

## Space and Feasting Hall in the Heroic Poetry\*

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### 1. Moral Background of *Beowulf*

The poem of *Beowulf* belongs to the late antiquity of the heroic age, of which the social ethos is based on “shame culture” rather than “guilt culture,” as Dodds keenly observed (Dodds 28-50). It is quite true to say that *Beowulf* is not about an individual as such about a man of archetypal proportions, whose significance, in the broadest and deepest sense, is social” (Lee 173). In keeping with this social dimension, *Beowulf*’s speeches, marked by courtly custom, demonstrate at the outset that he is to a large extent subordinated to an

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obligation generated by the social ethos. In general, a society demands that its members adhere to specific moral principles. The social background of *Beowulf* is the society of Germanic heroic ideology conventionally known as the *comitatus*, in which duties of loyalty and revenge become a binding force on the individual. The modern term of individuality appears to have no place in the heroic ideology of the *comitatus* the lives of members of Germanic society are defined “only in terms of their functions in relation to God and to the kindred and *dryht* in whose social fabric their lives have meaning” (Lee 173). Thus the two way relationship between the lord and his retainers is supposed to take precedence over the individual’s position in society. The core of this moral principle, as Smithers says, appears to be the “nexus between fate on the one hand, and a man’s honour and unremitting exercise of courage on the other” (Smithers 78). In this society, in this way heroes are constantly called on to respond to an ineluctable obligation to prove themselves in war. From this point of the unremitting exercise of courage, heroes are shown as men of action more obviously than men of thought or reflection.

## 2. The Function of Feasting Hall in *Beowulf*

The central location for the *comitatus* society was the hall, called the gift-hall, gold-hall or mead-hall in *Beowulf*. Heorot was such a place and it comes to represent the entire Danish society. Here vows of allegiance were interchanged, heroic boasts made, and feasting and mead-drinking carried out. Tacitus refers to the Germanic love of banqueting and entertainment, especially at ceremonial occasions, and we see Hrothgar conducting much of his business at a feast, while Queen Wealhtheow circulates with the cup. Great significance

is given to protocol and seating arrangements, and it is here that promises of future aid are made. In the hall the poet (*scop*) narrates the legends of past glory and keeps the reputation of dead heroes alive, or he composes new songs out of his “word-*hoard*” to celebrate recent victories. The threat to Heorot by Grendel has far greater consequences than the collapse of a building: it refers to the civilization itself and to the cosmos. To call Grendel the new hall-thane implies that evil now has control in Denmark. In spite of the order and peace in the hall, we are frequently shown the tensions that lie just beneath the surface. When Wealththeow pleads for her sons’ succession, when we are told of future feud and fire, we are aware of how fragile this peace is.

In *Beowulf* the banquet hall is repeatedly mentioned with words indicating that the hall is of pleasure and entertainment, that signify that the hall’s major function is to refresh its members through entertainment. On returning to his homeland Geats Beowulf recalls King Hrothgar’s favor given to him by using *symble*, “feast,” *gidd*, “song,” *gleo*, “merriment.” This function of entertainment is also well portrayed in words such as *niode naman*, “took pleasure,” *symbolwynne*, “banquet-pleasure,” *medudream*, “mead-joy,” *healgamen*, “hall-joy.” Moreover, the harp, which serves to comfort the warriors, is also called *gleobeam*, “glee-wood, pleasure-wood” (kenning, compound metaphor). This kennings, compound metaphor, proves that the banquet hall works to provide a place of entertainment for its members. Most of the participants at the banquet-hall are warriors comprising a *comitatus* and are also called with reference to words of such as *beorscealca*, “beer-warrior,” *healsittendum*, “hall-sitters,” *fletsittende*, hall-sitters.” The fact that those key members of the *comitatus* are referred to in this way suggests that the identity and philosophical behaviour of its members are formed largely with hall and wine.

