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BOAR AND BADGER: AN OLD ENGLISH HEROIC ANTITHESIS?

By T.A. SHIPPEY

This piece must begin with a reminiscence, and an apology. The reminiscence is of an occasion (I hope it will remain the only one) when the present author was detected in evident error by the sounder judgement of J.E. Cross. In his essay of 1974, "Mainly on Philology and the Interpretative Criticism of *Maldon*",¹ Professor Cross turned his fire on a series of *Maldon* critics. In succession he considered the meanings of the disputed words or phrases from lines 86-90 of that poem, *lytegian*, *landes to fela*, and finally *ofermod*; concluded with reference to the last that a generally critical translation such as 'pride' must be much more likely than a generally approving one such as 'great, high courage'; and *en passant* remarked, perhaps more in sorrow than in anger, that the latter remote possibility "has now become accepted decision in T.A. Shippey's translation 'out of his high heart'" (with reference to the present author's *Old English Verse*, 1972, p.28).

There is no question here as to who was right and who was wrong. 'Out of his high heart' was a careless translation for of *his ofermode*, and based on little more than *dolgilp - wæs ic þa git on geogoðfeore*. In so far as the phrase had intellectual justification, it came from awareness of the modern analogues *Übermut*, *overmod*, *overmoed* etc., and from dim memory of two analogous 'rash judgements' in Germanic epic, Gunnarr's open-eyed acceptance of Attila's dare, *af móði stórum*, in the *Atlakviða*, and Sifrit's fatal removal of Prünhild's ring and girdle, (possibly) *durh sînen hôhen muot*, in the tenth *Âventiure* of the *Nibelungenlied*.² Even so, not all the modern analogues to *ofermod* lead towards an approving translation; while one might well say that there is a long and large difference both between the three passages cited and, of course, between something which is 'great' or 'high' and something which is 'over'! 'Out of his high heart', then, can only be recanted and apologised for.

Having said which, however - and it seems inevitable in academic matters that there should always be a 'however' - it may still be legitimate to feel that the discoveries of strict philology have, even since Professor Cross's piece of 1974, not been quite so compelling as to still all argument and drive "interpretative criticism" back where it belongs. The essay that follows, then, is an attempt to express why even now a candid reader might feel that the argument about *ofermod* is not yet settled; and further to see if anything more can be said about the distinctive quality of Old

English heroic conceptions. Only incidentally, and with proper respect, does it touch on the inevitable shortcomings of even the best of philology.

One may begin with a sidelight from that most familiar of all Old English heroic tales, annal 755 of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard.³ This short passage has been analysed all too often already, and from its hapless sentences have been drawn political morals, Shakespearean parallels, involved literary ironies and sober historical conclusions. No-one has remarked however that at one point it surely cannot be telling the truth. This is quite early on in the annal, before most of the disagreements start. Cynewulf has deposed King Sigebyrt, taken over his kingdom, and held it for many years. Then he goes to visit a woman at *Merantun*, with just a small guard, only to be pursued and attacked by Sigebyrt's vengeful brother Cyneheard. Cynewulf and the woman are in a room together; Cyneheard and his men are outside the room; even further away (but not very far) are the king's guardsmen. It requires little tactical sense to see what Cynewulf must do, and indeed, according to the Chronicler, he does it: *he on þa duru eode, and þa unheanlice hine werede*, 'he went to the door, and then defended himself nobly'. It is vital, of course, that Cynewulf should be in the doorway. Only there can he hope to resist superior numbers till his guardsmen can gather themselves; and whether or not this would give him much chance of surviving (one would guess not), it is the only tactic that gives him any chance at all. However this eminently reasonable stance lasts only, says the Chronicler again, *op he on þone æpelung locude, and þa ut rædde on hine, and hine miclum gewundode. And hie alle on þone Cyning wærun feohtende op þæt hie hine ofslægenne hæfdon*, 'until he caught sight of the prince [Cyneheard], and then he charged out at him, and wounded him badly. And they all kept on fighting against the king until they had killed him'. Only then do the king's guardsmen arrive, to be defeated and killed in their turn.

Everyone can see that Cynewulf's charge out from the doorway was a disastrous mistake. Yet surely it must be, at least in part, a fiction. The only good witnesses to the event, after all, were Cyneheard and his men. They would all be dead (except one) within twenty-four hours. Of course during that time they might have spoken of the king's death to others; or the survivor, alderman Osric's godson, might have told the story; or the woman, though she was presumably inside the doorway and cannot have seen much. However, the really suspicious part of the account is the Chronicler's implicit statement about emotions. Cynewulf stood in the doorway, he says, 'until he caught sight of the prince'. It was that moment of recognition which made him charge out, forfeit his defensive position, and meet his death trying not quite availingly to kill the man he hated. But all this, surely, took place at night.⁴ And whoever passed the story on, it would be a miracle if anyone, in those circumstances, could be certain of a motivation present only in Cynewulf's head, and of an event without words, consisting of nothing but a meeting of eyes - and that not even across a room, but

during a deadly struggle in the dark!

It seems much more likely that someone made up this scene in the doorway. It is plausible enough, and has convinced readers for generations, but it cannot be soundly based. Why then did the original story-teller, or the Chronicler, invent or preserve these details, and what did they expect us to think of Cynewulf? The answers here leave little room for doubt. In the 755 annal there is not a word of criticism for Cynewulf, and several words of praise. One must conclude that those who passed on the story of Cynewulf took a certain delight in the king's sudden decision that life counted for nothing against the furious hatred he felt for his ambusher; furthermore that they liked scenes of this sort, and motivations of this sort, so very much that they did not scruple to invent them, and probably to believe that they had really happened - even when they hadn't, and when a moment's thought would have shown that no-one could have registered them even if they had. At least some Anglo-Saxons, then, admired impetuous courage, and liked scenes displaying and even elaborating it.

There is nothing very startling in such a conclusion. But one may move from it to another scene and another text, this one considerably harder to read. It is the first of the two surviving *Waldere* fragments, repeatedly edited and very extensively commented on, but still by no means settled in meaning. All recent editors agree that the speech in it comes from Hildegyth, the female companion of Waldere on his flight from the court of Attila. It is clear also that she is encouraging Waldere to make or to continue resistance against a number of enemies who - from what is said later and from the parallel with other versions of the story, especially the tenth-century Latin poem *Waltharius* - must be the Burgundian king Guthhere, his retainer Hagena, and other less prominent warriors. There is further agreement that the Old English poem must have followed the general line of the *Waltharius*,⁵ an essential feature of which is Waldere's stand in a sort of cave in the rocks, with a narrow entrance which restricts his attackers. Beyond that, though, many questions remain undecided.

