

# THE JOURNAL OF Medieval Military History

## Volume IV

Edited by

CLIFFORD J. ROGERS  
KELLY DEVRIES  
JOHN FRANCE

2006

"Cowardice" and Duty in Anglo-Saxon England\*

Richard Abels

Then a great English army was gathered from Wiltshire and from Hampshire and they were going very resolutely towards the enemy. The ealdorman Elfinc was to lead the army, but he was up to his old tricks. As soon as they were so close that each army looked on the other, he feigned him sick, and began retching to vomit, and said that he was taken ill, and thus betrayed the people whom he should have led. As the saying goes: "When the leader gives way, the whole army will be much hindered."<sup>1</sup>

(Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C, D, E)s.a. 1003)

Colorado Springs, Colorado, Oct. 30, 2003 (AP). An Army interrogator has been charged with cowardice for allegedly refusing to do his work in Iraq.... An October 14 charge sheet accuses him of "cowardly conduct as a result of fear, in that he refused to perform his duties."... In an interview... Sergeant [Georg Andreas] Pogany... said he was with a team of Green Berets near Samarra, north of Baghdad on Sept. 29 when he saw the mangled body of an Iraqi. He said he began shaking and vomiting and he was terrified he would be killed. Sergeant Pogany said he told his team sergeant he was headed for a "nervous breakdown" and needed help. After that, he said, he was not asked to go on missions. "I don't know how asking for help qualified as misbehavior," Sergeant Pogany said. "You ask for help and they throw the book at you."

(The New York Times, Friday, October 31, 2003, A8)

In 1984, Philippe Contamine included in what is still the best general study of medieval warfare, *War in the Middle Ages*, a brief chapter he entitled "Towards a History of Courage." Contamine posed the question whether

- An earlier version of this paper was given at the Annual Conference of the Charles Homer Haskins Society at Cornell University, 3 November 2003. I have greatly benefited from the insights and suggestions made by my colleagues at the United States Naval Academy, in particular John Hill and Timothy O'Brien, and from the critical discussion of this paper in the History Department's Works-in-Progress seminar. I would also like to thank Thomas Hill, Paul Kershaw, Stephen Morillo, Janet Nelson, Ruth Mazo Karras, Alice Sheppard, Richard Barton, Ellen Harrison, Steven Isaac, and Constantin Fasolt for their criticism, corrections, encouragement, and invaluable guidance. All the errors that remain, of course, are my own.

<sup>1</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Whitelock with David C. Douglas and Susie L. Tucker (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U. Press, 1961), C, D, E, s.a. 1003, p. 86.

THE BOYDELL PRESS

courage, defined as the strength of mind or moral character of one who masters fear in the face of imminent danger, can on its own "constitute a subject of historical enquiry." He answered affirmatively, noting that "recent examples have shown that a history of sentiments or emotions can be attempted, especially if approached from the exterior or periphery, that is to say by the study of the historical context in which they were formed and which, in a sense, conditioned them."<sup>2</sup> What Contamine offered, he conceded, was intended only "to mark out a trail in this little-explored historical domain." Although the history of sentiments or emotions has since been recognized as a proper, if problematic, field of study for medievalists,<sup>3</sup> few historians of medieval warfare have taken up that trail. What was and still is needed is a full historical inquiry into how medieval soldiers and those who wrote about them understood fear and courage. Contamine's approach to the problem, moreover, was, to my mind, too limited. To understand fully the virtue of courage as a historical cultural construct one must also understand the opposing vice of cowardice, and even fewer historians of medieval warfare have dealt with this topic.<sup>4</sup> J. F. Verbruggen, who pioneered so many of the central topics of discussion in the modern historiography of medieval warfare, explored, all too briefly, the *mentalité* of the knight on the battlefield, including the role played by fear. Verbruggen, however, was less interested in "cowardice" *per se* than he was in the mechanisms through which such fear was overcome.<sup>5</sup>

This paper represents a preliminary investigation into the meanings of martial cowardice in Anglo-Saxon England. My presumption going into the research was that the Anglo-Saxons *had* a specific concept of "cowardice." There is, of course, no one definition of cowardice in modern American society, and one would expect that the concept of cowardice in Anglo-Saxon England would be equally multivalent. There are differences in emphasis, for example, between the philosophical definition of cowardice offered by Aristotle, which emphasizes character, and the U.S. military's Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), which focuses on action. For Aristotle, cowardice is a disposition of character marked by excessive fearfulness and deficiency in boldness resulting in shameful behavior.<sup>6</sup> In the UCMJ it is misbehavior motivated by fear. The

<sup>2</sup> P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 250–59.

<sup>3</sup> Anger's Past, a splendid volume of essays edited by Barbara Rosenwein exploring the cultural and social meanings of anger in the middle ages, demonstrates the potential of such an approach. Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past* (Ithaca, NY, 1998). Cf. the interesting debate by C. Cubitt, B. Rosenwien, S. Aarle, M. Garrison, and C. Larrington over the problem of the history of emotions for the early middle ages in *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), 225–27.

<sup>4</sup> This is quite evident from perusing the bibliography of William Ian Miller's essay on the meanings of courage, *The Mystery of Courage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages from the Eighth Century to 1340*, rev. 2nd ed., trans. S. Willard and R. W. Southern (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 38–49.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2:7, 3:7–8. David Peers, "Courage as a Mean," in Amélie O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, CA, 1980), pp. 171–87.

"Manual for Court Martial" acknowledges that "fear is a natural feeling of apprehension when going into battle" and that "the mere display of apprehension does not constitute" the offense of cowardice. "The refusal or abandonment of a performance of duty before or in the presence of the enemy as a result of fear" does, and distinguishes the offense of cowardice from mere dereliction of duty.<sup>7</sup> What Aristotle and the U.S. military agree upon is that military cowardice is a specific condition that involves a soldier's failure to act as he ought because of excessive fear of danger. As understood in our society, cowardice arises from fearfulness.

The evidence drawn from the Old English corpus, however, challenges the assumption that the Anglo-Saxons, at least before the mid eleventh century, had a distinct conception of martial cowardice in the sense of a specific moral failing concerned with fearfulness in war. As presented in Old English vernacular texts, actions that one might term "cowardly" were presented as failures to perform military duties owed a lord due to insufficient love and loyalty. Rather than a personal and subjective response to the emotion of fear, "cowardice" so conceived was socially condemned behavior, structured by expectations arising from the lordship bond and by cultural assumptions about manliness. There is less of a focus on lordship in the insular Latin texts by ecclesiastical writers, especially those heavily influenced by classical models. In the works of Bede, Aldhelm, Ælfric of Eynsham, and Archbishop Wulfstan of York the disposition toward *ignavia* and *segnitia* is unsurprisingly moralized and given religious significance. Nonetheless, even in these texts "cowardice" was understood as a disinclination to fulfill one's obligations because of sloth and the effeminacy associated with it rather than debilitating timidity.

Given the heroic rhetoric that suffuses so much of Old English poetry and prose, one might expect to find a clear binary opposition between bravery and boldness, on the one hand, and cowardice and timidity on the other. But this seems not to be the case. The problem is more complicated. While Old English has a rich vocabulary for fear and terror with adjectives such as as *acol-mod*, *egesful*, *fright*, *forlit*, *gloren-mod*, *anforlit*, *forthmod*, and *forthentlic* to connote timidity or fearfulness, the language lacks any specific word that corresponds precisely to the modern English words "coward," "cowardly," or "cowardice," a situation one would not even begin to suspect based on the many translations that use these terms.<sup>8</sup> For most, though not all,<sup>9</sup> Anglo-Saxon authors, actions that translators have characterized as "cowardly" had less to do with a timorous disposition than with slackness and torpor. The shame lay in a man's willful choice, when faced with danger, to turn his back on the duty he

<sup>7</sup> UCMJ (United States Uniform Code of Military Justice) art. 99, Manual for Court Martial, 2002, Chapter 4, Paragraph 23.

<sup>8</sup> Words related to fear: Jane Roberts and Christian Kay with Lynne Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 2 vols. (London, 1995), 1:384–86 (06.01.08.06–01.08.05.03.01). Words translated as "cowardice": 1:402 (06.02.07.07).

<sup>9</sup> See discussions of Aldhelm's *Prosula De Virginitate* and of the *Durham Proverbs* below.

owed his lord. The moral failure was the wilful refusal to fulfill the duty owed to lords, kinsmen, and friends, to undertake on their behalf the hard work and risk of battle.