The beer (mead)-drinking at the feasting hall implies not only the literal act

of consumption, but also the ritual swearing of vows (Robinson 77). This drinking custom at the mead-hall(banquet hall) is especially important in clan society, since it is understood as a “symbol and a confirmation of mutual social obligation,” according to E. A. Thompson (68). This implication of beer-drinking is well embedded in the various epithets for hall: *meoduheal*, “mead-hall,” *beorsele*, “beer-hall,” *winærn*, “wine-hall,” *ealubenc*, “ale-seat.” The use of these compounds with their first elements denoting mead, beer, wine and ale, appears to prove that courtly life in heroic society is dominated by drinking. In this comment on lines 1024b-25a, *Beowulf geƿah ful on flette*, “Beowulf received the cup of that hall,” Klaeber observes that Beowulf’s acceptance of a drinking cup is “no doubt in obedience to well regulated courtly custom” (Klaeber 169). In heroic poetry the “courtly custom” is frequently manifested in terms of making vows over mead-hall whilst drinking. When Wealhtheow brings the cup to Beowulf, he ceremonially receives it and then makes his formal vow to rescue her people or die in the attempt:

Ic gefremman sceal  
 eorlic ellen, oƿðe endedæg  
 on þisse meoduhealle minne gebidan (*Beo* 636-38)

[I will perform the deed of heroic valor, or meet my last day in this mead-hall]<sup>1)</sup>

Similarly, in “The Battle of Maldon,” the commemorative battle-poem probably composed c. 991-1000, Aelfwine encourages those dispirited warriors at the hall of Byrhtnoth by recalling their heroic boast over the drinking of mead:

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1) Klaeber’s *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* is the edition used for my paper and modern translation is mine.

Gemunað þara mæla þe we ofæt meodu spræcon,  
 þonne we on bence beot ahofon,  
 hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn. (*Maldon* 212-14)

[Remember all those speeches that we uttered over mead, when we raised  
 vows upon the benches, heroes in the hall about hard strife]<sup>2)</sup>

Here we can note that the vows to serve the leader is said to be made when the warrior drinks the mead, as if the acceptance of the drink confirms the binding of the oath. The significance of mead-hall in heroic society is well presented in the speeches of Beowulf and Hrothgar. To the sea-captain Beowulf reveals his purpose that he can offer Hrothgar good counsel on the great question whether this scourge is ever to cease or not:

["I can give Hrothgar good counsel about this, with generous mind, -how he, the wise and good, shall overcome the fiend"; if, said Beowulf, for him there should ever come a change and help from the torment of affliction, and the surges of care grow cooler; or else he should ever hereafter endure unendurable hardship (a time of tribulation), inescapable distress (crushing misery), long as the best of the houses lasts there in its lofty place." (*Beo* 277-285)]

On the deeper level, what Beowulf describes is an utter paralysis of Danish courage, and both the noble-chief and *husa selest*, (the finest hall) represent an ideal combination of the *comitatus*, but its leader's torment in the place symbolizes a collapse of Danish prowess. Though the description is focused on Hrothgar, its thematic implication is much wider than first appears, since one

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2) Bill Griffiths' *The Battle of Maldon* is the edition used for my paper and modern English translation is mine.

man's trouble indicates the general condition of the tribe's fighting prowess. Here Hrothgar's physical and mental state, deprived of martial prowess, is pungently portrayed with the terms a, "ever after." *earfoðrage*, "unendurable hardship," *ƿreanyd*, "inescapable distress," *ƿolað*, "suffer."

However, the image of Hrothgar's paralysis appears not to provoke any serious disputatious reaction among the Danes, because Beowulf attributes the source of the tale to the hearsay of sailors. Beowulf's unintentional negative view on the Danish *comitatus* goes on when he asks Hrothgar for permission to fight against the monster Grendel:

secgað sæliðend, ƿæt ƿæs sele stande,  
 reced selest, rinca gehwylcum  
 idel ond nunyt, (*Beo* 411-13)

[Sea-farers say that this hall, this most noble building, stands empty and useless to everyone]