What Hildegyth actually says is as follows.⁶ She praises the 'work of Wayland', which 'does not fail anyone who can hold the hard [sword] Mimming. Often' (she says) 'one man after another fell in battle, bloodstained and sword-wounded'. She goes on to urge Waldere not to let his valour fail, nor (probably) his prowess weaken. 'Now the day is come, that you must certainly do one of two things: lose your life, or, son of Ælfhere, gain lasting glory among men.' Her next lines, though, create particular doubt:

"Nalles ic ðe, wine min, wordum cide,
 ðy ic ðe gesawe æt ðam sweordplegan
 ðurh eðwitscype æniges monnes
 wig forbugan oððe on weal fleon,
 lice beorgan, ðeah þe laðra fela
 ðinne byrnhomon billum heowun,
 ac ðu symle furðor feohtan sohtest,
 mæl ofer mearce; ðy ic ðe metod ondred,

þæt ðu to fyrenlice feohtan sohtest
æt ðam ætstealle, oðres monnes
wigrædenne." (ll.12-22)

I translate only what is not in dispute, which seems to run: 'I am not at all reproaching you with words, my friend, because I saw you disgracefully avoid fighting any man at the sword-play, or flee to the wall to protect your life, though many enemies hacked your armour with swords; but you always sought fight further forward, *mæl ofer mearce*: that is why I fear fate for you, because you sought battle too rashly at the *ætsteall*, according to the other man's plan of battle'. Two phrases have been left untranslated. They are the most contested of the speech, but not by any means the only problems.

Some problems, though, are of scholars' making. One of the plainest things Hildegyth says is that she is not criticising Waldere because she saw him flee. The implication is that she has been in a position to see Waldere fighting, and - unless one prefers to construct a story about her accompanying Waldere as a 'shield-maiden' on his Hunnish campaigns⁷ - the time for her to see this is immediately prior to the speech. Guthere's assault, in short, has already started, and she is speaking in one of the pauses as the enemy come to attack Waldere, in his narrow space between the rocks, in ones and twos. One might note that she also says, at the start of the speech, that 'Wayland's work does not fail' (which implies that she has seen it succeeding, whether she means Waldere's sword or his armour); and that in the second fragment, which few editors place long after the first, Waldere calls himself *headuwerigan*, 'battle-weary'.

If one were then to try to insert the Old English fragments into the general story as given by the *Waltharius*, one might well put this speech by Hildegyth somewhere near the end, i.e. after several enemy warriors have been killed, but before the greatest of them, Hagena, is drawn reluctantly into the action to support his king. A suitable moment for instance would be after the end of *Waltharius*'s seventh section, at or near line 940, by which time Camalo, Scaramundus, Werinhardus, Ekiurid, Hadawardus, Pataurid and Gerwitus are dead - so indeed 'often one man fell after the other, bloodstained and sword-wounded' - but Randolf, Helmnod, Trogus, Tanastus, Guntharius and Hagano remain, so that Waldere certainly still needs encouragement. Yet making such a suggestion actually points to two major differences between the Latin poem and the Old English fragments. In the *Waltharius* Hiltgunt makes no speech of encouragement, indeed hardly speaks at all. Furthermore the centre of the lady's speech in *Waldere* - her remark that she is chiding the hero not because she has seen him turn back but because he always wants to go forward - finds virtually no parallel in the Latin work. In that poem⁸ it is true that the *angusta loci*, the *specus* with its *introitus*, is vital for the hero's defence, and that the attackers in the end realise they have to get him out of it to succeed; but there is no sense of insidious temptation in *Waltharius*'s heart. He chases the fleeing Hadawardus at line 840, and kills him, but no-one tries to take advantage of his move. In the last contest actually in the 'narrow place' he rushes out at Helmnod, Trogus, Tanastus and

Guntharius, but once again the charge leads to no great danger. If Hildegyth were speaking from the *Waltharius*, her main point would be almost baseless. But what exactly is her main point?

In the OE passage already translated, the main difficulty was the phrase *mæl ofer mearce*. Problems and probabilities are well summarised here by the most recent editor of the poem, my colleague Dr Joyce Hill. "Any interpretation of this phrase", she remarks, "must start from the general point made here by *Hildegyð, that Waldere, far from being cowardly, is inclined to display a hero's rash prowess . . . It is also necessary to interpret the phrase in a way that allows *mæl* to be in some way parallel to *feohte* (line 18). *Ofer mearce* clearly implies some kind of excess: 'beyond the limit', or 'beyond the boundary'."⁹ This leaves us with *mæl*, which as Dr Hill says has four main possibilities: (1) meaning 'time', (2) (but only in compounds), having some sense to do with 'space', (3) meaning 'mark' or 'sign', and (4) (taking it now as a variant for *mædel*) meaning 'speech', and so - if one accepts analogies with Old Norse - perhaps 'a case, a law-case, a contest'. (2) and (4) are the most attractive and least likely choices. Dr Hill tentatively accepts (1), translating *mæl ofer mearce* "'an occasion beyond the limit' (sc. 'of prudence'? 'of safety'?)". The most extensive commentator on *Waldere*, Dr Ute Schwab, is meanwhile so blocked by this one problem as to advocate entirely re-ordering lines 17-21 (as 17, 19, 18, 21, with 20 deleted), taking *mæl* under meaning (3), and translating the whole passage as 'although many enemies have with their swords struck marks without limit on your armour'.¹⁰ This is clearly a case of allowing one crux to poison the interpretation of half-a-dozen lines together. However, Dr Hill's more restrained translation does not seem to carry the sense of the passage much further forward.

In this circumstance one may as well try to cut a Gordian knot. The meaning of *mæl* in this passage is not illuminated by any Old English parallel: we do not know what it means. It seems likely, though, not only that *mæl* is parallel to *feohte* (so Dr Hill), but that *ofer mearce* is parallel also to *furðor*, the six words *furðor* . . . *mearce* then forming a chiasmus of a type common in Old English verse. Furthermore the word *mearce* can hardly avoid being suggestive in this context. It has the very strong sense of a physical boundary, even a 'scratch-line',¹¹ as in the later pugilistic phrase 'to come up to the mark'. Since *Waldere* in other versions is fighting in a narrow entry, and Hildegyth here wants to dissuade him from going either back or forward, going 'over the mark' cannot help suggesting going out of the gap and into the open. One sees why Professor Norman argued so hard for a sense of 'place' in *mæl*.¹² If that is wrong, then one might opt for meaning (4) instead and translate lines 18-19a as 'but you always sought fight further forward, a dispute beyond the mark'. The last phrase could then well carry a similar "ironic semantic extension" to the one noted by Dr Hill in the word *mædelstede* of *Beowulf* 1082, with Hildegyth meaning, as it were (a) 'a dispute that goes too far', in what may have been a relatively familiar but abstract sense, but (b) by extension and in the particular circumstance where she and *Waldere* find themselves, 'a fight beyond the physical line of safety'. *Mæl ofer mearce*, in

short, would have its meaning modified by the strong sense of place, and of local tactics, evident in all that Hildegyth says from lines 13-20 (*forbugan, on weal fleon, furðor, æt ðam ætstealle*,¹³ *wigrædenne*).