According to the OED, the word "coward" only entered the English language in the late thirteenth century and derived from Old French *coart*, meaning an animal's tail. The authors of the OED explain the etymology by suggesting that it might refer either to "the habit in frightened animals of drawing the tail between the hinder legs" or an allusion to "turning tail" in flight from the enemy.<sup>10</sup> What one might think ought to be the primary terms for cowardice in Old English, words such as *acol-mod* and *aforhten-mod* that literally connote a fearful or timid spirit, are not. Oddly, Anglo-Saxon words that literally mean "fearful" are rarely found in military contexts. A search of Toronto's *Old English Corpus* produces over five hundred hits for the word *fōrt* and its various compounds. Relatively few of these references to fear, however, are associated with war, and even fewer imply moral judgments. That an army or its leaders would feel fear when confronted by a larger host was accepted as natural and carried no stigma. Cymewulf's Constantine in *Elen*, for example, is frightened (*cynig was afyrheda*) at the sight of the massive army of Huns:

smitten of terror (*egstar geactad*), as he surveyed those foreign hordes, the host of the Huns and Hrengothas, that at the kingdom's end, on the edge of the water, gathered their force, a countless throng. Heart-sorow smote the Roman ruler, of his kingdom had he little hope, for his dearth of men. Too little strength of warriors, of trusty fighting men, had he to battle against that over-night of stalwart spoilers. (lines 56–66)<sup>11</sup>

This sets the stage for Constantine's vision in his slumber of an angelic messenger who tells him not to "dread though foreign hordes threaten terror against you and hard war"<sup>12</sup> assures him victory over the "loathsome host" if he fights under the sign of the cross. Constantine awakes relieved and now eager for the "terror of battle" (*Hildesega*) (line 113).

Typical also are the passages in the *Old English Exodus* describing the fear felt by the men of the Hebrew "army" when they heard the sound of the Egyptian trumpets and of the Egyptian host when it was swallowed up by the sea:

There dread tidings of inland pursuit came unto the army. A great fear (*egsan stoden*) fell upon them, and dread of the hosts (*mægrye wenoda*). So the exiles awaited the coming of the fierce pursuers, who long had crushed those homeless men and wrought them injury and woe. (lines 135–41)<sup>13</sup>

owed his lord. The moral failure was the wilful refusal to fulfill the duty owed to lords, kinsmen, and friends, to undertake on their behalf the hard work and risk of battle.

According to the OED, the word "coward" only entered the English language in the late thirteenth century and derived from Old French *coart*, meaning an animal's tail. The authors of the OED explain the etymology by suggesting that it might refer either to "the habit in frightened animals of drawing the tail between the hinder legs" or an allusion to "turning tail" in flight from the enemy.<sup>10</sup> What one might think ought to be the primary terms for cowardice in Old English, words such as *acol-mod* and *aforhten-mod* that literally connote a fearful or timid spirit, are not. Oddly, Anglo-Saxon words that literally mean "fearful" are rarely found in military contexts. A search of Toronto's *Old English Corpus* produces over five hundred hits for the word *fōrt* and its various compounds. Relatively few of these references to fear, however, are associated with war, and even fewer imply moral judgments. That an army or its leaders would feel fear when confronted by a larger host was accepted as natural and carried no stigma. Cymewulf's Constantine in *Elen*, for example, is frightened (*cynig was afyrheda*) at the sight of the massive army of Huns:

smitten of terror (*egstar geactad*), as he surveyed those foreign hordes, the host of the Huns and Hrengothas, that at the kingdom's end, on the edge of the water, gathered their force, a countless throng. Heart-sorow smote the Roman ruler, of his kingdom had he little hope, for his dearth of men. Too little strength of warriors, of trusty fighting men, had he to battle against that over-night of stalwart spoilers. (lines 56–66)<sup>11</sup>

This sets the stage for Constantine's vision in his slumber of an angelic messenger who tells him not to "dread though foreign hordes threaten terror against you and hard war"<sup>12</sup> assures him victory over the "loathsome host" if he fights under the sign of the cross. Constantine awakes relieved and now eager for the "terror of battle" (*Hildesega*) (line 113).

Typical also are the passages in the *Old English Exodus* describing the fear felt by the men of the Hebrew "army" when they heard the sound of the Egyptian trumpets and of the Egyptian host when it was swallowed up by the sea:

There dread tidings of inland pursuit came unto the army. A great fear (*egsan stoden*) fell upon them, and dread of the hosts (*mægrye wenoda*). So the exiles awaited the coming of the fierce pursuers, who long had crushed those homeless men and wrought them injury and woe. (lines 135–41)<sup>13</sup>

And then all the folk was smitten with terror; fear of the flood fell on their wretched hearts. The great sea threatened death. The sloping hills were soaked with blood; the sea spewed gore. In the deep, the waves were filled with weapons; a death-mist rose. Fearful the Egyptians fled (*fugon forhigeode*), and shamming battle (*herfebleode*), they wished to seek their homes. Their boasting was humbled. (Lines 446–55)

Since the poet had earlier emphasized the valor and strength of the Egyptian host, it is unlikely that he now intended the reader to view those same warriors as cowards; rather, the terror felt by the drowning Egyptians is presented as the proper response to God's awful wrath visited upon them.

Most references to fear and fearfulness are found in homilies, devotional poems, and religious epics such as *Andreas*, *Exodus*, *Genesis*, and the usual context is the awe inspired by God or by some divine prodigy. In *Andreas*, for instance, Andrew and his troop of thanes are tossed on a raging sea in a ship that is captained, unknown to them, by God himself:

Then the whale mere was troubled and stirred; . . . the candle of the sky grew dark, the winds rose, the waves dashed, the floods were fierce, the cordage creaked, the sails were soaked. The terror of the tempest (*wateregsa*) rose up with the might of hosts; the thanes were afraid; none looked to reach hand alive, of those who with Andrew sought the ship on the ocean stream. (Lines 369–77).<sup>14</sup>

The storm, of course, was a test, but, oddly enough, not of the thanes' faith in the Lord, but rather of their devotion to their sworn lord, Andrew. When Andrew tells the divine ship's captain that "my thanes, the young warriors, are cast down; . . . the men are afflicted, the band of the brave ones mightily oppressed" by the turbulent sea, God suggests that he land the ship and disembark the frightened thanes, who could await in safety Andrew's return. But in words reminiscent of the *Wanderer*,

the heroes straightway gave him answer, thanes strong to endure, they would not agree to leave their loved teacher at the ship's prow and seek land for themselves: "Whither shall we turn, lacking our lord, heavy at heart, bare of happiness, stricken with sins, if we desert thee? We shall be despised in every land, hateful to the peoples, when the sons of men in their valour hold debate as to which of them has always served his lord best in war, when hand and shield hacked by swords, suffered distress on the field of battle in the deadly play."<sup>15</sup>

[www.sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMAC/L/Junius/Exodus](http://www.sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMAC/L/Junius/Exodus). For the Old English text, see Peter J. Lucas, ed., *Exodus*, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> G. P. Krapp, ed., "Andreas," in *The Vercelli Book* (New York, 1932), lines 369–80: "þa gedreden/ wearð/ onhreder hvernime. Hornfisc plegode/ glad geond garseg, ond se græga næfw/ wælfirfe wand. edercande! swearc,/ windes weoxon, wægas grundon, streamas styredon, strengas gurron,/ wædo gewæste. Wæteresa stod/ breata þrydum, beginas wurdian/ acolmude; ænig ne wender þær he lifgende land begete, þara þe mid Andreas on eageostream/ ceol gesohite"; trans. R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1970), p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> "Andreas," lines 401–14: "Edre him þa eortas agefan ondsweare, / þeganis hæfowfæd we hlafordleas, / geornormode, gode orforne, / symnum wunde, gif we swicad þe? / We bið olað on landa gethwam, / folcum fræodo, þonne firn bearn, / elleneofre, ænt besittap."

owed his lord. The moral failure was the wilful refusal to fulfill the duty owed to lords, kinsmen, and friends, to undertake on their behalf the hard work and risk of battle.

According to the OED, the word "coward" only entered the English language in the late thirteenth century and derived from Old French *coart*, meaning an animal's tail. The authors of the OED explain the etymology by suggesting that it might refer either to "the habit in frightened animals of drawing the tail between the hinder legs" or an allusion to "turning tail" in flight from the enemy.<sup>10</sup> What one might think ought to be the primary terms for cowardice in Old English, words such as *acol-mod* and *aforhten-mod* that literally connote a fearful or timid spirit, are not. Oddly, Anglo-Saxon words that literally mean "fearful" are rarely found in military contexts. A search of Toronto's *Old English Corpus* produces over five hundred hits for the word *fōrt* and its various compounds. Relatively few of these references to fear, however, are associated with war, and even fewer imply moral judgments. That an army or its leaders would feel fear when confronted by a larger host was accepted as natural and carried no stigma. Cymewulf's Constantine in *Elen*, for example, is frightened (*cynig was afyrheda*) at the sight of the massive army of Huns:

smitten of terror (*egstar geactad*), as he surveyed those foreign hordes, the host of the Huns and Hrengothas, that at the kingdom's end, on the edge of the water, gathered their force, a countless throng. Heart-sorow smote the Roman ruler, of his kingdom had he little hope, for his dearth of men. Too little strength of warriors, of trusty fighting men, had he to battle against that over-night of stalwart spoilers. (lines 56–66)<sup>11</sup>

This sets the stage for Constantine's vision in his slumber of an angelic messenger who tells him not to "dread though foreign hordes threaten terror against you and hard war"<sup>12</sup> assures him victory over the "loathsome host" if he fights under the sign of the cross. Constantine awakes relieved and now eager for the "terror of battle" (*Hildesega*) (line 113).