In Beowulf's speech, Heorot, the Danish banquet hall representing Danish national pride, is reduced to a mere useless hall and symbolizes the destruction of heroic activity. Hence, hall, as a space, contains much wider implication beyond a mere drinking place. Here Beowulf seems to describe the desolation of the hall, but on a deeper level his remarks are understood to evoke the image of Danish paralysis. Unlike the first verbal *hynƿo*, "humiliation" in which the central image is focused on the chief, Hrothgar. Here the best hall (Heorot) becomes a thematic embodiment representing the collapse of the Danish *comitatus*. This interpretation becomes possible only when the implication of a hall in the heroic world is fully perceived. On the surface, the hall is nothing but a place to reside; but the hall, in Germanic heroic society, it is expected

to play a key role as the setting for all kinds of heroic activities: vows of allegiance are exchanged here, heroic boasts made, feast held, mead drunk and treasures distributed. In essence the binding force of the *comitatus* is conceived in the hall. In this sense, the hall symbolizes the heart of the heroic world, and it is also becomes a physical embodiment of the heroic code. Swanton rightly points out the hall is the symbol of the pride of the whole nation, not just the court (Swanton 90). In Beowulf's description, the hall, as an embodiment of civilization, is portrayed as having lost its principal function. the loss is highlighted by the combination of two adjectives *idel*, "empty," and *unnyt*, "useless," Beowulf's technique of deepening the sense of degradation by joining words characterizing the condition of the Danish hall is also a notable feature in his description of Hrothgar's suffering.

In his exchange of speeches with Beowulf, Hrothgar sadly recalls the vain efforts of his warriors:

Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne  
ofer ealowæge oretmeccas,  
þæt hie in beorsele bidan woldon  
Grendeles guþe mid gryrum ecga.  
Ðonne wæs þeos medoheal on morgentid,  
drihtsele dreorfan, þonne dæg lixte,  
eal bencpelu blode bestymed,  
heall heorudreore; (*Beo* 480-487a)

[Very often, warriors, after the drinking of beer, pledged themselves over the ale-cup that they would await in the beer-hall the combat with Grendel with terrible swords. Then at the morning-time, when day shone forth, this mead-hall, this chamber for retainers, was stained with gore; all the bench-boards deluged with blood and gore of swords]

The whole framework of this speech is designed to preserve the Danish pride. Hrothgar recalls the efforts of his deceased warriors by conjoining words evoking heroic spirit: *gebeotedon*, “vowed,” *beore*, “beer,” *druncne*, “drunk,” *oretmecgas*, “battle-fighters,” and *beorsele*, “beer-hall.” Hrothgar’s recollection of *beot*, “vow,” is significant, as the pledging of oaths is a prerequisite for heroic deeds. Hrothgar’s use of these connotative words is part of his desire to show affection and respect for his retainers who risked their lives at the fighting with Grendel. In particular, the beer-drinking at the feasting hall implies not only the literal act of consumption, but also the ritual swearing of vows (Robinson 77). The conjunction of *gebeotedon* and *beore druncne* in Hrothgar’s memory is meant to stress the essential heroic quality inherent in his retinue even under the threat of Grendel (Robinson 77). Most of all, it is assumed that Hrothgar’s recollection of his warrior’s effort is motivated by Beowulf’s symbolic description of Heorot (*Beo* 411-3a), and is intended to defend the pride of his country.

Hrothgar, regarding Beowulf’s daring eagerness as threatening the pride of the Danes, tries to save his face and keep up the pride of the Danish warriors by presenting a real picture of the frequent efforts of his warriors. The concept of loss in battle does not always mean that the warriors involved in the battle were weak in these ways. It may be concluded that the Danish warriors were not idle in the fighting against Grendel, but were defeated by Grendel’s overpowering might. Gerald Morgan also believes that “the devastation of Heorot by Grendel is not to be seen as an indication of Hrothgar’s lack of authority, nor of the Dane’s lack of valour” (Morgan 28). This interpretation is supported by a series of words denoting the frequent efforts of the Danish warriors: *Ful oft*, “very often,” *bidan woldon*, “would await.” Here *Ful oft*, combing with *woldon*, implying a routine, suggest frequent combat between the



Danish and Grendel. Furthermore the subsequent description of the blood-stained floors implies that the Danes fought to the last minute at the risk of their lives. Hence, hall, as a space, contains much wider implication beyond a mere drinking place. Hrothgar's emphatic use of "very often" and the subsequent reference to ritual vows made by his retinue seems to show that Hrothgar, as a representative of Danish pride, has perceived Beowulf's unwitting sarcasm beneath his literal description of Heorot.