If the argument so far is accepted, though - namely, that Hildegyth is speaking during a pause in Waldere's fight with Guthere's retinue, that she is speaking while Waldere continues to block a narrow way, and that the main point of her speech is to tell him to keep on blocking it, and not give way to his urge to rush out - then we find ourselves observing a rather close symmetry between Waldere and annal 755 in the Chronicle. In both cases there is a champion, with a lady behind him, holding an entrance against a crowd of enemies. In one case the champion stays where he is until provoked too far, and then rushes out to his death. In the other case (as far as we can tell) the champion stays where he is, though provoked, and does *not* rush out to his death, though he feels a strong urge to. In both cases, we may say, there is a tactical necessity opposed by an emotional drive. Either may win, but both are present. And, most surprisingly, in the case of Cynewulf we are faced by open invention (the motif about rushing out, and the implication as to his motive). In the case of Waldere we have two features (the lady's speech, and her assertion that the hero wanted to rush out) without parallel in the otherwise closely similar account of the *Waltharius*. Is there, one asks, something special for Anglo-Saxon story-tellers in this image of the man in the doorway, poised between two necessities? Were they particularly attracted by this embodiment of a contrast between two heroic styles?

Similar thoughts have struck other critics. Especially since R.E. Kaske's article of 1958¹⁴ there has been a certain readiness to observe contrasts of *sapientia* and *fortitudo* in *Beowulf* and elsewhere. However, though it would be quite possible to see Waldere as *sapientior* and Cynewulf as one overcome by *fortitudo*, these absolute terms do not seem to me to be quite appropriate. As has been remarked already, there is no hint of moral disapproval of Cynewulf's act from the Chronicler, and while Hildegyth certainly urges Waldere to restraint, she does so because anything else would play into the enemy's hands, follow the *oðres monnes . . . wigræden*. She also has no wish at all to diminish her champion's *fortitudo*: for him *wig forbugan oððe on weal fleon* would be just as bad as to go the other way, *ofer mearce*. For these reasons I would propose to give the two heroic styles morally neutral and not inter-active labels, not 'wiser' and 'bolder' (or *sapientior/fortior*), but 'boar' and 'badger'. In these terms Cynewulf is a 'boar': like the *vncely swyn* of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* who *vnsoundlyly out sojt seggez ouerþwert*. By contrast Waldere is a 'badger': he retires into his hole and strikes at every hand that comes near, requiring enormous toil to dig him out. The one is an emblem of fury and impetus; the other of doggedness, and, one may say, the 'cost-effective' defence. But in the first place neither image has clear moral ascendancy: their differences for the story-teller are aesthetic ones. And in the second place, as has been made clear enough already, in both Cynewulf and Waldere the motives

are mixed. Cynewulf is a badger till the sight of Cyneheard turns him into a boar. Waldere feels the urge to turn boar all the time he is being a badger.

How far do these two labels fit other Anglo-Saxon heroic stories? There is of course far too little left to tell. However, from what one can deduce of the 'Finnsburg' story, it does look as if Hengest is a clear case of the 'badger': after Hnæf is dead he defends the hall (with himself in the doorway, no doubt) so effectively that he cannot be forced out and has to be offered terms to leave his position instead.¹⁵ It would be only consistent if he were to turn 'boar' later: but we do not know what lies behind the *Beowulf* sentence in lines 1150-51, 'the restless spirit could not hold itself back in his heart'. Later on in *Beowulf* there is a clear case (lines 2945-98) of the Swedish king Ongentheow being even more of a 'badger' than Waldere, as he turns back 'beneath the earth-wall', to be brought on *bid* or 'at bay'. He is attacked by Wulf and then by Iofor, or 'Boar' tout court. In the background one might observe a dimmer contrast between the fiercely-resisting Ongentheow, and Hygelac, who is always seen on the offensive and has been picked out (and frequently reprov'd) by critics for his consistent bravura.

However it is to *The Battle of Maldon* that the discussion so far has been pointing; and the implications must by now be obvious. If Anglo-Saxon poets enjoyed men in doorways and tensions between opposed heroic styles, then surely Byrhtnoth fits (has been made to fit) exactly their preferred pattern. Although he does not do it in person, he makes his army first of all take the role of 'badger': they hold the Vikings at the 'narrow place', this time the *brycg* or causeway, and are clearly not to be shifted from that position by force. But then their leader abandons the position wilfully, driven by *ofermod*. The only difference between Byrhtnoth and Cynewulf, one may say - for both do something tactically wrong, and both do it out of a desire to get at their enemies once and for all¹⁶ - is that Byrhtnoth moves *back* to let the Vikings across the *brycg*, while Cynewulf charges the other way. The deliberateness of what Byrhtnoth does has not led anyone before to put him in a 'boar' category. Nevertheless the underlying impulse of aggression is the same.

Yet Cynewulf receives no blame for his rash action, while Byrhtnoth does; and this returns us to the issue raised at the start of this paper, that of *ofermod*. On this I have some four points to make, and only one of them is about philology. With this, though, it would be wisest to begin.

