,
glēdegeas grim! (2646-2650)

[The time is at hand when our generous lord could use the strength of good soldiers. Let us go to him now, help our war-leader through this heat, fire-horror.]

With this speech he goes into the dragon-fire and gives aid to his lord. He is with Beowulf when he dies. It is eminently fitting that the one loyal retainer pass judgement over those who broke faith with their lord.

After announcing Beowulf's death, Wiglaf condemns his companions for their crime. For it is a crime: they have irreparably harmed the community by failing to stand by their lord in his time of need.

"Wergendra tō lýt
þrong ymbe þeoden, þa hinc sēo þræg becwōm.
Nū sceal sinc þego ond swyrgifu,
eall eðelwyn eowrum cynne,
lufen ālicgean; londrihtes mōt
þære mægburge monna æghwylc
idel hweorfan, sy ððan æðelingas
feorran gefricgean flēam eowerne,
dōmlēasan æd. Dēað bið sēlla
eorla gehwylcum þonne edwiltū!" (2882-2891)

[Too few defenders pressed round the king when his worst time came. Now all treasure, giving and receiving, all home-joys, ownership, comfort, shall cease for your kin: deprived of their rights each man of your families will have to be exiled, once nobles afar hear of your flight, a deed of no glory. Death is better for any warrior than a shameful life!]

By their failure, the faithless retainers have caused a loss to the community which cannot be repaid. The only

recompense is punishment of those who failed in their responsibility. They and their kin are exiled, because those who will not stand by their lord in his need have no value to the community. Indeed, their fate is worse than the usual exile. Exiles who must wander because their lord and kin are no more can hope to find a place with another lord, but those who are cast out because they broke faith with their lord are not likely to find a hospitable home in exile. Once their names and deeds become known, no lord would feel inclined to accept as retainers men who have failed in their duty to their previous lord.

The relationship of lord and retainer can thus be seen as a mutually sustained balance. The life of either depends on the faithfulness of both. Should one or the other fail, a loss of some sort is bound to afflict the community, a loss that would need to be compensated by some means.

II. FEUDING

One result of the structure of the lord-retainer relationship and its accompanying institution of wer-gyld was the practice of feuding. When an outsider causes the death of a lord, the offer of material recompense is not always satisfactory to those who are now "aldorlease". The mental states of those who suffered the loss determines whether wer-gyld will be accepted or vengeance sought. It is the seeking of vengeance which supplies the cause of most of the feuding recounted in *Beowulf*. The poet shows that once the contention has begun, it is very difficult to break the cycle of the blood-feud. Wer-gyld may be offered, and even accepted, but such payment may not end the search for vengeance.

Of all the characters in the poem, Beowulf himself is the least connected to any feuding. The closest (and virtually only) association of a feud to Beowulf occurs in his father's history. When Beowulf visits the court of Hrothgar, the Danish king recalls the incident.

"Gesið þin fæder fāðhæ mæste;
wearþ hē Heaðolāfe tō handbonan
mid Wilfingum; ðā hine Wedera cyn
for herebrōgan habban ne mihte.
Þanon hē gesōhte Sūð-Dena folc
ofer yðā gewearc, Ār-Scyldinga" (459-464)

[Your father struck up a mighty feud, slayer of Heatholaf among the Wylfings, by his own hand. Then the treaty-folk could not harbor him for fear of war, and so he traveled to the land of South-Danes, over rolling waves to Honor-Scyldings.]

Hrothgar goes on to tell how he paid the wer-gyld which settled Ecgtheow's feud: "Siððan þā fāðhæ fēo þingode; / sende ic Wylfingum ofer wāteres hrycg / ealde mādmas" (470-472) [Later I settled the feud by payment; / I sent to those Wylfings, over the water's ridge, / fine old treasures]. Apparently, Hrothgar's payment of the blood-price brought a satisfactory conclusion to this feud,

as no mention occurs of any continuation of it.