Upon arriving in Denmark Beowulf is invited three times to the prepared by the Danes. In the first part of the poem up to line 2220 banquets take place three times as Beowulf's exploits progress and his heroic achievement is made. However, the banquet hall works as forming Beowulf's true heroic image and identity and representing the whole aspect of heroic society as well. Because this feasting is a kind of routine in heroic society and has a purpose of entertaining and refreshing, it is designed to refresh those present at the banquet hall, thus wine and music become quite natural accompaniment to it. This kind of function of a banquet as entertaining with drinking wine is well proven in the words representing the banquet hall. The Danish banquet hall "Heorot" is presented or called various compounds denoting or indicating a space performing various functions. The hall of *comitatus* serves as a meeting place for its members and works as place of entertainment as well, and sometimes becomes a battle field for inner and outer conflicts. So the banquet hall is often called war-hall. Besides, the hall is called *hringsele*, "ring-hall," *goldsele*, "gold-hall," clan-hall, *gifhealle*, "gift-hall," *gestsele*, "guest-hall," *gifstol*, "gift-seat." These compounds denote directly or indirectly the function of the banquet hall and reflect heroic ethos controlling heroic society. As a treasure the "ring" and "gold" forming the first element in ring-hall and gold-hall work as a catalyst cementing the loyalty between the lord and his thanes. Lord-hall

means the place where the chief presides over administration. Likewise the hall is differently called according to its various roles.

In *Beowulf* many scenes of receiving cups of wine appear: *Him wæs ful borne*, “cup was brought to him” (*Beo* 1192), *liðwæge bær*, “goblet bore,” *sincfato sealde*, “gold-cups handed,” *medoful ætbær*, “carried mead-cup,” *beorþege*, “beer-taking,” *symbol ond seful*, “(he took delight in) feast and hall-cup,” *ful geþeah*, “took cup.” The close relationship between the banquet hall and the warriors is directly related first to its functional connection between the hall and wine which is apparent in the following compounds: *medoærn*, “mead-hall,” *meduseld*, “mead-hall,” *beorsele*, “beer-hall,” *winsele*, “wine-hall,” *winreced*, “wine-hall,” *medoþence*, “mead-bench.”

The lord in the heroic society distribute treasure and wine at the hall at peace time, which is regarded as political gesture in order to secure complete loyalty from his thanes. By receiving lord’s wine cup, the thane is to offer a pledge to risk his life for the safety of his lord and nation, the pledge of which is designed to repay his lord’s favour. Hence a successful lord means the one who secures a consistent binding force based on complete loyalty. Since this binding force is directly related to the existence of the heroic society, the distribution of wine and a pledge from warriors contains more significant symbolic meaning than the mere formality of a banquet hall.

Focal theme of heroism penetrating *Beowulf* is well portrayed in *Beowulf*’s speech delivered at the banquet hall in Denmark:

Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan  
 worolde lifes; wyrce seþe mote  
 domes ær deaþe; þæt biðdrihtguman  
 unlifgendum æfter selest. (*Beo* 1386-89)

[Each of us must expect an end of living in this world; let him who may win glory before death: for that is best at last for the departed warrior.]

Here Beowulf emphasizes the importance of glory, which in heroic society is considered as immortality passing this earthly life, working as a substitute for soul after death in Christianity. The desire for achieving heroic deeds on earth is repeated at the banquet hall in Beowulf:

Ic gefremman sceal  
 eorlic ellen, oþþe endedæg  
 on þisse meoduhealle minne gebidan. (*Beo* 636-38)

[I will show the courage of a hero, or in this mead-hall pass my latest day.]