The fact is that, as with *mæl ofer mearce*, there is not enough evidence in the extant remains of Old English to permit an absolutely reliable gloss on the phrase of his *ofermod*, given its context in *secular poetry*. If one ignores the two qualifications of the last phrase ('secular' and 'poetry') there would be plenty. But probably a feeling for their importance led E.V. Gordon to initiate the debate by his translation of *ofermod* as 'great pride, overconfidence' in his edition of 1937.¹⁷ His view was echoed for

many years, e.g. by Norman Blake in 1965 - 'high spirits, greatness of heart' - by George Clark in 1968, and by others before and since.¹⁸ Especially after the discussion of *ofermod* in 1953 by Professor Tolkien,¹⁹ though, more critical views and translations became common, though there was not always an unbridgeable gap between these and the more favourable ones. Thus Professor Cross, also in 1965, said that the word meant 'sinful pride', but did not balk at a "reasonable adaptation" to secular circumstances and to a meaning more like 'over-confidence'.²⁰ This was not very far even from the conclusions of Professor Gneuss, who concluded that the best translation was 'pride', with all its "various shades of meaning", most of them of course pejorative, but then most of them, in Old English, surviving from religious contexts in which pride could have no value.²¹

It is a pity, though, that during the course of this relatively rational discussion the tone of *ofermod*-commentary turned sour, leading to several cases of what Professor Cross has deplored as "emotional" criticism,²² with critics calling each others' views inconceivable, ludicrous, beyond debate, etc. Possibly even philologists, after such marked polarisation, will never reach common ground again. Nevertheless one ought to be able to state a philological case with reasonable fairness, and it seems to the present author to run as follows.

In the first place, *ofermod* and its relatives *ofermodig*, *ofermedla*, *ofermodness* etc. are common in Old English, and nearly always carry an evident meaning of 'sinful pride'. However *ofermod* itself as a noun is rare, occurring only three times outside *Maldon*. In poetry it occurs twice outside *Maldon*, both times meaning 'sinful pride' and once applied to Lucifer - though this is in a poem translated from Old Saxon, in which case we may well have a slipshod conversion of O.S. *obarmôd*, itself a separate question. Furthermore, though the evidence so far makes an overwhelming case for *ofermod* as a sin, one is checked by the fact that equally strong presumptions can be proved of the analogous but commoner noun *oferhygd*, only for these to be denied by two aberrant but clearly favourable uses of that word in prose, and one doubtful case in poetry.²³ And there is one other point to be taken from Hans Schabram's very complete study, *Superbia* (on which the preceding sentences largely rest), which is that though it confines itself to words glossing *superbia*, and is therefore by definition sin-oriented, what it shows with rather startling force is that the vocabularies of Old English prose and poetry can on occasion be very far apart. One of the major *Wortfamilien* for *superbia* is common in prose but never appears in poetry at all - it is the one centred on *prut*-.²⁴ One of the others, that centred on *modig*, is also common in prose, so much as to 'dominate the field around the year 1000'.²⁵ And yet its ninety occurrences in poetry have, says Dr Schabram, "fast durchweg eine positive Eigenschaft oder Verhaltensweise, grob umschreibbar mit 'hochgesinnt, hochgemut, stolz (im guten Sinne), mutig'".²⁶ In *Maldon* of course it just means 'brave', though it is true the bravery may be only show. Finally, one may well wonder what would have happened if Dr Schabram had included the *Wortfamilie* of *wlencu*, so evidently parallel to

Byrhtnoth's *ofermod* in some poetic contexts (e.g. *Beowulf* 1206), so evidently condemned as sinful in many prose uses, but so evidently regarded as tolerable to admirable by more than one poet - including the author of *Maldon* (see his line 205). Such a study might well illuminate exactly the areas of doubt between prose and poetry, secular and religious uses. However since *wlencu* was never used to gloss *superbia*, it fell outside Dr Schabram's field of study; the *strenges Auswahlprinzip* on which his work was based was not devised to assist commentators on *Maldon*.

One may repeat, then, that *of his ofermode* is, in poetry, in a secular context, unparalleled. There is still a very strong presumption for its meaning 'pride': but one has to remember that this has "various shades of meaning" (so Gneuss), and can be found *im guten Sinne*. The real question then ceases to be a philological one, and reverts to what we imagine to have been the emotion felt or aimed at by the poet when he wrote: 'Then the hateful strangers began to grow cunning (*lytegian*), asked that they might have passage to the land, to lead their troops and cross the ford. Then the earl out of his pride began to allow too much land to the hateful people . . .'. Did he mean to arouse "severe criticism" (Tolkien, 1953), "despairing admiration" (Blake, 1978), "tactical disagreement" (Cross, 1974), or some other more ungraspable sentiment? If the word leads us no further, it is possible to draw some less philologically-oriented conclusions from the context.

The first of these which I would make does however rest on a grammatical point not so far noticed, though of some interest to historical linguistics. This emerges from Byrhtnoth's shouted exchange with the Viking messenger across the river Blackwater in lines 25-61. It has several times been observed that Byrhtnoth's speech echoes the Viking's verbally.²⁷ To give only the most obvious repetitions: the Viking's speech, in the first place, is literally centred on the proposed interchange of *gold* and *grið*, gold and peace. It contains however a more traditional and potentially more honourable alliterative connection, not between money and peace, but between tribute and war, *gafol* and *gar*.²⁸ 'It is better for you', says the Viking:

"þæt ge þisne garræs mid gafole forgyldon,
þon we swa hearde hilde dælon." (ll.32-3)

'that you should buy off this rush of spears with tribute, than that we should join battle so fiercely'. In his reply, though, Byrhtnoth picks up the alliteration of *gar* and *gafol*, and reverses it both literally (to become *gafol* and *gar*) and in sense:

"Hi willað eow to gafole garas syllan" (l.46)

'As tribute they will give you spears'. A very similar line then closes Byrhtnoth's speech in the familiar 'envelope' pattern. 'Point and edge will reconcile us', he says:

"grim guðplega, ær we gofol syllon" (l.61)

'grim war-play, before we give tribute'. The direct object of the verb *syllan* is now 'tribute' not 'spears', but the line still plays on the opposition of tribute and war.

As has been said, this set of echoes has been noted before. But what were not noted, either by myself or Professor Anderson, were the curious reversals of grammatical mood, which once observed create an oddly wry effect. The two lines of the Viking's speech quoted contain the only verbs he puts in the subjunctive, *forgyldon* and *dælon*, so that he is saying in effect 'better for you that you *should* pay up than that we *should* join battle'.²⁹ In reply Byrhtnoth not only reverses *gar* and *gafol*, he replaces hypothesis with plain statement: the verb that ends his line 46 is an infinitive, *syllan*, governed by the very firm modal *willað*. But when he ends his speech, *garas syllan* (infinitive) has become *gofol syllo* (subjunctive), closer to the Viking's original *mid gafole forgyldon* (also subjunctive), but now subjunctive because scornfully unlikely: 'you will have to fight, before we *should* ever give tribute'.