Typical also are the passages in the *Old English Exodus* describing the fear felt by the men of the Hebrew "army" when they heard the sound of the Egyptian trumpets and of the Egyptian host when it was swallowed up by the sea:

There dread tidings of inland pursuit came unto the army. A great fear (*egsan stoden*) fell upon them, and dread of the hosts (*mægrye wenoda*). So the exiles awaited the coming of the fierce pursuers, who long had crushed those homeless men and wrought them injury and woe. (lines 135–41)<sup>13</sup>

And then all the folk was smitten with terror; fear of the flood fell on their wretched hearts. The great sea threatened death. The sloping hills were soaked with blood; the sea spewed gore. In the deep, the waves were filled with weapons; a death-mist rose. Fearful the Egyptians fled (*fugon forhigeode*), and shamming battle (*herfebleode*), they wished to seek their homes. Their boasting was humbled. (Lines 446–55)

Since the poet had earlier emphasized the valor and strength of the Egyptian host, it is unlikely that he now intended the reader to view those same warriors as cowards; rather, the terror felt by the drowning Egyptians is presented as the proper response to God's awful wrath visited upon them.

Most references to fear and fearfulness are found in homilies, devotional poems, and religious epics such as *Andreas*, *Exodus*, *Genesis*, and the usual context is the awe inspired by God or by some divine prodigy. In *Andreas*, for instance, Andrew and his troop of thanes are tossed on a raging sea in a ship that is captained, unknown to them, by God himself:

Then the whale mere was troubled and stirred; . . . the candle of the sky grew dark, the winds rose, the waves dashed, the floods were fierce, the cordage creaked, the sails were soaked. The terror of the tempest (*wateregsa*) rose up with the might of hosts; the thanes were afraid; none looked to reach hand alive, of those who with Andrew sought the ship on the ocean stream. (Lines 369–77).<sup>14</sup>

The storm, of course, was a test, but, oddly enough, not of the thanes' faith in the Lord, but rather of their devotion to their sworn lord, Andrew. When Andrew tells the divine ship's captain that "my thanes, the young warriors, are cast down; . . . the men are afflicted, the band of the brave ones mightily oppressed" by the turbulent sea, God suggests that he land the ship and disembark the frightened thanes, who could await in safety Andrew's return. But in words reminiscent of the *Wanderer*,

the heroes straightway gave him answer, thanes strong to endure, they would not agree to leave their loved teacher at the ship's prow and seek land for themselves: "Whither shall we turn, lacking our lord, heavy at heart, bare of happiness, stricken with sins, if we desert thee? We shall be despised in every land, hateful to the peoples, when the sons of men in their valour hold debate as to which of them has always served his lord best in war, when hand and shield hacked by swords, suffered distress on the field of battle in the deadly play."<sup>15</sup>

[www.sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMAC/L/Junius/Exodus](http://www.sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMAC/L/Junius/Exodus). For the Old English text, see Peter J. Lucas, ed., *Exodus*, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> G. P. Krapp, ed., "Andreas," in *The Vercelli Book* (New York, 1932), lines 369–80: "þa gedreden/ wearð/ onhreder hvernime. Hornfisc plegode/ glad geond garseg, ond se græga næfw/ wælfirfe wand. edercande! swearc,/ windes weoxon, wægas grundon, streamas styredon, strengas gurron,/ wædo gewæste. Wæteresa stod/ breata þrydum, beginas wurdian/ acolmude; ænig ne wender þær he lifgende land begete, þara þe mid Andreas on eageostream/ ceol gesohite"; trans. R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1970), p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> "Andreas," lines 401–14: "Edre him þa eortas agefan ondsweare, / þeganis hæfowfæd we hlafordleas, / geornormode, gode orforne, / symnum wunde, gif we swicad þe? / We bið olað on landa gethwam, / folcum fræodo, þonne firn bearn, / elleneofre, ænt besittap/

The discourse of courage and cowardice as revealed in this and like texts is a public one in which the audience, the warrior nobility, awards honor and shame. Although greatly frightened by the "water-terror," Andrew's followers choose to face danger with their lord rather than abandon him; the shame of such an abandonment would be worse than death. Andrew, urged on by God, then assures his thanes that the Creator protects them and that "through the King of Glory the water terror, the tossing flood, shall be rebuked and vanquished, grow more calm," and that "the living God never forsakes a hero on the earth if his courage fail not." Heartened by their lord's words, the thanes' fear abated, so much so that they gave into their weariness and slept.<sup>16</sup> The fear felt by Andrew's thanes, thus, is not a sign of their cowardice, but a necessary precondition for their demonstration of loyalty, love, and trust.

In *Daniel* it is the power of God and portents of disaster that inspire fear. Nebuchadnezzar awakens from his dream with "fear (*egea*) of it upon him, and terror (*grye*) of the vision which God had sent him (lines 523–25);" while of Belshazzar, we are told, "the chieftain (*folcoga*) became "fearful in mind, trembling with terror" (*Da weard folcoga forh on mode, acul for þam egesan*) (Dan. 5:5–6). Such fear is justified and even praiseworthy. It is not depicted as a moral failing.

The words most often translated as "cowardly" or "cowardice" are terms of scorn. The most common of these are *eare/earh*, *sene*, and *wac*; the most explicit in terms of warfare are the rare poetic compound words *hereblead* and *hildlata*. To translate *eare* as "cowardly" is reasonable in terms of the historical development of the word. Certainly this is its meaning in a saying in the mid eleventh-century *Durham Proverbs*: "A coward (*earh*) can do only one thing: fear."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, an early eleventh-century glossator of Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* explained the Latin phrase *timidorum militum*, "of the fearful soldiers," with *earegra cempagna*.<sup>18</sup> The Middle English word derived from *eare*, *arg*, is glossed by *pusillanimus* in thirteenth-century texts, and the usual meaning of *arg* in Middle English literature is "cowardly" in the sense of shamefully fearful.<sup>19</sup> In Old English, however, *eare* most often meant "sluggish/cowardly" or "slothful," though it could also convey a more general sense of opprobrium. The same is true for *sene*, "slack," "lazy," or "dull," and *wac*, "weak," "soft," "feeble," "fainted-hearted," "irresolute." *Hereblead*, a hapax legomenon that appears only in the Old English *Exodus*, and *hildlata*, literally mean, respectively, gentle or slothful in war and slow in combat. The complex of meanings of all these words relate to sluggishness/laziness or weakness/passivity/shirkung, and arising from this is a connotation of worthlessness.<sup>20</sup>

There is a distinction, however, between this vocabulary of contempt and the terms most often used to denote physical lethargy and enervation such as *stewwod* and *steac*, which rarely appear in a military context. *Earg* implied willful dereliction, a shirking of duty, rather than simply a state of enervation.

To translate *eare*, *sene*, *wac* as "cowardly" is merely inference from context colored by expectation. Consider, for instance, how the Alfredian author of the *Old English Orosius* used *earg*. The word appears three times in the work. In two of these, the best translation is probably "cowardly," though in both the connotation is passivity or sluggishness. Hearing of Hannibal's approach, the men of Rome, we are told, were so "frightened and astonished" that their women grabbed rocks and ran to the walls, declaring that if the men would not defend the city, they would. This shamed the consuls, who "did not think themselves so cowardly (*swa earge*), as the women had before spoken of them, that they dared not defend themselves within the *burh*; but they arrayed their troops against Hannibal outside the walls." (Or. IV.10). The author clearly used *earge* as an expression of contempt voiced by the Roman women, and in particular for the consuls, for their men's terrified paralysis. If they are unwilling to act like men, the women will. The consuls respond not only by defending the city walls but by challenging Hannibal to battle in order to preserve their challenged honor and masculinity.<sup>21</sup> In this passage, which was expanded by the translator to add the women's challenge and consuls' response, the label *earg* is an accusation of cowardice. The same may also be true of a passage in Book VI, chapter 36, where the translator, again expanding upon Orosius's text, explains that Theodosius was able to break through a mountain pass because the enemy general foolishly had entrusted its defense to a few vile men (*hybrum monnum*) who were "*yfele and earge*." Earlier in the narrative, however, the term *earg*

hwylc hira selost symle geleste/ hlaforde æt hilde, bonne hand ond rond/ on beadwange bilum forgrunden/ æt midþeagan nearu browdon." Trans. Gordon, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> "Andreas," lines 433–60: "ic bæt syifa wat, bæt us gescylded/ scryped engla, weornda dryden/ Watergeesa sceal, gedýd ond geþreaded/ þunh þryðcīning, lagu lacende,/ lîdra wyrðan. . . / Forthan ic sƿow to sode seegan wille, þær næfne forstedeð lifgende godz eorl on cōtan, gif his ellen deah" (Trans. Gordon, pp. 188–89).