However, such successful resolutions of feuds are in the extreme minority among the sub-stories of *Beowulf*. Even Hrothgar is destined for his failure. Beowulf recounts to Hygelac upon his return to the Geatish court Hrothgar's attempt at resolving the Danes' feud with Ingeld: Hrothgar will wed his daughter to Ingeld.

“... hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga,
rices hyrde, ond þæt fæd talað,
þæt hē mid ðý wife wælfæhðaða dæil,
sæcca gesette. Oft seldan hwær
æfter leodhryre lýtle hwile
bongār būgeð, þeah sēo brýd dugu!” (2026-2031)

[“The Scylding king has brought this about the guard of his kingdom, accepts the opinion that with the young woman he'll settle his share of the killings and feud. But seldom anywhere, after a slaying, will the death-spear rest, even for a while, though the bride be good.”]

Hrothgar has tried to settle the feud by forging bonds of adopted kinship through marriage. Beowulf has no doubt that this attempted resolution will fail.

Beowulf bases his certainty on a simple psychological fact: material objects often have a strong evocative effect on memory. Beowulf points out that Freawaru's Danish honor-guard is likely to carry Heathobard heirlooms into Ingeld's court: “on him gladiað gomela lāfe, / heard on hringmæl Heaða-Beardna gestreon ...” (2036-2037) [On Danish belts swing shining heirlooms, / sharp as of old, the Heathobards' ring-treasures...]. The sight of the familiar treasures will soon recall the feud to the minds of those who lost fathers and lords in the conflict. As was stated, a bride — no matter how good she is — is not suitable recompense for lost lords and warriors.

Another aspect of feuding which the poet explores is the effect the conflict has on the guiltless bystanders. The description of Hildeburh's grief over the results of the fighting at Finnsburg provides the main example of this aspect. Like Freawaru, Hildeburh has the misfortune of seeing her kin-by-marriage clashing with her blood relations.

Nē hūru Hildeburh herian þorfe
Eotena trēowe; unsynnum wearð
beloren lēofum æt þām lindplegan
bearnum ond brōðrum; hīe on gebyrd hruron
gāre wunde; þæt was geōmuru ides!
Nalles hōlinga Hōces dohtar
meotodscraft bemearn, sy þān morgen cōm,
ðā hēo under swegle gesēon meahthe
morþorbealo māga, þær hēo ær mæste hēold
worolde wyne. (1071-1080)

[No need at all that Hildeburh praise the faith of the “giants”; guiltless herself, she lost her loved ones / in that clash of shields, her son and brother — they were born to fall,

slain by spear-thrusts. She knew deep grief. Not without cause did Hoc's daughter mourn the web's short measure that fated morning when she saw their bodies, her murdered kinsmen, under the skies where she had known her greatest joy.]

Hildeburh loses both son and brother in the conflict, yet she receives no compensation. This is a common result of feuding. By carrying the contention beyond the bounds of recompense and into the realm of vengeance, the parties quickly bring the feud to the point where no *wer-gyld* would be able to alleviate the loss.

The ending of the feud between the Danes and the Frisians is particularly bloody. Hengest and his followers slay Finn and his people.

Ðā was heal roden
feōnda feorum, swilce Fin slāgen,
cýning on corþre ond sēo cwēn numen.
Scōtend Scyldinga tō scypon feredon
eal ingesteald eorðcýninges,
sylce hīe æt Finnes hām findan meahthon
sigla searogimma. Hīe on sēlāde
driflice wif tō Denum feredon,
læddon tō lēodum. (1151-1159)

[The hall was decorated with the lives of the foe, a tapestry of blood, Finn slain too, the king with his troop, and the queen taken. The Scylding warriors bore to their ship every good heirloom they found in the house of the great king Finn, gold seals, gem brooches. Over the sea they carried the queen back to the Danes, brought her to her people.]