The same ironic change is found in the pair of lines 40 and 56. The Viking says: if you pay up, we *willað mid þam sceattum us to scype gangan*, 'we will, with the money, go (infinitive, *gangan*) to our ships'. But Byrhtnoth replies that it would be a shame *þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scype gangon*, 'that you, with our money, should go (subjunctive, *gangon*) to the ships'. Finally the Viking's other subjunctive, *dælon*, already quoted, also finds an echo, to which we are guided by the opposed pair of adverbs *swa hearde/swa softe* in lines 33 and 59. Better to pay, says the Viking, 'than that we should join battle *swa hearde*'. We will not pay, says Byrhtnoth: 'you must not gain treasure *swa softe*'. But the Viking's line-ending verb is hypothetical, subjunctive, *dælon*, Byrhtnoth's declarative, infinitive dependent on the *sceole* modal, *gegangan*.

There are then four pairs of opposed *-an/-on* endings: *forgyldon/syllan*, *syllan/syllon*, *gangan/gangon*, *dælon/gegangan*. Each verb cited ends a line, and each pair is conclusively signalled by some other verbal or alliterative echo in the lines so ended. There can be no doubt that this is a deliberate device of the poet, nor that the poet has placed the device of echoing in the mouth of Byrhtnoth. But what is the point of it, and what are its implications? One can say immediately that its aim must be to make Byrhtnoth's reply more ironic and more of a rejection. Everything the Viking presents as a hypothetical subjunctive becomes a firmly governed infinitive either positive (line 46) or negative (line 59). The main thing the Viking presents as a likely future event becomes by contrast a remote subjunctive impossibility (lines 56, 61). Meanwhile the main implication for Byrhtnoth is that he comes over - he has been *made* to come over - as possessing precise verbal control: as well, possibly, as a particularly heroic ability to envisage possible futures without losing grip on the present (of which more later). As for other implications, one incidental one is rather to check the notion that vowels in final syllables were growing too weak to be distinctive in Old English by the time of *Maldon* (though it is true the four *-on* endings should all be *-en*); another is regretfully to diminish the likelihood that the Viking

was meant to be recognised as speaking dialect.³⁰ More important, though, this deliberate, even studious, jingling on verb-endings seems to me entirely to destroy the argument that sinful immoderation is to be recognised in Byrhtnoth even at this early stage.³¹ What he says is admirably witty and controlled, as well as decisive.

There is another point further on where I believe the poet's attitude to Byrhtnoth may be recognised, though it is also one which critics have passed over. It is in the section of single combats between Byrhtnoth and four successive Vikings (lines 130-62), which has attracted little comment, except for E.B. Irving's remark that one of the things that made one think the poem realistic was the "clinical detail of some of the infighting".³² The authority here of a former U.S. Marine is compelling; but Professor Irving may have been editorially misled. The two particularly suspicious lines are 136-7. Here Byrhtnoth and a Viking warrior have approached each other, when the Viking throws 'a southern spear, so that the lord of warriors was wounded':

He sceaf þa mid ðam scylde, þæt se sceaft toberst,
and þæt spere sprengde, þæt hit sprang ongean.
(ll.136-7)

I translate, 'he thrust then with the shield so that the shaft broke, and shattered the spear so that it sprang away again'. What are we supposed to imagine here? In his 1937 edition Professor Gordon remarked reassuringly that "Similar movements of the shield that break the hostile weapon or send it flying away are described in the sagas: see H. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, p.149".³³ But nothing quite like what Byrhtnoth does appears to be recorded anywhere, even in Falk.

What Falk has no trouble in finding are shield-parries which deflect a weapon into the air, or into the ground, which break it, or (once it is stuck in the shield) tear it from an enemy's hand. These are weapons, though, which have not reached their mark. The one that Byrhtnoth breaks has already wounded him (line 135). It is possible that we are meant to think that it has struck him through his shield, but not deeply, and become embedded in the shield but not in the body. In that case Byrhtnoth (I suppose) jerks the shield so that the spearshaft breaks and the point falls out of the shield; but that seems an awkward translation. More likely the audience is meant to envisage the thrown spear striking Byrhtnoth without touching his shield at all; and Byrhtnoth then standing with the weapon still embedded in him, but striking it so hard with (the edge of) his shield that (a) the spearshaft breaks and (b) the point springs out of his body. But of course as soon as one spells it out the picture becomes incredible. Nor has Falk got anything like it. The closest scene to be found in the sagas (not at all clearly cited by Falk) is the one in *Njálssaga* ch.72 where Gunnarr is ambushed beside the Rang River. Thorgeirr Otkelsson there drives at Gunnarr with a spear, *ok lagði í gegnum skjöldinn ok svá í gegnum hönd Gunnari. Gunnarr snaraði svá hart skjöldinn, at spjóttit brotnaði í sundr í falnum*, 'and drove through the shield and so through Gunnarr's arm. Gunnarr twisted the shield

so hard that the spear broke in two at the socket'.³⁴ This, it is true, is fairly implausible. But nothing is said of the point coming out of Gunnarr's arm; and the spear can be twisted because it is in the shield.

To repeat, the Byrhtnoth scene verges on the incredible, and is unparalleled (though in a moment Wulfmær the young will pull another spear from Byrhtnoth's body and throw it back again, another dangerous tactic). Its aim however is obvious, which is to present Byrhtnoth as a man careless of pain, rising superior to wounds and weakness. This is furthermore deliberate fiction, put in *solely* to create that image. The poet here cannot have been constrained by reality at all.

Neither this observation nor the one about subjunctives tells us, of course, anything directly about *ofermod*. They do indicate that the poet regarded Byrhtnoth with *exaggerated* favour. This may not rule out the chance that he balanced that with a word of criticism, even (Tolkien's phrase) of "severe criticism", though it should prevent anyone from resting a whole case on that word. In any event, there is a further point which takes us back to 'boars' and 'badgers', and may lead on to a more precise delineation of Anglo-Saxon images of heroes. This point concerns the figure of Offa.

It has already been remarked that even in a clear case of a 'boar' hero, like Cynewulf, there is a strain of 'badger' to contend with; and conversely that even a 'badger' like Waldere has to restrain 'boar' impulses. Byrhtnoth also shows he has both tendencies. However one might go on to suggest that where heroes are not divided in themselves, there is a tendency for them to be presented in pairs. Against Ongentheow there is Hygelac (and Iofor), against Hengest (perhaps) there is the bold and ill-fated Hnæf. One wonders if Byrhtnoth might not - if we had the full poem - have been more thoroughly matched by a figure of restraint in Offa. The lines to which one must draw attention here are 198-201, where the English army breaks, more men flee than is at all right, and the poet remarks, with evident reference back to Byrhtnoth: 'As Offa had told him one day'³⁵ when he held council at the meeting-place, that many men were there speaking boldly who later would not endure at need'.