The fact that heroic vow is made at that hall is related to the publicity of the banquet hall. A true hero is born when his words (vow) are fulfilled at the battle field. In this process, companions, members of *comitatus* present at the hall at the time the warrior makes a vow will judge the consistency between his words and actions. Such a true image of warriorship is revealed at Wiglaf's speech to his coward companions, who fled the battle scene when Beowulf was fatally wounded:

Ic ðæt mæl geman, ðær we medu þegun,  
 Ðonne we geheton ussum hlaforde  
 in biorsele, ðe us ðas beagas geaf,  
 þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon,  
 gif him þislicu þearf gelumpe,  
 helmas ond heard sweord. (*Beo* 2633-38)

[I remember that time at which we drank the mead, how in the beer-hall we

pledged ourselves to our lord, who gave us the rings, that we would repay him for the war-equipments, the helmets and hard swords, if any need like this befell him.]

### 3. The Relationship between Heroic Identity and the Banquet Hall

Such an attitude of humility, playing down one's martial prowess, opposes the moral philosophy of *comitatus*. As mentioned already a warrior is always ready to risk his life in order to obtain reputation which will accompany his name forever even after his death. That is, glory is regarded as life to warriors, and such a reputation becomes real only when there is somebody praising his achievement after his death. In this context the announcement of one's heroic achievement by the lord at the banquet hall, a public place containing many witnesses is to incite heroic consciousness among its members and thus the hero becomes an idol to them. After Beowulf defeated Grendel and his mother, King Hrothgar and his queen Wealhtheow recognize Beowulf as true hero and praise him to the utmost. Since such a recognition and praise is made at the public place, hall, Beowulf's heroic identity is established based on publicity and objectivity. This publicity referring to warriors' qualification is closely related to the fact that a warrior's vow is made at the banquet hall before he takes an adventure. If he fails to carry out his vows at the real scene he will be judged later by the witnesses who are present at the banquet hall. Warriors's new identity is often established when the lord confers new social position indicating promotion of social status and goes together with treasure and wine. When Beowulf returns to Geats after carrying out his adventure successfully in Denmark, King Hygelac confers new position on Beowulf and treasures:

þæt he on Biowulfes      bearn alegde,  
 ond him gesealde      seofan þusendo,  
 bold ond bregostol. (*Beo* 2194-96)

[That he laid (a sword) in Beowulf's lap, and gave him seven thousand (hides of land), a hall, and the rank of chief.]

A similar example occurs when Beowulf bestows his sword on the sea-captain who safely guarded Beowulf's ship:

He Ðæm batwearde      bunden golde  
 swurd gesealde,      Ðæt he syðan wæs  
 on meodubence      maðme þy weorþra, (*Beo* 1900-03)

[To the sea-captain Beowulf gave a sword bound round with gold, so that henceforth he was more honoured (*þy weorþra*) on the mead-bench (*meodubence*) for that treasure- that heirloom.]

Those terms of *meodubence*, "mead-bench," *weorð*, "worthies" defining new position of the sea-captain are also used in describing young Beowulf's martial disposition:

Hean wæs lange,  
 swa hyne Geata bearn      godne ne tealdon,  
 ne hyne on medobence      micles wyrðne  
 drihten Wedera      gedon wolde; (*Beo* 2183-86)

[For a long time he was despised, as the children of the Geats knew him not to be brave, nor wold the lord of the Geats do him much honour (*wyrðne*) at the mead-bench (*medobence*).]