They take Hildeburh back to the Danes, as if this is the solution to her losses. In addition to losing her brother, she has lost both husband and son, and she had presumably been happy with them, for the poet in describing her in the earlier passage has said so: “ær heo ær mæste heold / worolde wyne” (1079-1080) [where she had known / her greatest joy].

Many of the feuding sub-stories in *Beowulf* deal with the type of feuding that sets kin against kin. The problem with these feuds is that they tend to involve other people eventually, to some community's loss. The tale of the rebellion Othere's sons stirred against their uncle Onela serves as an example of this problem. Besides rebelling and breaking their bonds of kinship and loyalty to lord, the brothers also involve outsiders in their conflict. They go to Heardred and seek the aid of the young Geatish king against Onela.

Hyne wrācmaecgas
ofer sē sōhtan, suna Ohteres;
hæfdon hý forhæalden helm Scyldinga,
þone sēlestan sēcýninga

þāra ðe in swiðrice sinc brytnade,
mārne þrōden. Him þæt is mearce weaðð;
hē þær for feorme feorhwunde hlēat,
sweordes swengum, sunu Hygelāces;
ond him eft gewāt Ongentþiofes bearn
hāmes nīosan, syððan Heardrēd laeg,
lēt ðone bregostlā Blōwulf healdan,
Gēatum wealdan (2379-2390)

[Then outcasts came,
seeking him out, Ohthere's sons,
across the sea; had rebelled against Onela,
lord of the Scylfings, best of the sea-kings,
of those who gave treasure in Swedish lands,
a famous prince. That was the end
for Hygelac's son, when his hospitality
later earned him a death-wound by sword,
and Ongentþiof's son turned about
once Heardred lay dead, returned to his home,
let Beowulf hold the royal chair
and rule the Geats.]

Because he has involved himself in someone else's feud, Heardred loses his life. At Heardred's death, Beowulf becomes the lord of the Geats. He, wisely, makes no effort to force a continuance of the feuding, and thus, Onela leaves him to piece.

He does rule in peace for a long time (recognizing that the "fifty years" used is probably formulaic). Yet, even so good a lord as Beowulf is not able to defeat the persistence of the urge for vengeance. At his death, the feuds that will be revived against the Geats are recounted. That most of the principal figures of the original conflict are no longer alive in no way deters those set upon revenge. The emotional memory of a great loss is as easily handed down to the next generation as an heirloom.

Some of the feuds described in the sub-stories deal with kin-slaying. Little distinction need be made between the adopted kinship of marriage and the bonds of blood relationship. When the importance of the relationship is ignored in the heat of emotion, disaster always results.

An early example of this secondary type of feuding, that is, conflict between kin, is given early in the poem. As the poet describes the building of Heorot and its glory, he mentions in passing the feud between Hrothgar and his son-in-law Ingeld which will eventually result in the destruction of the golden hall:

Sele hlífade
hēah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bād,
lāðan liges; ne wæs hit lenge þā gēn,
þæt se ecghefe ðumswēoran
aetter waelniðe wæccan scolde. (81-85)

[The hall towered high,
cliff-like, horn-gabled, awaited the war-flames,
malicious burning; it was not the time
for the sharp-edged hate of his sworn son-in-law

to rise against Hrothgar in murderous rage.]

Hrothgar in particular seems afflicted with problems of betrayed kinship. His son-in-law will rise against him. It is also implied that his nephew will abuse the bonds of kinship. This is accomplished in one short passage: "þā cwōm Wealhþeo forð / gān under gyldnum beage þær þā gōðan twegen / sæton suhtergelæðeran; þā gýt wæs hiera sib ætgædere, / æghwylc oðrum trýwe" (1162-1165) [Wealththeow came forth, / glistening in gold, to greet the good pair, / uncle and nephew; their peace was still firm, / each true to the other.]. The simple phrase "þā gýt" ["then still"] conveys a sense of the impending betrayal.