The one obvious fact here is that Offa was clearly right, where Byrhtnoth was wrong. The lines are furthermore the most powerful use of 'flashback' in the poem, for instead of merely reminding us of some protracted state,³⁶ they take us back to a *moment*, and a moment, one can imagine, of strain and social tension, a moment furthermore which in the past managed to encapsulate the present. Lines 198-201 are matched in *Malgon* only by lines 289-93, also a 'flashback' to an earlier event, and also about Offa: they tell us, as Offa is cut down, that 'he had, though, carried out what he had promised his lord, as he had boasted to his ring-giver, that they would both have to ride safe home to the citadel, or else fall in action, die of wounds on the battlefield'. Once again Offa is presented as prophesying the future. The two sets of lines create a powerful effect of distance and fatality. They appear to say 'it

could all have been avoided, but . . .', and then 'Offa at least knew what would happen, but . . .'.

Nor are these the only occasions when Offa catches the eye. He makes the second of the direct speeches by Byrhtnoth's retainers, lines 231-43: it is the only one that adds any information to the poet's account, namely that when Godric rode away many men thought he was Byrhtnoth. It is Offa's kinsman, too, at the start of our fragment, who releases his hawk, letting it fly to the shelter of the wood, where he may not go, with again an effect of clear sight, concentration, and once more fatality. But any attempt to extrapolate from these references and to suggest that Offa should have been associated in the poem with the 'badger' qualities of foresight and good sense is spoilt by the clear fact that *some* of the things the poet meant to say about Offa have been lost. The point was first made by J.C. Pope that after line 283 something has been missed out.³⁷ Dr Scragg, in his recent edition, resists the conclusion,³⁸ but there can be little doubt that the sudden change from plurality in lines 282-3 (a 'crowd scene') to a sequence of singular nouns and unintroduced definite articles immediately following (*bordes, seo byrne, þone sælidan*) marks an omission of some length. And what has been lost, clearly, is the build-up to the death-scene of Offa - a scene which, to judge from the way his antagonist is singled out and killed after Offa has received a death-wound, and from the seven lines of underlining commentary that follow, may indeed have been an important one.

Trying to write the poem now for the poet would of course be wrong (though it would not be as wrong as trying to insist that the unknown never existed). Still, one may say without undue speculation that the poet seems to have had a high regard for the character Offa, to have cast him consistently as a man of sense as well as of courage, and most importantly to have taken trouble to make him the only man in the poem credited with premonitions. All this does not mean that he was important for being "probably leader of the English after Byrhtnoth's death" - Gordon's attempt to give Offa a 'realistic' role.³⁹ Rather, his importance seems to have been thematic. I would suggest that he was intended to represent a side of the heroic character, of which Byrhtnoth was the complement, but not necessarily the antithesis.

Several reasons have then been presented for thinking that (however we translate *ofermod*) the character of Byrhtnoth was meant to fit, and not to betray, a heroic paradigm probably already familiar. There is the deliberate creation of Cynewulf's *anagnorisis*, with its relish for fatal fury. There is the entertainment of a rash streak in Waldere's character, which implies that such a streak is part of every hero's make-up. There is the evidence to suggest that the poet wanted Byrhtnoth to be seen as capable of a clear irony; and that he wanted us also to see him as superhuman in overcoming pain. Finally there is the more tentative suggestion that Byrhtnoth could have been meant to take one end of a heroic polarity, the other end of which was reserved for Offa; though one must say that if chance had thrown Offa alone into the centre of our

view, we would have been even more conscious of a missing element, the impetus and *élan* of his leader.

Implicit in all this is rejection of the Tolkienian view of the poem, with its translation of *ofermod* as "overmastering pride" (his words but my italics), its assertion that the poet intended "severe criticism" of Byrhtnoth, and its further theses, mostly by now well-embedded in the critical consensus, that the poem is a critique of "misplaced chivalry", that its heroes are the loyal followers not their misguided chief, that the poet meant most of his work to be deeply ironised by one authorial comment. The view is certainly an attractive one, praised e.g. by Professor Cross as a "sensitive explanation [sc. of the phrase 'overmastering pride'] on the basis of the poem and the attitudes of heroic society".⁴⁰ What is often still underrated, though, in spite of copious evidence, is Professor Tolkien's fatal skill in rhetoric! Much of his piece on "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhtelm's Son" commonly escapes criticism because the core of it is in verse, with a prose introduction and appendix round it. Yet its theses are all linked, and many of them are tendentious and personal to a marked degree. Tolkien thought, for instance, that the words of Byrhtwold, the *eald geneat* (lines 312-13), could not be his or the poet's, but must be some sort of quotation or interpolation, basically pagan in spirit - "fey and fell-hearted / and heathenish, too: I don't hold with that", says Tídwald, Tolkien's verse-mouthpiece.⁴¹ This implies that Tolkien felt the whole presentation of the retainers' self-sacrifice was not quite what it should be in a Christian age. But since the poem must have been by a Christian, Tolkien was further forced to conclude that the poet must have kept a certain critical distance from his characters. So one moves to the conviction that lines 89-90 were a kind of touchstone for the poem; and to the belief that the poet was, in a curious way, commenting on the delusive glamour of his own tradition. Listening to poems has turned Tolkien's other verse-character Torhthelm into a fool and braggart. It was the same poems (so Tídwald the mouthpiece says on p.10) which made Byrhtnoth vacate the *brycg*:

"He let them cross the causeway, so keen was he
to give minstrels matter for mighty songs.
Needlessly noble. It should never have been:
bidding bows be still, and the bridge opening,
matching more with few in mad handstrokes!"

But with the last line we come to something the poet did not say, namely that the English lost because they were outnumbered. To have said it would, I think, have diminished *Maldon* and made it a poem of excuses, the kind of thing journalists invent after defeat to salvage national pride.⁴² And once one begins to unwind Tolkien's skein of argument, very little of it can bear much weight. The idea of an Anglo-Saxon poet somehow detached from his own tradition and commenting on its failings is an unlikely anachronism. There is no sign that poetry itself was responsible for addling Byrhtnoth's wits - one cannot imagine even what kind of "mighty song" Tídwald thought Byrhtnoth was aiming at! There can be no support either for the

device of picking lines out of the poem, putting them in quotation marks, and so to speak transferring them to the other side, because they do not suit the critic's notion of a true Christian militia. It is possible that valuable opinions on *ofermod* could co-exist with all these other unlikely theses, but in so far as the opinions are inter-dependent they can only weaken each other. Finally one has to say that Tolkien's most dangerous notion was the one that two lines - if you picked the right ones - could dominate a whole poem, and that it was acceptable to base an entire theory on an "extended comment" on lines 89-90.