<sup>17</sup> Olaf Aspert, "The Durham Proverbs," *Speculum* 56 (1981), 288–300, at 293 (no. 22); Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 306. "Eare meig þeet an þer he him ondræde."

<sup>18</sup> Louis Goossens, *The Old English Glosses of M.S. Brussels, Royal Library 1659*, Brussels Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren 36 (Brussels, 1974); Aldhelm's *De laude virginitatis*, line 805 (found through a search of the Old English Corpus). For the Latin text of the glossed passage, see note 23 below.

<sup>19</sup> See the electronic *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *arg* (<http://ets.engl.unimelb.edu/m/med/>).

<sup>20</sup> The same is true of the Latin terms *ignavia*, *seginitia*, and *segnitas*, which were sometimes glossed by *eare*, and which are also often translated as "cowardice" when encountered in early medieval Latin texts. The primary connotation of all these terms in classical Latin was sluggishness, torpor, and sloth. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford, 1982), s.v. *ignavia* (p. 822), *seginitia*, and *segnitas* (p. 1727). As Dr. Myles McDonnell observed in a personal communication, the Romans also had a less than precise concept of cowardice.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Nelson has called my attention to a comparable incident in the *Annals of Fuldha*, s.a. 872: "quidam comites in illa expeditione fugientes a mallerculis illius regionis verberati et de equis in terram fustibus deficti referantur." *Annales Fuldaenses sive Annales regni Francorum orientalis*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scolarum separatum editi 7 (Hanover, 1891; repr. 1978), p. 76.

appears without any implication of timidity or cowardice. Thus the translator characterizes the successors of Romulus as "more wicked, and more vile (*eargrun*) than he was, and more hateful and troublesome to the people." Of them Tarquin was "*ægþer ge eargast, ge wrenast, ge offermodast*," "the most vile, the most lustful and the most proud." (Or. II.2). Since the narrative neither emphasizes Romulus's courage nor the timidity of his successors, the term seems to be used here with the more general meaning of vile or worthless.<sup>22</sup>

The Old English *Orosius*'s story of Roman consuls shamed into facing Hannibal in battle by the scornful words of women may suggest that a failure of will in war was seen as emasculating or feminizing the warrior. This is also the sense of an interesting passage in Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* written toward the end of the seventh century. In chapter eleven, Aldhelm, loosely following Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, advances an elaborate martial metaphor in which the "virgins of Christ" protected by the conscler of virginity and the shield of modesty battle the eight principal vices with the weapons of virtue:

Virgines de Christo et raw recutis [*firmezulis*] of the Church must therefore fight with muscular energy [*lacertosus viribus*] against the horrendous monster of Pride and the same time against those seven wild beasts of the violent vices . . . and they must struggle industriously [*nauiter*] with the arrows of spiritual armament and the iron-tipped spears of the virtues as if against the most ferocious armies of barbarians, who do not desist from battering repeatedly the shield-wall (?) [*festitudinem*] of the young soldiers of Christ with the catapult of perverse deceit. In no way let us slackly [segner] offer to these savage enemies the back of our shoulder-blades in place of shield-bosses shields, after the fashion of timid soldiers effeminate [*muliebrii*] fearing the horror of war and the battle-calls of the trumpeter!<sup>23</sup>

In addition to supplying evidence of Aldhelm's familiarity with classical texts dealing with war, the prose *De Virginitate* provides the clearest equation in the Anglo-Saxon corpus of military cowardice, in the classical sense of fleeing the enemy from fear, with effeminacy. The image that Aldhelm conjures of the

<sup>22</sup> *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately, The Early English Text Society (Oxford, 1980), pp. 103 (IV.10), 40 (II.2), 154 (VI.36). *An English Translation of King Alfred's Anglo-Saxon Version of the Historian Orosius*, trans. Joseph Bosworth, in *The Whole Works of King Alfred the Great* (London, 1858; repr. New York, 1969), pp. 147, 82, 186.

<sup>23</sup> "Idcirco virginitas Christi et trinacris ecclesiae contra horrendam superbiae bestiam similitudine contraria has virulentissimas barbarorum legiones, quae manipulatum tironum Christi testidinem strigoface fraudis ballista spatiare non cessant, spiritualis armantea speculis et ferratis virtutum uenabulii nauiter certandum, ac nullateaus timorundam more militum horrem pro scutorum salpicie muliebrii metucentium saeuissimum hostibus scapularum terga propter umbonibus segniter praecibamus!" *Aldhelmi Malmesbirensis Prosa De Virginitate*, ed. Scott Gwara, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina CXXIV A (Turnhout, 2001), 129-33. I have followed the translation of Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm, The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 68, with two significant changes, altering their translations of *nauiter* and *segner* from, respectively, "zealously" and "sloppily" to the more usual "industriously" and "slackly."

cowardly soldier turning his back and shield on the enemy because he fears the "horror of war and the battle-calls of the trumpeter" is couched in Roman military terminology and may indeed owe something to Aldhelm's reading of classical authors. For his audience of men, however, what would have been of more interest is the manner in which Aldhelm plays with sexual conventions and identities: the virgins of Christ, the most perfect of women, are urged to fight against sin with *manly* courage and to shun the timidity associated with their sex. Although for Aldhem virgins, like angels, transcend gender, spiritual courage, as Sinead O'Sullivan observes, "is equated with masculinity. They reject female activities and become male. . . . Aldhelm's female heroes become male warriors."<sup>24</sup> There is more to this gender reversal than simply Aldhelm's admonition that the virgins overcome fear. Aldhelm's language also opposes "masculine" forceful activity (*lacertosus viribus, nauiter*) with "feminine" sluggishness and passivity (*segner*). The proposed dichotomy also underlies the *Orosius*-translator's characterization of the inactivity of the Roman consul as "womanly." It seems to have struck a chord with later Anglo-Saxon readers of Aldhelm, as well. The connections between courage, gender, and the active/passive binary implied by Aldhelm are brought out more explicitly by the eleventh-century glossators of this text. Thus *nauiter*, which is usually translated as "industriously," is glossed with *uriliter uel fortiter*, that is, "manly or bravely," and *muliebrii*, "womanlike," with *eneruiter* and *earhlice, niflice*, that is, respectively, "feeble" and "shamefully" or, in this context, "cowardly."<sup>25</sup> For Aldhelm and his eleventh-century readers, the virgins of Christ were not simply desexed but, in terms of the energy and courage with which they opposed sin, "manly" women. The tension between female and masculine traits and virtues manifested in Aldhelm's martial metaphor for virginity's war against sin appears also in ninth- and tenth-century poetic portrayals of female heroism, most notably in the Old English *Judith*. Aldhelm included the widowed Judith among his Virgins because she "kept the honor of her modesty intact," despite her use of feminine wiles to ensnare Holofernes. Aldhelm excuses and praises Judith because the motivation for her pretense was grief and "affection of compassion" for her threatened kinsfolk during the "close siege" of Bethulia.<sup>26</sup> The metaphor of the war against vice is here made concrete, and

<sup>24</sup> Sinead O'Sullivan, "Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*: Patriotic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?" *Pertica* 12 (1998), 271-95.

<sup>25</sup> *Prosa De Virginitate*, ed. Gwara, 130, 132.

<sup>26</sup> *Prosa De Virginitate*, ed. Gwara, ch. 57, pp. 731, 733; trans. Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm, Pertica* 12 (1998), 271-95.