Shown in the two cases above the social status of the sea-captain and young Beowulf is presented with words *weorðra*, “worthier” and *wyrðne*, “honour.” Terms like *weorðra* and *wyrðne* are derived from Old English *weorðan* meaning “happen,” “become,” “come to pass” and they are used to indicate the characteristic of heroic society in which the social status of members of *comitatus* can be changed according to their martial achievements. The adjective *weorðra* is derived from the verb *weorðian* meaning “honour,” “exalt” and a comparative form of *weorð* meaning “valued,” “dear,” “honor,” has the sense of emphasis and thus quite appropriate for expressing a more elevated status of warriors. Meanwhile *weorð* is also used as noun and contains the meanings of “price,” “worth,” “treasure.” Considering the fact that the new promoted social status or position is established by the lord’s words and at the same time with material reward corresponding to his achievement, the sense of material value immanent in *weorð* meaning “price,” “worth,” “treasure” suggests something far greater than its literal sense. *Weorðmynd*, “glory,” “honour,” which is regarded as the most desired by the members of the *comitatus*, also contains *weorð* element. The fact that *weorðmynd* contains *weorð* element is not accidental but a calculated combination of words by the poet. Surely the poet intends to stress the essence of heroic world by putting emphasis on *weorðian* or *weorðan*. We should not overlook the fact that the promoted new position of the sea-captain and Beowulf is accompanied with *medobence*, “mead-bench.” This indicates that the banquet hall plays a key role in the heroic society with reference to the social status of its members.

#### 4. The Banquet Hall as Space for Ritual Performance: the meaning of *beore druncen*

Both the cup and wine given by the lord has very special meaning in heroic society. The lord expresses his generosity and favour towards his followers in return the warriors offer vow of loyalty for their lord and nation. Considering this significance of “drinking wine,” giving and receiving wine works as part of binding force of *comitatus*. In Old English *beore druncen* is the phrase depicting warriors involved in drinking at the banquet hall. However, the true meaning of *beore druncen* has been controversial among the scholars over two meanings: one is “drinking wine (beer),” the other is “being inebriated in wine (drunkenness). The true meaning of *beore druncen* can be drawn from close examinations on the speeches of Unferth and Beowulf.

Unferth, a Danish courtier, is devoured by jealousy, and taunts Beowulf:

[“Are you that Beowulf who strove with Breca, contended with him in the open sea, in a swimming-contest, when you two for pride tried the floods, and ventured your lives in deep water for boasting? You two toiled in the water’s realm seven nights; he (Breca) overcame you at swimming: he had greater strength. Then, at morning-time, the ocean cast him up on the Heathoraemas” land. There, dear to his people, he sought his beloved fatherland, the land of the Brodings, his fair stronghold, where he had subjects and treasures and a stronghold. The son of Beanstan performed faithfully in the contest with you all that he had pledged himself to. So I expect from you a worse result, though you have everywhere prevailed in rush of battle, stern war, if you dare await Grendel at the close quarters for the space of a night.” (*Beo* 506-28)]

Beowulf replies with much warmth, and gave his own version of the swimming

contest with Breca:

Hwæt, þu wom fela, wine min Unferð,  
 “beore druncen” ymb Brecan spræce, (*Beo* 530-31)

[What! my friend Unferth, you have talked a great deal, “drinking beer”  
 (according to the formality of heroic society), “drunken with beer,”  
 concerning Breca,]

Whether Unferth’s speech comes from his “drunkenness” or from the formality of “drinking wine” is dependent on the close analysis of Unferth’s previous speech and close observation of Beowulf’s response to Unferth’s speech. It is quite certain that Beowulf perceives that Unferth’s speech is made out of heroic rival consciousness. In fact Unferth’s speech follows quite a logical pattern and contains hardly any trace of idle, random talks out of heavy drunkenness. Unferth intends to point out Beowulf’s lack of martial prowess rather than to blame him for his audacious attempt to enter a dangerous swimming contest.

Here lies the underlying message from Unferth by whom, according to Parks, “a past incident is being summoned up not so much for its own sake as for its predictive value on the coming exchange” (Parks 49). Unferth tries to discredit Beowulf with his own version of the swimming contest. Yet, the underlying meaning of Unferth’s speech seems to shed a new light on his attitude towards Beowulf. Unferth tries to set out his personal heroic ideology. This intention becomes gradually evident as he begins to change his attitude towards both Beowulf and Breca. At the beginning of his version of the swimming-contest, Unferth taunts Beowulf that his youthful exploits were motivated by his audacious boasting. But it should be borne in mind that Unferth’s sarcasm is directed to Breca as well as Beowulf. As this speech



develops, however, we can see that Unferth begins to single out Breca from the dual *git*, “you two” to the single he (Breca). This shifting of subjects seems to be designed in order first to emphasize Breca’s victory over Beowulf then to praise Breca’s achievement which echoes the ideal of the central figure of a *comitatus*:

[then he, dear to his people, sought his beloved fatherland, the land of the Brondings, his fair stronghold, where he had subjects and stronghold and treasures]

What we here about now is the glorious return of Breca to his fatherland. Here the previous tone of sarcasm has disappeared completely. At the centre of his speech lies the thematic motif of the ideal *comitatus* which is encapsulated in the words; “fatherland,” “people,” “stronghold,” and “treasures.” Each of these words embodies a key element of the *comitatus* and together they make up a model society. The addition of the heroic deeds of Breca completes the image, creating an ideal, the perfect society. This scene of Breca’s return to this his land seems to induce the audience to forget that Unferth had previously reproached him in harsh terms; instead Unferth delivers a panegyric on Breca. Moreover, Unferth raises Breca to the level of a perfect hero by putting an emphasis on Breca’s fulfillment of his pledge to Beowulf:

Beot eal wið þe  
sunu Beanstanes soðe gelæste. (*Beo* 523-24)

[The son of Beanstan performed faithfully all the vow that he had made against you]

Breca, in Unferth’s speech, emerges as an ideal hero by fulfilling his vow. But

it should not be overlooked that Unferth, through this heroic eulogy, demonstrates his own heroic ideology: boasts, even if they are foolishly motivated, must be fulfilled. Therefore it is assumed that Unferth's version of the Breca episode sets out an ethical standard from which Unferth seems to derive his heroic ideology; as long as a warrior achieves success in the fulfillment of his pledge he gains credit, despite the motivation of the vow. Dodds claims that in heroic society a warrior is judged by his successes. Any attempts that failed were not only worthless but a source of shame (Dodds 28-50). This tradition of "shame culture" is brought home again to the minds of the audience of Beowulf, in particular when they hear of Unferth's taunting speech towards Beowulf; in this Unferth completely ignores Breca's previous attempt in the swimming contest, based on youthful boasting, as with a panegyric tone he gives much credit to Breca's glorious achievement. In terms both of the classical heroic moral standard and that of Unferth, Breca's attempt should not be condemned at all as long as he proves his martial prowess in practical terms of success. According to Parks, what Unferth points out about this episode "is not that Beowulf was foolish in undertaking this swimming exploit, but that he lost at it" (Parks 111). Thus Unferth, with his assessment of Beowulf's past incompetence, foretells the failure of Beowulf's exploit:

Ðonne wene ic to þe  
 wýrsan geþingea, (*Beo* 524-525)

[Therefore I expect from you a worse result ]

In this prediction of coming warfare, Unferth directly challenges Beowulf's heroic identity, as he publicly doubts Beowulf's heroic competence (Parks 91). However, Park's view seems to me to fall short of a convincing case for

Beowulf's recognition of Unferth's mental ability: *ƿeah ƿin wit duge* (Beo 589b) "though your mental powers may be great." This short statement leads the audience to consider what intellectual quality there is in Unferth's speech. It may be assumed that Beowulf clearly perceives Unferth's intention, which is delivered in the form of a verbal disguise: Unferth urges Beowulf to restrain or tone down such daring boasts. Thus a different paraphrase of Unferth's speech might be the following: "You, daring Beowulf, postpone your bragging until you demonstrate your actual heroic achievement; if you do so, then I will recognize you as a real hero, as I now recognize Breca with his exemplary deeds."

As proven both in the contents of Unferth's speech and Beowulf's understanding of Unferth's hidden intention in his speech, we can conclude that Unferth's speech was not uttered out of drunkenness. Moreover, we can see that Unferth's speech is constructed in the frame of logic, that is, to predict the result based on the past accounts. Then the meaning of *beore druncen* should be interpreted differently from the meaning of "drinking wine heavily," or "in a state of drunkenness." As discussed already the sense of "drinking wine" means literal sense and is regarded as a part of the process of making a vow and as a confirmation of responsibility between the lord and his warrior. Hence two conceptions are encapsulated in the meaning of "drinking wine," one is a formality as a ritual, and the other in the original meaning of drinking as a process of entertainment.