Far too much of the later critical literature on the poem has done just that.⁴³ But I would suggest that the poem's whole structure leads away from such a conclusion. *Maldon* is of course a strongly narrative poem, with a high proportion of lines simply saying what happened next. However it is also a poem marked by a string of local climaxes, in which the poet either steps back from his narrative to use a superior perspective; or allows himself or one of his characters to take on a strong generalising tone; or else manoeuvres a scene so that mere event is transmuted into an image so strong as to approach the symbolic. Byrhtwold's first two lines (which Tolkien rejected) are a good example of the second category, the generalising tone; but in this category one could place as well the two-line speech of *Dunnere*, the *unorne ceorl*, with its characteristically proverbial use of the modal *meag* to change an ethical statement into a physical one, 'he who means to avenge his lord on the enemy cannot draw back or fear for his life' (lines 258-9);⁴⁴ or indeed the poet's own compressed summary of lines 207-8, 'they all wanted one of two things, to lose life or to avenge the dear one'. As for the use of superior perspective, lines 89-90 (which Tolkien so much elevated) are indeed a very strong example - but not the only one. I have already pointed to the force of the two sudden 'flashbacks' associated with *Offa*, in lines 198-201 and 289-93. To these one could add several authorial remarks, like the potentially ironic comment on the two armies' motivation in lines 66-7, 'too long it seemed to them, till they bore their spears together', the equally ominous quasi-prophecy from *Byrhtnoth* in lines 94-5, or the strongly approving but forward-looking authorial gloss on an event in lines 9-10, 'by that one could recognise that the boy would not weaken in battle when he took up arms'. What all these inserts show is a sense either of the poet's superior knowledge, or of the characters' approach to foresight; but what they all do, of course, is to magnify by contrast our sense of the characters' involvement in the human predicament of ignorance and uncertainty.

The impulse behind them, I feel, and behind the generalisations, is primarily aesthetic, not moral. This produces also the poet's device of following a speech or a flashback with a sudden re-invasion of narrative, like line 96, 'The slaughter-wolves came on, they did not fear the water', or line 181, 'Then the heathen warriors cut him down', or line 205, 'Then the proud thanes went forward'; and leads to one of the poem's most distinctive characteristics, the scene very nearly symbolic. *Offa's* kinsman with his hawk has already been mentioned, and time could well be spent on

exploring its linked contrasts of safety and danger, freedom and duty, flying and stepping, as well as the ambiguous sense of regret and acceptance the image contains. But one could look also at the last line expended on Offa (line 294), so summary as to be almost a maxim, *he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende*, 'he lay like a thane, next to his lord'; or at the moment just before the death of Byrhtnoth, when very violent action (lines 164-5) changes to elegiac formula (lines 167-8), with in between a line of which one cannot be sure, *Feoll þa to foldan fealohilte swurd*, 'Then the gold-hilted sword fell to the ground'. This is an event, certainly. But is it merely part of the narrative? With the dropping of the sword Byrhtnoth's resistance comes to an end, and so does his power and his authority. Soon he too will be on the ground, in the ground; behind that lies the dimmer notion that gold goes back to the earth, that all human emblems of pride must fall.⁴⁵ Line 166 is a very powerful line. If one were looking for touchstones in *Maldon*, that would do as well as any other.

However the point being made is that this is only one example of a repeated impulse; and that exaggerating any one example (especially to the extent of not recognising the impulse) leads only to impoverishment. This leads me to the last remark I would make, and to an *apologia* of sorts for the labour of expending "interpretative criticism" on Old English heroic poetry at all. There is not very much Old English heroic material left; and it may seem that what little can be said about it should have been. If this is not the case, it is perhaps because the genre has something its later critics have since lost: in this case, a particular kind of emotional maturity. Professor Garmonsway pointed to this with his remarks on how Old English poets were so often prepared to include commentary from the other side, from figures apparently opposed to everything the hero stood for - so Hygelac dissuading Beowulf, Unferth supporting Breca, Guthere crying out to Garulf, Hildegyth restraining Waldere, and of course Wiglaf and the *Maldon*-poet commenting respectively on Beowulf and Byrhtnoth.⁴⁶ It is notoriously a sign of maturity to be able to see all round a situation without feeling obliged to let one fact organise the rest: this the critics of *Maldon* have often failed to manage. It is another sign of the same quality to be able to see all the pros and cons (academics can usually manage this), but not thereby to be inhibited from decision: here we need heroes to instruct us.

One of the best pieces of comparative criticism of recent years must be Patrick Sims-Williams's "'Is it fog or smoke or warriors fighting?' . . ." on the *Finnsburg* fragment and its Celtic parallels.⁴⁷ Particularly impressive is the way Mr Sims-Williams shows there how Hnæf, the hero, comes to a correct explanation after discarding false ones, not because he has prior knowledge (as in the parallels) but through scrutinising his own fears. Hnæf in this way both retains humanity, by his ignorance, and rises above it, by strength of will. I would suggest that a very similar blend of strength and weakness characterises *Maldon*, and *Offa*, and *Byrhtnoth*. *Offa* predicts what is going to happen once, when he says not all promises will be kept; but he does not know which of his own two alternatives will come true, to ride home safe in company or die of

wounds on the battlefield. Similarly Byrhtnoth, in his play with modals and infinitives and subjunctives, does not *know* whether the Vikings will go to their ships in the end or not, whether they will gain treasure, or whether the English even will not have to pay tribute. All the adverse possibilities are present. What he is sure of is that the Vikings will not go 'unfought', or gain treasure 'softly', or receive tribute before a trial of 'point and edge'. But invincibility is no part of what he says. For him either to fail to recognise the doubtful future or to let that put him off decision would stop him being an Old English poetic hero. He has to show, I repeat, both the 'shrewdness' of the badger and the single-mindedness of the boar.