Judith's extreme act is excused by military necessity and the fear and timidity of her countrymen. Aldhelm contrasts Judith's willingness to act with the passivity of the Hebrew males, to whom she "brought back a renowned trophy . . . and a distinguished triumph." The contrast is underscored by Aldhelm's omission of any mention of the Hebrew army's subsequent slaughter of the leaderless Assyrians. Aldhelm's Judith is simultaneously a masculine warrior hero and a feminine seductress. That Aldhelm was disturbed by the complexities of this image is suggested by his characterization of Judith's motivation as arising from womanly compassion and affection. The *Judith*-poet faced the same problem of reconciling the male and female qualities of his heroine.<sup>27</sup> The challenge was to present Judith as an exemplar of heroism while still maintaining her essential femininity. He accomplished the former, as Jane Chance has shown, through his choice of imagery and diction.<sup>28</sup> Thus the poet characterizes her as courageous (*ellenrof*: lines 109 and 146), proud (*collenferhde*: line 134) and bold (*modig*: line 334; and *ellenbriste*: line 133), terms usually reserved for male heroes but justified in Judith's case by her heroic decapitation of a cruel and terrifying (*egesful*: line 21) warlord while in the midst of the enemy camp, an act that no man dared.<sup>29</sup> Judith, however, remains a woman, though in some ways the poet's Judith is less womanly than Aldhelm's. The poet focuses on her chastity and

from that in the Vulgate's *Liber Judith* 8:11–9:14, where Judith puts aside her mourning for her dead husband in order to defend God's sanctuary and tabernacle. Aldhelm's treatment of Judith is discussed in relationship to the Old English *Judith* by Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, New York, 1986), pp. 38–40.

<sup>27</sup> *Judith*, ed. Mark Griffith, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter, 1997), pp. 55, 68–69.

<sup>28</sup> Chance, *Woman as Hero*, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> R. E. Kiske observes that early in the poem Judith's wisdom is contrasted with Holofernes's power. However, Judith "is inspired with strength" (line 95) when Holofernes lies before her in a drunken stupor. She is elevated to the status of hero in counterpoint to Holofernes's reduction to the status of beast. The poet underscores this by characterizing Judith as brave and bold as well as wise (e.g. lines 145–46). "Sapienia et fortitudo in the Old English *Judith*," in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. L. D. Benson and S. Wenzel (Kalamazoo, 1982), pp. 13–29 and 264–8. Mark Griffith, "Introduction," in *Judith*, ed. M. Griffith, pp. 87–88. Although the Vulgate's Judith also remains behind, unlike her counterpart in the Old English poem, she acts as war leader by devising the strategy that the Hebrew troops are to follow, ordering them to draw up their lines before the Assyrian camps as if to offer battle, but refrain, from attacking until the enemy discovered the decapitated corpse of their commander so that, terrified, they would flee rather than stand and fight (15:1–5). The poet's Judith sends the warriors to battle with the simple admonition to "slay their leaders with gleaming (or blood-stained) swords, their doomed chiefs" (lines 194–95: "sylian folclogen fagum swerdum, / fæge framgaras"). In seeing the poem's Judith as inspiring the troops rather than devising a strategy, I agree with C. Fee, "*Judith* and the Rhetoric of Heroism in Anglo-Saxon England," *English Studies* 78 (1997), 401, 405. For an opposing interpretation, see Kelly Guehther, "The Old English Judith: Can a Woman be a Hero?" *York Medieval Yearbook: MA Essays from the Centre of Medieval Pipe/Judith.pdf*, who interprets Judith's exhortation to kill the Assyrian leaders as "specific instructions as to what they should do, rather like a military commander formulating a battle plan" (p. 9).

the complexities of her femininity. The poet's Judith is more passive than Aldhelm's and remains more womanly. As Hugh Magennis persuasively argues, the poet successfully struggled to limit the transgression of traditional gender roles threatened by Judith's heroism, and presented her actions "in such a way that Judith may take on the heroic role without losing her femaleness, without becoming either monstrous or some kind of honorary male."<sup>32</sup>

If Judith's active heroism posed problems of gender-role transgression, so did the failure of men to act decisively and violently. The problem of definitions of masculinity in the early middle ages has been tackled by Janet Nelson, who posits that Carolingian monks promoted among the lay aristocracy a new, gentler ethos that rejected violence and sex and exalted compassion, humility, and chastity, qualities that had been previously associated with femininity. The adoption of these values by certain pious laymen, notably Alfred the Great and St. Gerald of Aurillac, created anxieties and inner conflict that manifested itself in illness.<sup>33</sup> The challenge to the "masculine" warrior ethos of honor and vengeance presented by Christian teaching is highlighted by Bede's account of the murder of St. Sigibert, king of the East, by his own kinsmen, who "were angry with the king and hated him because he was too ready to pardon his enemies, calmly forgiving them for the wrongs they had done him, as soon as they asked his pardon."<sup>34</sup> A contemporary of this royal saint, King Sigibert of the East Anglians, shared the martyr's name and fate. This Sigibert had retired into a monastery he himself had founded, where he "made it his business to fight instead for the heavenly kingdom." But when the East Anglians were

<sup>30</sup> *Judith*, ed. Griffith, lines 21–59. On the poet's establishment of Judith's chastity, see Patricia A. Belanoff, "Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine," in Helen Damico and John Leyende, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger*, Jr. (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 247–64.

<sup>31</sup> As is often the case with Old English biblical poems, the *Judith*-poet greatly elaborates upon the Hebrews' victory in battle (lines 199–320), depicting the heroic deeds of the Hebrew warriors and the grisly nature of the slaughter in far greater detail than his source (*Liber Judith* 15:3–8).

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Magennis, "Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*," in Elaine Treharne, ed., *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 5–18. Cf. P. A. Belanoff, "Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine," in H. Damico and J. Leyende, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger*, Jr. (Kalamazoo, 1993), p. 252.

<sup>33</sup> Janet Nelson, "Monks, Secular Men, and Masculinity," in D. Hadley, ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1998), pp. 121–42.

<sup>34</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 3.22.

attacked by the pagan Mercian King Penda, they dragged an unwilling and protesting Sigibert to the battlefield to lead the troops, "in hope that the soldiers would be less afraid and less ready to flee if they had with them one who was once their most vigorous and distinguished leader." Sigibert, true to his monastic profession, carried only a staff into combat. He was killed and his army scattered.<sup>35</sup> The fate of King Sigibert and the criticisms that Bede offered in his letter to Bishop Egbert of York about laymen who adopted monasticism, unlike Sigibert, insincerely, and abandoned their duty to defend the kingdom with arms, perhaps indicates a measure of ambivalence on Bede's part. It certainly implies that many eighth-century aristocrats found the Christian monastic values of forbearance, forgiveness, and restraint at odds with their military ethos.

Asser's complex presentation of Alfred as "ever victorious warrior" and saintly invalid perhaps ought to be read as an attempt to maintain his hero's masculinity while insisting upon his embrace of a monastically influenced Christian ethos manifested by his divinely granted illness, love of learning and desire to make peace with his enemies. Asser's otherwise puzzling account of Alfred's behavior at the battle of Ashdown makes perfect sense if this was the author's intention. The natural hero of this story should have been King Æthelred, who, like St. Gerald of Aurillac, refuses to engage the heathen enemy until he has finished his prayers. Asser instead focuses upon the *ætheling* Alfred, who rather than awaiting his brother, instead rushes into battle at the head of his contingent, "acting courageously, like a wild boar, supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help."<sup>36</sup> Here prayers take second place to courage and audacity, although Asser's emphasis upon Alfred's divine favor maintains the monk's theme of Alfred's piety. God's favor and Alfred's ambivalence about his masculinity lie at the heart of Asser's presentation of Alfred's mysterious adult affliction. As Asser tells it, this illness came as a result of the "concern" young man's prayer that God replace his earlier infirmity, piles, with a more suitable and bearable affliction that would not be outwardly visible and make him contemptible or useless, but would still restrain his libido. Asser's Alfred here and elsewhere is a man fighting to restrain his strong sexual drives.<sup>37</sup> His illness gives him the means to do so without emasculating him or weakening him as a warrior.

While there is some evidence, then, that among the Anglo-Saxons cowardice was associated with effeminacy, there is none that would link it with passive-homosexuality.<sup>38</sup> The Anglo-Saxon word *earg* does not appear to have had the strong passive-homosexual connotation of its Norse cognate, *argr*.

attacking the pagan Mercian King Penda, they dragged an unwilling and protesting Sigibert to the battlefield to lead the troops, "in hope that the soldiers would be less afraid and less ready to flee if they had with them one who was once their most vigorous and distinguished leader." Sigibert, true to his monastic profession, carried only a staff into combat. He was killed and his army scattered.<sup>35</sup> The fate of King Sigibert and the criticisms that Bede offered in his letter to Bishop Egbert of York about laymen who adopted monasticism, unlike Sigibert, insincerely, and abandoned their duty to defend the kingdom with arms, perhaps indicates a measure of ambivalence on Bede's part. It certainly implies that many eighth-century aristocrats found the Christian monastic values of forbearance, forgiveness, and restraint at odds with their military ethos.