Yet, these are not the only examples of kin-slaying or kin-betrayal present at Hrothgar's court. His leading warrior, who sits at his feet, is a kin-slayer. When Unferth taunts the visiting Geat about the contest with Breca, Beowulf responds by reminding the Dane of his deed.

"Breca næfre gīt
æt heaðolāce, nē gehwæþer incer,
swā deorlice dāð gefremede
fægum sweordum — nō ic þæs fela gylpe —,
þeah ðū þinum brōðrum ið banan wurde,
hæafodmægum; þæs þū in helle scealt
werhðo drēogan, þeah þīn wit dūge." (583-589)

["Never in the din and play of battle
did Breca or you show such courage
with shining blades — not to boast about it—
though you were a man-slayer, killed your brothers,
closest kinsmen, for which you must suffer
damnation in hell, clever though you are."]

Beowulf declares that Unferth will suffer damnation for this deed, a punishment for the evil of kin-slaying.

The loss to the community which a kin-slaying causes is no less than that of any other violent death. The difficulties which it causes in matters of recompense are what make it different. The person whose responsibility it is to gain recompense for the death is often the same person who caused the loss. It poses a severe emotional strain on the community.

A prime example of this problem is presented among the Geats. Of King Hrethel's sons, the eldest, Herebeald, was accidentally killed by his brother.

Wæs þā yldestan ungedæflice
mæges dædum morþorbed strēð,
syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
his frēawine flāne geswencte,
miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscēt,
brōðor oðerne blōdigan gære. (2435-2440)

[For the eldest brother a death-bed was strewn,
undeservedly, by his kinsman's error:
Hæthcyn shot him, his brother, his leader,
with an arrow from his bow curved and horn-tipped;
missed his mark and struck his brother,

one son's blood on the other's shaft.]

This sort of accident creates a grave problem for the community. It is not possible to gain suitable recompense: *"Net was feohlēas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad, / hreðre hygemēðe; sceolde hwaðre swā þeah / æðeling unrecen ealdres linnan"* (2441-2443) [There was no way to pay for a death so wrong, / blinding the heart, yet still the prince / had lost his life, lay unavenged.]

The feud stories presented in *Beowulf* are generally unglamorized tales. The heroism of physical combat is given scant attention in these conflicts. Such heroism is reserved for Beowulf's battles with monsters. Instead, the sub-stories which are concerned with feuding focus on the emotional states of the participants, and on the devastating results of the feuds.

Likewise, the tales of kin-slaying mentioned in *Beowulf* center not so much on the events themselves, but rather on the problems they create for the community. To slay one's kin weakens one's own community. In the end, it leads to one's own detriment.

III. THE MONSTERS AND BEOWULF

The main events of *Beowulf* deal with monsters. The hero, Beowulf, has two confrontations with monsters in Denmark, and one in his homeland. A great deal could be said about the presence of such fantastical creatures in the work. Yet, if one made the effort to defend their presence, one could easily overlook the reason for their inclusion. For there is a reason, and it is not unconnected with the supporting material of the work. The best way to discover this reason is to examine what it is that the poet says about the monsters, particularly about Grendel and his mother.

As the poet sets the scene for the first conflict, he introduces the creature which will shortly bring such grief to the Danes. He names the "murderous spirit" Grendel, and continues:

fifelcynnes eard
wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
si þðan him Scyppend forscifen hæfde
in Cīnes cynne — þonne cwealm gewrac
ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Åbel slōg;
ne gefeah hē þære fæhðe, ac hē hine feor forwac,
Metod for þy mǣne mancynne fram. (104-110)

[unblessed, unhappy,
he dwelt for a time in the lair of the monsters
after the Creator had outlawed, condemned them
as kinsmen of Cain —for that murder God
the Eternal took vengeance, when Cain killed Abel.
No joy that kin-slaughter: the Lord drove him out,
far from mankind, for that unclean killing.]