What Beowulf intends is that Unferth's speech is not based on the fact thus Unferth deserves the criticism because Unferth failed to the formality demanded by the heroic society. Thus the underlying meaning of Beowulf's speech can be paraphrased as follows: "You, Unferth, you are losing heroic disposition as a true warrior because you are criticising me with misled information when you

ought to deliver your speech in accordance to the formality of warriors' custom when you are "drinking wine." In this context the meaning of *beore druncen*, "drinking wine" is more appropriately interpreted as "drinking wine (according to the formality of heroic society)" rather than "being inebriated in wine or drunkenness." I quite agree with Robinson's view on the meaning of *beore druncne*. Robinson denies that *beore druncne* (*Beo* 480b) means "inebriated" (with beer) or "drunk," preferring the translation "having drunk the (lord's) beer," in which a ritual is implied (Robinson 77). This interpretation of *beore druncen* has some distance from the sense of "drunkenness" and is also demonstrated in Hrothgar's recollection of his followers's readiness in the face of Grendel's attack:

Ful oft gebeotedon      beore druncne  
ofer dalowæge      oretmecgas  
Ðæt hie in beorsele      bidan woldon (*Beo* 480-83)

[Very often, warriors, after the drinking of beer (*beore druncne*), pledged themselves over the ale-cup that they would await in the beer-hall the combat with Grendel with terrible swords.]

Here, considering the context, the true meaning of *beore druncne* accords more suitably to "drinking wine" rather than "being inebriated in wine." Considering the background of this scene in which Danish warriors being fronted by the monster Grendel make vows to risk their lives by receiving wine given to them by their lord Hrothgar. This is the moment of resolution and solemnity and tense runs very high, can we imagine that their vows are raised, made out of "drunkenness." Such an interpretation of "drunkenness" loses its logical ground

when we think of the moment of resolution and solemnity. The clear picture will be as follows. As participants in a ritual ceremony with solemn mood, the Danish warriors, by taking the cup given by their lord, make pledges to defeat Grendel. Considering the gravity of the scene in which vows to risk their lives are raised, vows which are directly related to their reputation, which is life to them, can such vows be uttered in a state of drunkenness?

Hence the complete components for ritual ceremony are established: the participants are the lord and his followers, the instruments for the ritual are cup, wine, and treasures, and the contents of ritual is the lord's generosity and vows of loyalty from warriors.

주제어: 코미타투스, 영웅적 결의, 향연장, 술을 들이킴, 술잔

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## Space and Feasting Hall in the Heroic Poetry

Abstract

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The feasting hall in heroic poetry has special meanings since it contains both physical and moral dimensions. In heroic poetry such as *Beowulf* the most important concept, the binding force of society, was the *comitatus*, the mutual loyalty between lord and his chosen warriors. The lord gave legal and economic protection in return for military services. The central location for the *comitatus* society was the hall, called *goldsele* (gold-hall), *meduseld* (mead-hall), *hringsele* (ring-hall) or *gifhealle* (gift-hall) in *Beowulf*. Here vows of allegiance were interchanged, heroic boasts made and feasting and mead-drinking carried out. In this context hall functions not only as a space for entertainment but also as a place where heroic ethos is formed. The beer (mead)-drinking at the feasting hall implies not only the literal act of consumption, but also the ritual swearing of vows. This drinking custom at the mead-hall is especially important in clan society, since it is understood as a symbol and a confirmation of mutual social obligation. A successful lord means the one who secures a consistent binding force based on complete loyalty. Since this binding force is directly related to the existence of the heroic society, the distribution of wine and a pledge from warriors contain more significant symbolic meaning than the mere formality of a banquet hall.

Key Words

*comitatus*, heroic vows, mead-hall, beer-drinking, ale-cup