Asser's complex presentation of Alfred as "ever victorious warrior" and saintly invalid perhaps ought to be read as an attempt to maintain his hero's masculinity while insisting upon his embrace of a monastically influenced Christian ethos manifested by his divinely granted illness, love of learning and desire to make peace with his enemies. Asser's otherwise puzzling account of Alfred's behavior at the battle of Ashdown makes perfect sense if this was the author's intention. The natural hero of this story should have been King Æthelred, who, like St. Gerald of Aurillac, refuses to engage the heathen enemy until he has finished his prayers. Asser instead focuses upon the *ætheling* Alfred, who rather than awaiting his brother, instead rushes into battle at the head of his contingent, "acting courageously, like a wild boar, supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help."<sup>36</sup> Here prayers take second place to courage and audacity, although Asser's emphasis upon Alfred's divine favor maintains the monk's theme of Alfred's piety. God's favor and Alfred's ambivalence about his masculinity lie at the heart of Asser's presentation of Alfred's mysterious adult affliction. As Asser tells it, this illness came as a result of the "concern" young man's prayer that God replace his earlier infirmity, piles, with a more suitable and bearable affliction that would not be outwardly visible and make him contemptible or useless, but would still restrain his libido. Asser's Alfred here and elsewhere is a man fighting to restrain his strong sexual drives.<sup>37</sup> His illness gives him the means to do so without emasculating him or weakening him as a warrior.

While there is some evidence, then, that among the Anglo-Saxons cowardice was associated with effeminacy, there is none that would link it with passive-homosexuality.<sup>38</sup> The Anglo-Saxon word *earg* does not appear to have had the strong passive-homosexual connotation of its Norse cognate, *argr*.

Scandinavian saga and legal sources, however, repeatedly draw the connection between cowardice and effeminacy. The terms associated in medieval Scandinavian sources with cowardice or lack of prowess in war – *nid*, *argr*, and *ragr* – also connote willingness to be used sexually by other men. These labels were so offensive that the *Gulahing Code* and *Gragas* allowed the insulted party to refuse monetary compensation and redeem his honor by killing the slanderer.<sup>39</sup> Although written by a Norman cleric in the early eleventh century, Warner of Rouen's scatological Latin poem *Morlith* may shed light on viking attitudes toward sexuality and shame. Warner depicts his monstrous protagonist, the inept Irish poet and grammarian Morlith, as falling into the hands of Danish pirates while searching for his captive wife:

He is subjected to insults and then in place of a wife he is forced by the Vikings [Danes] to perform the sexual services of a wife. Morlith, dressed in furs like a bear, is stripped, and before the sailors, bear, you amorously sport and strike. Yet not unwillingly does he play Ravola for everyone with his arse. Struck by a penis, he groans, alas the unfortunate!<sup>40</sup>

The irony of Warner's characterization of the hypersexual Morlith as "unfortunate" is underscored by the grammarian's willingness to be sodomized. Just as clearly, Warner believed that Danish vikings would "sport" with a captive, in particular one so lacking in marital and masculine attributes as Morlith, in this manner, underscoring their contempt, as well as the shame that the poet ought to have but did not feel. One wonders whether this fictional account reflects what may have occurred – or what Warner's audience feared would occur – when monks and clerics fell into viking hands. Medieval Scandinavian law codes and sagas cannot be read as transparent windows on to the culture and ethos of the viking age, and Scandinavian mythology is more ambiguous in its attitudes about gender than these sources might suggest.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the equation

<sup>35</sup> *Gragas, Seðarkáðsbók* (1879), p. 392, cited by Folke Ström, *Nið, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*. The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies delivered at University College London, 10 May 1973 (London, 1974), p. 6. The relevant passages from the *Gulahing Code* are quoted in Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Speculum* 68 (1993), 363–87, at pp. 373–74. See, especially, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's discussion of sexual insults in the sagas, *The Unmannly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Ivarville-Petrie (Odense University Press, 1993). Christine Ward, who under the *nom de plume* Gunnora Hallakarva maintains the webpage "Viking Answer Lady," provides a good and balanced overview of the question of homosexuality in the Viking Age (<http://www.fortham.edu/falsall/pwh/gayvik.html>).

<sup>36</sup> C. J. McDonough, ed. and trans., *Warner of Rouen. Morlith. A Norman Latin poem of the Early Eleventh Century* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 76–77. I owe this reference to Paul Kerstrew.

<sup>37</sup> Óðinn was accused of *ergi*, passive homosexuality, because of his practice of womanly *seidr* magic and divination. Loka in the guise of a mare, according to his practice of *grimismái*, stanza 44, gave birth to the eight-legged stallion Sleipnir. This is alluded to in *Lokesenna* where he and his blood-brother Óðinn swap charges of perversion. Even Thor cross-dresses in the Eddic poem

<sup>38</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 3.18.

<sup>39</sup> Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch. 38. As Ruth Mazo Karras pointed out to me, Gerald of Aurillac's biographer, Odo of Cluny, uses the term "viriliter" to describe how his hero strove against the vices. *Acta Sanctorum, October VI, De S. Geraldis, Comite Auriliacensi Confessore*, p. 315.

<sup>40</sup> Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch. 74.

<sup>41</sup> Allen J. Frantz, *Before the Closet* (Chicago, 1998), p. 106.

between cowardice and effeminacy raises an intriguing possibility, especially given the Christian masculinity advocated by English churchmen and fostered by Alfred in his court. If Vikings regarded men who sought peace by paying tribute in coin rather than earn it in battle as shameful and "womanly" and the Anglo-Saxons did not, and if Anglo-Saxons regarded the breaking of *Christian* oaths securing truces and peace treaties as perfidy and pagan vikings did not, then the attempts by English and Frankish rulers to make peace with vikings would have been undermined by the two parties' profoundly different cultural conceptions of peace-making and cowardice.<sup>42</sup>

*Earg/lār* could imply unmanly/effeminate behavior and, in the case of the Scandinavians, passive-homosexuality, because of the word's secondary meaning of sluggishness. The gendered-binaries active/passive and strong (resolute)/weak are crucial here. Orosius's Roman consuls were *earg* and *wiflic* because they were too intimidated even to order that the walls of Rome be defended. They were "womanly" because they responded to danger and challenge with passivity rather than "manly" resolution and action. To Aldhelm "raw recruits" in the army of Christ who turn their backs on the enemy and flee are "womanly," not only because they give into their fear of the horrors of war, but because they act slackly rather than with the muscular resolution expected of a "warrior of Christ." This returns to my point that what we would call courage or bravery is often represented in Old English texts as resolution to make good on one's words and to fulfill duties and obligations to a lord, the proper behavior of a retainer – his side of the exchange of gifts for loyal service. Anglo-Saxon authors most often labeled commanders and warriors as *earg*, *sene*, or *wac* when they were perceived as failing to fulfill their duty to their lord or showed unwarranted reluctance or sluggishness in battle. This is clearly the case in the two most famous Anglo-Saxon heroic poems *Beowulf* and the *Battle of Maldon*. A climate of fear pervades *Beowulf*, though, as my colleague John Hill pointed out to me, the only one who is said to flee out of fear is Grendel (lines 755–57). The essence of Beowulf's heroism is that he boldly seeks out the monsters rather than shrinks into passivity or shameful resignation, in contrast to Unferð and Beowulf's hearth-troop in his last battle with the dragon. When Unferð "lent his sword to a better warrior" rather than "risk his life under the warring waves," he forfeited his glory, his name for valor because

he failed to make good on the boasts he made when drunk.<sup>43</sup> Unferð's gesture is both generous and shameful at the same time; it completes Beowulf's earlier victory in verbal combat by conceding that the hero is the greater swordsman. The poet is more critical of the moral failure of Beowulf's hearth-troop to come to his aid in his fatal combat with the dragon, even though he had ordered them to remain in safety. Rather than "choosing battle (*hilde-cystum*), they fled to the wood to save their lives."<sup>44</sup> For the poet these men are battle-late (*hild-latan*), false to their oath (*freow-logan*), and weak (*tydre*).<sup>45</sup> Even more than Unferð, Beowulf's retainers, with the notable exception of Wiglaf, are shamed by their sluggishness in fulfilling their duty to their lord. They fail to make good on the great promises of love and loyalty they had made to Beowulf in the great hall when they drank his mead and accepted his gifts.<sup>46</sup> The ethos of reciprocity is violated and the moral universe of the Geats shattered, as gift fails to call forth the expected loyalty and service owed the ring-giver. Wiglaf does not fear the dragon's fire less than his companions do. Nonetheless, conscious of duty to lord and kin, mindful of the gifts he accepted, he chooses to push aside the fear and make good promises he earlier made in comfort and safety.