This may be the traditional descent of monsters, that is, being the descendants of Cain. Yet, given the other matters presented in the poem, it is especially significant here. Cain was guilty of kin-slaughter, a deed which, as the poet shows

elsewhere in the poem, creates serious problems and harm for the community. Because of this deed, the Almighty cast Cain out of the community of mankind. Cain and then his descendants become the ultimate outsiders, and as such are a serious threat to the community of mankind.

When the poet introduces Grendel's mother, he adds a bit more to the perception of Cain's descendants as outsiders. He has already described how Grendel could not abide the joy emanating from Hrothgar's hall. In introducing Grendel's mother, the poet implies that this may be a hereditary trait.

Grendles mōdor,
ides āglæcwīf yrmþe gemunde,
sē þe wæteregeas wunian scolde,
cealde strēamas, si þðan Cāin wearð
to ecgbanan āngan brēþer,
fæderenmæge; hē þā fāg gewāt,
morþre gemearcod mandrēam flēon,
wēsten warode. (1258-1265)

[Grendel's mother,
a monster woman, kept war-grief
deep in her mind, dwelt in terrible waters,
icy cold streams, since Cain raised the sword
against closest kinsman, put blade to his brother;
dripping with that fate, bright-stained outlawry,
gore-marked by murder, he fled man's joys,
lived in wastelands.]

Cain fled from the joys of mankind. By choosing to flee from those things which make the life of mankind lightest, Cain and his descendants are, perforce, associated with that which makes the life of mankind darkest.

It is this association that engenders the connection of Cain with monsters:

þanon untýdras ealle onwōcon,
eotenas on ylfe ond orcnēas,
swylce gýgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon
lange þrage (111-114)

[From him sprang every misbegotten thing,
monsters and elves and the walking dead,
and also those giants who fought against God
time and again...]

All evil creatures have come to belong to Cain's kin, the misbegotten beings who are inimical toward mankind.

One of the interesting things about the character of Beowulf is that he is presented almost totally as a monster-fighter. When he arrives at the Danish court, the credentials he offers are those of monster-fighting:

"... selfe ofersāwon, ðā ic of searwum cwōm,
fāh from fēondum, þær ic fife geband,
fýðde eotena cyn, ond on fýðum slōg
niceras nihtes" (419-422)

"... They saw themselves how I came from combat
bloodied by enemies where I crushed down five,

killed a tribe of giants, and on the waves at night
slew water-beasts ..."]

When Unferth taunts Beowulf, saying that the Geat lost a swimming contest with Breca, the hero corrects the Dane's misapprehension of the contest. Beowulf declares that the contest was not so much between Beowulf and Breca as it was the pair of them against the sea. He goes on to describe the battle he fought with sea-monsters, alone.

"Swā mec gelōme lādgefeonan
þræatedon þearle. Ic him þenode
dēoran sweorde, swā hit gedēfe was.
Næs hīe dēare fyлле gefean hæfdon,
mānfordædla, þæt hīe mē þegon,
symbel ymbæton sægrunde nēah;
ac on mergenne mecum wunde
be Ƴðlāfe uppe lægon,
sweordum āswefede, þæt syððan nā
ymb brontme ford brimlīðende
lāde ne lettan." (559-569)

["Again and again the angry monsters
made fierce attacks. I served them well
with my noble blade, as was only fitting.
Small pleasure they had in such a sword-feast,
dark things in the sea that meant to eat me,
sit round their banquet on the deep sea-floor.
Instead, in the morning, they lay on the beach,
asleep from my sword, the tide-marks bloodied
from their deep gashes, and never again
did they trouble the passage of seafaring men
across the ocean."]