NOTES

- 1 In *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving jr. (Toronto, 1974) pp.235-53.
- 2 The first of these has since made its way into *Maldon* commentary, in N.F. Blake, "The genesis of *The Battle of Maldon*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978) pp.119-29. For the second, see *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. James Boyd (Oxford, 1948) p.87, l.681.
- 3 Cited here from the very careful text given in R.W. McTurk, "'Cynwulf and Cyneheard' and the Icelandic Sagas", *Leeds Studies in English* 12 (1981) pp.81-127.
- 4 I refrain from any comment about the king and the lady, but it is clear (a) that Cyneheard's men approach undetected, and (b) that the king's guard are disarmed and unprepared.
- 5 See for instance *Waldere*, ed. Arne Zettersten (Manchester, 1979) p.5, and *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*, ed. Joyce Hill (Durham and St Andrews, 1983) p.22.
- 6 Quotations from both *Waldere* and *Maldon* in this essay are from *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E.V.K. Dobbie, ASPR VI (New York, 1942), though I have changed the punctuation of lines 20-21 below. My translations are also based on this text.
- 7 So G. Neckel, cited in *Waldere*, ed. Ute Schwab (Messina, 1967) p.110.
- 8 Cited here from *Ekkehard's Waltharius*, ed. Karl Strecker (Berlin, 1907): see lines 692, 494 and 559.
- 9 Hill, *OE Minor Heroic Poems*, p.44 (as also for the remarks below).
- 10 Schwab, pp.117-23, and in her translation of the text inserted separately.
- 11 Instructions for an ordeal cited in J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* include, for instance, *Beo ðær gemeten nygon fet of ðam stacan to ðære mearce*, 'Let there be measured nine feet from the stake to the mark'. The mark is the line at which the victim can drop the hot iron.
- 12 *Waldere*, ed. F. Norman (2nd edn., London, 1949) p.37. The use of *fotmæl* in *Maldon* line 275 is certainly suggestive, though Norman does not argue from such cases.
- 13 The one other recorded use of *ætsteall*, in *Guthlac* line 179, inclines me to translate the phrase in *Waldere* as 'at the place where you took your station'.
- 14 R.E. Kaske, "*Sapientia et fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*", *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958) pp.423-57.
- 15 See *Beowulf*, lines 1080-85 (whatever editorial interpretation is placed on them). In *The Battle of Finnsburh* (also in Dobbie, ASPR VI) Hengest is seen heading for the doors, line 17.

- 16 By risking and losing their own lives, they also condemn loyal followers to death.
- 17 *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. E.V. Gordon (London, 1937) p.76.
- 18 See N.F. Blake, "*The Battle of Maldon*", *Neophilologus* 49 (1965) pp.332-45, and George Clark, "*The Battle of Maldon: a Heroic Poem*", *Speculum* 43 (1968) pp.52-71.
- 19 J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son", *Essays and Studies* n.s. 6 (1953) pp.1-18.
- 20 J.E. Cross, "Oswald and Byrhtnoth", *English Studies* 46 (1965) pp.93-109.
- 21 Helmut Gneuss, "*The Battle of Maldon* 89: Byrhtnoth's ofermod once again", *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976) pp.117-37.
- 22 Cross, "Oswald and Byrhtnoth", p.106.
- 23 For the two prose cases, in the Alfredian *Boethius* and the *Soliloquies*, see Hans Schabram, *Superbia. Studien zum altenglischen Wortschatz I* (Munich, 1965) pp.39-40. The poetic example is *Guthlac* line 269, where the devils mean it as an insult, but we take it as the opposite: 'the insult of an enemy is tribute to the brave'.
- 24 Schabram, p.123.
- 25 Schabram, p.130.
- 26 Schabram, p.123.
- 27 For instance by Earl R. Anderson, "Flyting in *The Battle of Maldon*", *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970) pp.197-202; and by T.A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972) pp.107-10.
- 28 Anderson, "Flyting . . .", notes a parallel case in the *Hildebrandslied*, line 37.
- 29 It is a moot point whether we here means the Vikings only, and *hilde dælon* 'give out blows' - so N.F. Blake, "The Flyting in *The Battle of Maldon*", *English Language Notes* 13 (1976) pp.242-5 - or whether we are the English and the Vikings, with *hilde dælon* as 'share battle', as in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. D.G. Scragg (Manchester, 1981) p.70. The former would be more threatening, the latter more wheedling. Dr Scragg incidentally marks both *forgyldon* and *dælon* as 'preterite subjunctive', but this must be an error for 'present'.
- 30 Put forward by Fred C. Robinson, "Some Aspects of the *Maldon*-Poet's Artistry", *JEGP* 75 (1976) pp.25-40.
- 31 See T.D. Hill, "History and Heroic Ethic in *Maldon*", *Neophilologus* 54 (1970) pp.291-6.
- 32 See E.B. Irving jr., "The Heroic Style in *The Battle of Maldon*", *Studies in Philology* 58 (1961) pp.457-67.

- ³³ Gordon, *Maldon*, p.52.
- ³⁴ *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XII (Reykjavík, 1954) p.176.
- ³⁵ Scragg, *Maldon*, p.80, translates on *dæg ær* as 'earlier that day'. This would perhaps weaken Offa's claim to foresight.
- ³⁶ As do for instance lines 218-19.
- ³⁷ *Seven Old English Poems*, ed. John C. Pope (New York, 1966) p.78.
- ³⁸ Scragg, *Maldon*, p.83.
- ³⁹ Gordon, *Maldon*, p.85; see also p.60.
- ⁴⁰ Cross, "Oswald and Byrhtnoth", p.103.
- ⁴¹ Torthelm is allowed to say them, but only "in a dream" (inspired seemingly by his pagan ancestors): see Tolkien, "The Homecoming . . .", p.12. See further T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (London, 1982) pp.118-19.
- ⁴² There is a lurking parallel with Scottish accounts of the battle of Flodden. These provide most of the excuses to be found also in the *Vita Oswaldi* or *Liber Eliensis* about Maldon. James IV is blamed for "wilfull misgovernance" (i.e. not refusing battle) in *Pitscottie's Chronicles of Scotland I*, ed. E.J.G. Mackay, Scottish Text Society 42 (Edinburgh, 1899) p.278.
- ⁴³ See for instance the unwavering tone of D.G. Scragg's "Supplement" to the reprint of Gordon's edition in 1976, pp.87-92.
- ⁴⁴ See further T.A. Shippey, "Approaches to Truth in Old English Poetry", *University of Leeds Review* 25 (1982) pp.171-89.
- ⁴⁵ See Scragg, *Maldon*, p.78.
- ⁴⁶ G.N. Garmonsway, "Anglo-Saxon Heroic Attitudes", in *Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of F.P. Magoun jr.*, ed. J.B. Bessinger jr. and R.P. Creed (London, 1965) pp.139-46.
- ⁴⁷ Patrick Sims-Williams, "'Is it fog or smoke or warriors fighting?': Irish and Welsh Parallels to the Finnsburg Fragment", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1978) pp.505-14.