A similar binary opposition between fulfillment and dereliction of duty lies at the heart of the discourse on heroism and cowardice in *Maldon*.<sup>47</sup> The theme is sounded from the beginning. The poet tells us that when Byrhtnoth ordered each man to drive off his horse, depriving him of easy flight, and to advance on foot, Offa realized that the earl would not suffer cowardice/shameful behavior (*yrhðo*, a variation on *earg*) in his troop.<sup>48</sup> What this entailed is immediately made clear: "Edric intended to support his lord, his master in the battle; he set off then to carry his spear to the fray; he maintained good spirit (*god gefhanc*) as long as he was able to wield with his hands his shield and broad sword; he fulfilled his vow [or boast, *beor*] when he had need to fight close by his lord."<sup>49</sup> Byrhtnoth then sets about

Drawing up the men there/ he rode and instructed, he told the soldiers/ how they should form up and hold the position/ and he asked that they should hold their shields properly,/ firmly with their fists, and not be at all afraid (lines 17-21)

<sup>42</sup> This, of course, does not mean that pagan Scandinavians took native oaths lightly. I explore these topics further in "Paying the Dane-geld: Anglo-Saxon Peacemaking with Vikings," in P. DeSouza and J. France, eds., *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

<sup>43</sup> *Beowulf*, lines 1455–71, trans. Howell Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition* (New York, 1966), pp. 132–33.

<sup>44</sup> *Beowulf*, lines 2596–99, Chickering, pp. 204–05.

<sup>45</sup> *Beowulf*, lines 2846–49, Chickering, pp. 220–21.

<sup>46</sup> *Beowulf*, lines 2631–50, Chickering, pp. 206–08.

<sup>47</sup> John Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature* (Gainesville, 2000), pp. 115–28, interprets the choice of Byrhtnoth's loyal thanes to die on the battlefield as different from and more demanding than traditional obligations arising from the reciprocal relationship between lord and man had been.

<sup>48</sup> "The Battle of Maldon," trans. Donald Scragg in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford, 1991), lines 11–16, pp. 18/19.

<sup>49</sup> "Maldon," trans. Scragg, line 207, pp. 26/27.

Byrhtnoth's admonition that his men face the enemy without fear finds an echo in the poet's characterization of the defenders of the causeway, Efhære and Maccaus, as "fearless warriors" (*wigan unforhie*, line 79). The English under Byrhtnoth's leadership fight well and vigorously until the earl dies in combat. Then "the sons of Odda were the first in flight there, Godric turned from the battle, and abandoned the brave man, who had often made him a gift of many a horse." Godric leaps upon the earl's horse, the only steed on the battlefield, and flees the battlefield, followed by his two brothers. In typical Anglo-Saxon understatement, the poet adds: "they did not care for the battle and sought the wood, they fled into that place of safety and saved their lives."<sup>50</sup> Most of the English troops flee, believing that Godric is Byrhtnoth and the battle is lost. What now follows is a series of speeches in which Byrhtnoth's *unearge* men (line 206) announce that they will "either lose their life or avenge their friend" (line 211). As in Wiglaf's admonition of his companions, the theme of each speech is matching deeds to words and repaying the gifts that one has received from the lord's love. The latter is underscored by the traitor Godric's choice of horse upon which to flee: the earl's own steed (lines 238–41).

If Godric and his brothers are cowards, what makes them so? Not their flight in itself. Armies admitted defeat by abandoning the battlefield. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle defeated armies invariably flee (the expression is *fyrð* or *herē geflymðon*) without condemnation. The *Judith*-poet saw no contradiction in characterizing the fleeing Assyrian host as *cynxrofe*, brave nobles (line 311). His praise of the defeated enemy merely underscored the magnitude of the Hebrew victory. Nor is it because the sons of Odda are fearful and the earl's *unearge* men are not. Byrhtnoth's loyal thegns make their speeches in order to overcome their fear, and it is for this reason they urge each other to think only of revenge and forget all else. As the old retainer Byrhtwold declares, "The spirit (*hige*) must be firmer, the heart the bolder, courage (*mod*) must be the greater as our strength diminishes."<sup>51</sup> The emphasis here is on choice and resolution. The core meanings of the vocabulary of courage in this passage, *hige, heorte*, and, *mod*, is "heart"/"mind"/"spirit";<sup>52</sup> and the implication is that toughness of spirit is a matter of conscious resolve. Godric, a member of the earl's own hearth-troop, has shown himself to be slothful and sluggish in fulfilling his obligations to his lord; Byrhtwold chooses to be resolute. The poet gives no indication that Godric and his brothers had shrunk from battle while Byrhtnoth still lived, but it is clear from the poet's presentation that they abandoned the battle while its outcome was still in question. Indeed, it was the manner in which Godric devised his flight, leaping upon Byrhtnoth's own horse, that sealed the

defeat, as many others followed him, believing that they were fleeing with their lord. By doing so, Godric has not only forsaken himself but his lord as well, since Byrhtnoth's own boasts are now made empty. As Offa concluded, "Godric has betrayed (*bewicene*) us, one and all, the cowardly [the word is *earlh*] son of Odda" (lines 237–38). The poet does not simply draw a contrast between *earge* men such as Godric and *unearge* men such as Offa, Edric, and Byrhtwold. He makes a finer distinction between those who abandoned their dead lord on the field of battle and those who believed that they were following him in flight. The latter, like Ulfred, may have forfeited their chance for glory, but the inference is that they have not shamed themselves or betrayed their lord.

This distinction may explain the inclusion of the phrase for *his yrhde* in *II Cnut 77*, a law concerned with men who desert their lords on campaign, promulgated around 1020: "And the man who, for *his yrhde*, deserts [the term is *fleo*, flees] his lord or his comrades on an expedition, either by sea or by land, shall lose all that he possesses and his own life, and the lord shall take back the property and the land which he had given him."<sup>53</sup> This clause is to be read in conjunction with the one that follows, which orders that "the heriots of a man who falls before his lord during a campaign, whether within the country or abroad, shall be remitted, and the heirs shall succeed to his land and his property and make a very just division of the same."<sup>54</sup> Together they offer a "curse and a blessing" respectively upon those who, like *Maldon*'s Godric, shamefully break their vows of loyalty, thereby forfeiting their claim to life and property, and those who, like Byrhtnoth's loyal thegns, die fulfilling their oaths, thereby confirming their status as thegns and their right to hold their lands and pass them on to their children.<sup>55</sup> Though usually translated as "on account of his cowardice," for *his yrhde* in *II Cnut 77* does not necessarily imply flight out of fear. More probably, Archbishop Wulfstan, the author of Cnut's as well as most of his predecessor King Æthelred's law codes, used *yrhðo* to characterize as contemptible this abandonment of a lord or friends during a military expedition, much as he castigated his countrymen for *earhlice laga* and *scandlice myndyld*.

<sup>50</sup> "Maldon," trans. Donald Scragg, lines 186–195.

<sup>51</sup> "Maldon," ed. Scragg, lines 313–14: "Hige secol be heardra, heorte be centre,/ mod sceal be ure mægen lytau."

<sup>52</sup> Janet Bately, "The Vocabulary of Bravery in *Beowulf* and the *Battle of Maldon*," in Mack C., Amadio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Unlocking the Wordford: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.* (Toronto, 2003), pp. 274–301, at 292.

<sup>53</sup> A. J. Robertson, ed., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge, 1925; repr. 1974), pp. 214, 215.

<sup>54</sup> Robertson, *Laws*, pp. 214, 215.

<sup>55</sup> *II Cnut 77* derives from *V. Æthelred 28/1 Æthelred 35* in the Enham codes of 1008, which were also drafted by Archbishop Wulfstan. Robertson, *Laws*, pp. 86, 87 and 102, 103. There are, however, a number of significant differences. Æthelred's legislation is concerned specifically with desertion of an army commanded personally by the king. The earlier codes differ on the penalty incurred for desertion. In *V. Æthelred 28* the penalty is to be placed upon the mercy of the king. In *V. Æthelred 35*, perhaps a draft copy, the penalty is loss of property. The earlier codes also do not use the verb *fleo*, "flies," to describe the proscribed action but the less dramatic *leafe*, "leaves" or "deserts." The severity of the penalties relates to the final clause of *V. Æthelred 35* and the first of *V. Æthelred*, in which all are enjoined (in the language of the former): "And let us loyally support one royal lord, and all of us together defend our lives and our country, to the best of our ability, and from our innermost heart pray to God Almighty for help." Robertson, *Laws*, pp. 90, 91.

"disgraceful laws [presumably not the ones he drafted] and shameful tributes," in his jeremiad of 1014, the "Sermon of the Wolf."<sup>55</sup> *Il Cnut* 77, unlike Article 99 of the UCMJ, is not concerned with the *motivation* underlying "the refusal or abandonment of a performance of duty before or in the presence of the enemy." Similarly, the Ethelham code Wulfstan drafted for King Æthelred in 1008 prescribes penalties for anyone leaving an army without permission, without reference to the motivation of the deserter.<sup>57</sup> This seems to be a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon law in general, typified by the well known tariffs levied for causing death or injury based only upon the status of the victim (or, in some cases, perpetrator) usually without consideration of intent.<sup>58</sup> This disinterest in motivation may reflect an aspect of Anglo-Saxon culture profoundly alien to our own: its lack of a fully developed sense of interiority.<sup>59</sup> Why one abandoned a lord in need was immaterial; that one did so knowingly and voluntarily was sufficient in itself to incur shame and punishment.