Even to the end of his life, Beowulf continued to view himself as a monster-fighter. It is this attitude which causes him to claim the right to fight the dragon; "Nis þæt ēower sīð, / nē gemet mannes, nefne mīn ānes, / þæt hē wið āgīðcean eorðo dāle, / eorlscype efne" (2532-2535) ["It is not your business, / nor fitting for any, except me alone, / to test out his strength against this monster, / do a hero's deed."]. He makes this claim not just because he is a hero, but because he has always been a monster-fighter.

By looking closely at the bits of information the poet offers about Beowulf, one discovers that the hero is kept clear of the bloody stain of feuding. As a youth, he was thought to be backward, for there were no glorious victories coupled with his name.

Hēan was lange,
swā hyne Gēata bearn gōdne ne tealdon,
nē hyne on medobence micles wyrðne
drihten Wedera gedōn wolde;
swyðe wēndon, þæt hē slēac wære,
æðeling unfrom. Eðwenden cwōm
tiredigum menn torna gehlyces. (2183-2189)

[Yet his youth had been miserable,
when he long seemed sluggish to the Geatish court;
they thought him no good; he got little honor,

no gifts on the mead-bench from the lord of the Weders.
They all were convinced he was slow, or lazy,
a coward of a noble. A change came to him,
shining in victory, worth all those cares.]

For a society where the warrior virtues were paramount, an able-bodied youth who did not give proof of future worth received little approval. He would not become valuable to the all important lord and retainer structure. Yet a change came to Beowulf, raising him in his people's esteem. As no other deeds are mentioned, one can assume that the cause of this change of opinion was his youthful monster-fighting.

Another aspect about Beowulf is his incredible strength: "sē was moncynnes mægenes strengest / on Ƴām dæge Ƴyses lifes, / ærle ond ēacen" (196-198) [he was the strongest of all living men / at that time in this world, / noble and huge.]. Indeed, the nature of his strength is given a fairly specific description. When Hrothgar hears that Beowulf has come to visit, he mentions the common report of the hero.

Ðonne sægdon þæt sæliþende,
þā ðe gisceaftas Gēata fyredon
þyder to þance, þæt hē þritigse
manna mangencraeft on his mundgripe
heaporōf hæbbe. (377-381)

[In fact, the merchants who used to carry
gifts of coins, our thanks to the Geats,
said he had war-fame, the strength of thirty
in his mighty hand-grip.]

Described as the strongest man of the age, Beowulf is an extraordinary hero. Of all his deeds, there is only one direct reference to his fighting with, and killing, another man. That man is Dæghrefn, who was directly responsible for the death of Hygelac. By killing Dæghrefn in battle, Beowulf is fulfilling his duty as a retainer. Unlike virtually all other characters in the poem, Beowulf has no direct connection with any feud.

As he is dying, Beowulf evaluates his life.

"Ic ðas lēode hēold
fiftig wintra; næs sē folccynig,
ymbesittendra ænig dāra,
þē mec gūðwinum grētan dorste,
egesan ðeon. Ic on earde bād
mælgeseafta, hēold mīn tela
ne sōhte searonīðas, nē mē swōr fela
āða on unrhit. Ic ðas ealles mæg
feorhbennum sōoc gefēan habban;
forðām mē witan ne ðearf Waldend fira
morðorbealo māga, þonne mīn sceaceð
lif of lice." (2732-2743)

["I ruled this people
for fifty winters, and there was no ruler
of surrounding nations, not any, who dared
meet me with armies, seek out a battle,

make any onslaught, terror, oppression,
upon Geatish men. At home I awaited
what the years brought me, held my own well,
sought no intrigue; not often I swore
deceitful oaths! Sick with my death-wound
I can take joy in all these things;
the Ruler of men need not blame me
for murder of kin, once life is gone,
has left my body.")

What makes this passage of particular interest is that his accomplishments are the opposite images of the sub-stories of the poem. The supporting material is full of incidents of unpeaceful reigns, wars, intrigues, broken oaths and kin-slaughter. This simple contrast suggests the poet's perception of Beowulf.

Beowulf is presented as an ideal, a model. He is shown to be a perfect retainer, fulfilling his responsibilities. He is not involved in any of the feuds, which the poet presents in a very unglamorized and unfavorable light. He is completely loyal to his kin. The closing of the poem emphasizes this picture of Beowulf as the ideal warrior-lord. The Geats are shown mourning his death.

Swā hit gedēfe bið,
Ƿæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,
ferhðum frēoge, ƿonne hē forð scile
of lichaman lāded weorðan.
Swā begnornodon Gēata lēode
hlāfordes hryre, heorðgenēatas;
cwādon Ƿæt hē wære wyruldcyninga
manna mildust and monðwærust,
lēodum lifoost ond lofgeornost. (3174-3182)

[So it is fitting
that a man speak praise of his beloved lord,
love him in spirit, when he must be led
forth from his life, the body's home.
Thus did the Wēders mourn in words
the fall of their lord, his hearth-companions.
They said that he was, of the kings in this world,
the kindest to his men, the most courteous man,
the best to his people, and most eager for fame.]

CONCLUSION

Throughout the poem, the treatments of loss and recompense provide a key for understanding the relationship between the main events of the poem and the supporting sub-stories. Beowulf shows in his subsidiary actions the ideal behavior of a retainer, in contrast to those retainers who fail in their duty and thus cause loss to their community. In the latter part of the poem, he is shown as an ideal lord, protecting his people from losses caused by wars and feuds, this also in contrast to the other lords described. Of the many lords told of in the poem, only Scyld compares with Beowulf in the matter of protecting his people from such losses. Even Hrothgar does not match Beowulf in this, for Hrothgar makes no move himself to

remove the terror of Grendel from his people, while Beowulf immediately goes out to deal with the dragon. Furthermore, where Beowulf succeeds in keeping his reign unafflicted by the losses caused by feuds, Hrothgar does not.

The monsters in *Beowulf* are presented as existing outside the community of mankind. Their descent from Cain, a kin-slayer, insures their alien state. They represent the extreme threat to the community of mankind. Beowulf, as the ideal hero, is precisely the warrior to deal with these creatures. Yet, because he is the ideal hero, monsters are the only truly suitable opponents for him. To pit such an ideal against another man would involve him in all the unfavorable things associated with feuds. Were Beowulf to fight another man, he would create a loss to some community which would necessarily need a recompense. This is why Beowulf is a monster-fighter: as such a pre-eminent hero, his responsibility is to all mankind. His natural enemies are monsters, who have no community and who threaten mankind.

There is one further connection between the sub-stories and the main events. The monsters are shown as creatures outside the community of men. To be outsiders, cast out from the community, is the fate of retainers who fail in their duties (as Beowulf's companions do when he goes to fight the dragon), and of lords who fail in their responsibilities (as Heremod does). Beowulf's faithless followers and Heremod are cast out because they have caused irremediable harm to their community. Their deeds can easily be compared to the evil of kin-slaughter, the crime which caused Cain to be cast out from his community. It is not far-fetched to assume that the poet intended such a connection between the monsters and those who cause loss to the community.

Notes

1. The term "sub-stories" is used throughout this article rather than the traditional "digressions". The term "digressions" was found to be unhelpful during the study of the poem, in that the material usually tagged with this word does not, in fact, digress or lead away from the central matter of the poem.
2. All Old English quotations from the poem are taken from Klaeber's third edition of *Beowulf*, (D.C. Heath and Company: Lexington, Massachusetts: 1950). Line citations are in parentheses. The modern English translations are from Howell D. Chickering, Jr.'s *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition* (Anchor Press/Doubleday: Garden City, New York: 1977).
3. The extreme difference in focus between the Finnsburg Fragment and the story as presented in *Beowulf* should make this obvious. The Fragment deals with a heroic battle; the story in *Beowulf* deals with the thoughts and feelings of the survivors.