The flight of an army upon the death or withdrawal of its leader in an age in which personal allegiance bound warriors to the combat was to be expected, for the death of the lord dissolved the bonds that held the troop together. As one of the sayings in the *Durham Proverbs* put it, "The whole army is bold when its leader is bold" (*Eall here bið hweat hōne lateow býf hwaz*).<sup>60</sup> And if a commander proved irresolute it was expected that his troops would as well. The saying quoted by the author of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's entry for 1003, saying

<sup>55</sup> *Sermo Lapi ad Anglos*, in Dorothy Bethunum, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), p. 271 (lines 106–07). That Wulfstan here used the adjective *earhlice* to connote "base" or "dishonorable" is implied by the variant reading *earmlice*, "wretched," "despicable," that appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 113. Cf. line 182: "hyre yrke Godes bydala" where the *yrke* ("sluggishness? cowardice?") of the preachers "who mumbled through their jaws" is presented in opposition to the *asolennesse* (sloth, laziness) of the bishops.

<sup>57</sup> *V. Æthelred* 28 and *VII. Æthelred* 35.

<sup>58</sup> I owe this insight to Ellen Harrison. However, Archbishop Wulfstan in the secular law code he drafted for Cnut does draw a distinction between voluntary and deliberate wrong-doing and such actions committed either unintentionally or under compulsion, which he saw as completely unlike cases. *Il Cnut* 68 §§ 2–3.

<sup>59</sup> There is some evidence, however, for increased awareness of spiritual interiority among late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical writers, as evidenced by the rhetoric of Archbishop Wulfstan in *Il Cnut* 84: "I earnestly enreat all men and command them, in the name of God, to submit in their innocent hearts (*inwearde heortan*) to their lord." Wulfstan used this same evocative phrase, "inwearde heortan," elsewhere in the law codes (*VII. Æthelred* 2.1, *I Cnut* 4.3; 21), in his *Institutes of Polity*, and in two of his homilies. It appears several times as well in homilies by Ælfric of Eynsham and in those by anonymous contemporaries. The Complete Corpus of Old English from the Dictionary of Old English Project, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, ed. Antonette di Paolo Healey (<http://ets.ualberta.ca/doe/>). See also the Old English Hexateuch, Deut. 4:29: "Gif ge hine mid inwearde heortan secedet si tio corde quesieris." Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898), p. 597 (s.v. inwearde).

<sup>60</sup> Quoted by Thomas Hill, "When the Leader Is Brave . . . : An Old English Proverb and its Vernacular Context," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 119.2 (2001), 232–36. See Antigart, 293 (proverb 22).

"When the leader gives way, the whole army will be much hindered" (*domine se heretoga wacð hōne bið eaſſe here swide*),<sup>61</sup> is at least as old as Alcuin, who gave a variation on it in his letter to Archbishop Eanbald II: "If he who bears the standard flees, what does the army do? . . . If the leader is fearful, how shall the soldier be made safe?" (*Si dux timidus erit, quomodo salvabitur miles?*).<sup>62</sup> Alfred in his translation of Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis* makes a similar observation: "If the general (*heretoga*) goes astray, the army (*here*) is wholly idle, when it should be striving against other nations."<sup>63</sup> For the main chronicler for Æthelred II's reign, the man responsible for the C.D.E. recensions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the question was not, however, about weakness or waywardness but disloyalty. Thus, along with the king's irresolution and the favoritism he showed to traitors, is the Chronicler's – and Wulfstan's – explanation for English defeat.<sup>64</sup> (Perhaps this is why the *Merton* poet chose to characterize Godric's flight as a betrayal.) Consider the passage from the annal for 1003 quoted at the head of this paper: "The ealdorman Ælfric was to lead the army, but he was up to his old tricks. As soon as they were so close that each army looked on the other, he feigned him sick, and began retching to vomit, and said that he was taken ill, and thus betrayed the people whom he should have led."<sup>65</sup> The chronicler does not imply that Ælfric (or Eadric Streona) was a coward. The vomiting, rather than a sign of timidity or uncontrollable fear, is passed off as one of his "old tricks," an accusation of duplicity that starkly contrasts with the United States Army's initial characterization of the similar reaction of the unfortunate Sergeant Pogson to the horrors of war: "cowardly conduct as a result of fear, in that he refused to perform his duties."<sup>66</sup> The

<sup>61</sup> ASC, s.a. 1003, trans. Whitelock, p. 86; G. P. Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition*, 6. MS D (Canterbury, 1996), s.a. 1003.

<sup>62</sup> Alcuin, "Letter to Eanbald II," in E. Diuimller, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae IV: Epistola Karolini aevi 2* (Berlin, 1895), *Epistola* no. 232. *Letters of Alcuin: Patrologia Latina cursus completus* 100, col. 345A, noted by Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892), 2:183.

<sup>63</sup> Alfred, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, 2 vols., Early English Text Society, Original Series (London, 1871–72), ch. 18, vol. 2, p. 129: "Sua eas daet heafod bið unhall eaſſe bi him bið ideli, þeah hi hale sten, sua eas bið se here eal idel, donne he on oðer folc witan sceal, gif se heretoga dwolā." Thomas Hill, "When the Leader is Bravé," 233, discusses Alfred's alteration of Gregory's original text.

<sup>64</sup> Archbishop Wulfstan's "Sermon of the Wolf," written in 1014, explains the military reverses of the English and the suffering of the realm as a consequence of the many treacheries committed by the English against their lords. For Wulfstan, these treacheries culminated in the murder of one king, Edward the Martyr, and the exile of another, his brother Æthelred. *Anglo-Saxon Prosse*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London, 1975), pp. 116–22, at 118–19. Alice Sheppard explains the narrative strategy of the Æthelred-Cnut entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a discourse on the failure of lordship. The disloyalty and treacheries of ealdormen Ælfric and Eadric Streona and other English leaders mirror King Æthelred's own bad lordship, so that "the king's disloyal lordship breeds more disloyalty," eventually leading to Æthelred's loss of his kingdom. *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 94–120.

<sup>65</sup> *The New York Times*, Friday, October 31, 2003, A.8. The charges were soon lessened to the more

Chronicler will not permit his villains the excuse of a timid nature. In this annual and others irresolution and weakness give way to a different and far more damning source of shame, perfidy, oath-breaking. But as I have suggested above, the two were intimately connected, since the weakness or sloth that kept a man from performing his duty to his lord was willful and therefore was in itself perfidious. The author of the entries for Æthelred II's reign in the C.D.E stock of the Chronicle, because of his theme of treachery, made the connection explicit. Perhaps by pointing up the treacheries of Æthelred's generals, the Chronicler was critiquing the king's own failure of courage and will in delegating the responsibility of defending the realm to others.<sup>66</sup>

Anglo-Saxon "cowardice," if we may call it that, thus differed from Aristotelian and modern conceptions of cowardice. Indeed, it might be more accurate to say that the Anglo-Saxons did not possess a conception of cowardice as a specific and unique failing of character or action. War leaders and warriors were shamed not because they possessed timid or fearful temperaments but because they were seen to be sluggish or lazy in fulfilling their pledges and boasts to serve and protect their lord (or, in the case of a king, God). Their deeds, in short, failed to match their brave – and often drunken – words. Janet Bately concluded about the vocabulary of bravery in Maldon, "what bravery words there are in that part of the poem that has come down to us are linked to the hope/expectation/intention of brave behaviour (or braveness of mind), rather than to specific actions of boldness or bravery. Not what people are, but what they need to be."<sup>67</sup> The vocabulary of cowardice, similarly, was linked to a lack of resolution that manifested itself in a shameful failure to fulfill one's vows in times of danger. What made it truly shameful was that this dereliction was seen as a

common and far less serious charge of "drexelion of duty" and then dropped entirely when the physician in charge of the Department of Defense Spatial Orientation Center in San Diego agreed with Pogany's lawyer that he suffered from a psychological disorder due to an anti-malaria drug he had taken: *The New York Times*, November 7, 2003, A 17; "Case dropped against American soldier initially accused of cowardice," CNN.com, July 15, 2004, [http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/07/15/army\\_dropped\\_charges/](http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/07/15/army_dropped_charges/). Even after the charges were dropped, Pogany claims that he was treated like a pariah by some members of his unit. MSNBC.com, Dec. 30, 2003, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5840267/>.

<sup>66</sup> In the annal for 1013, the Chronicler comments that the people of London would not yield to King Swein because King Æthelred and his Danish mercenary captain Thorkell the Tall were inside the borough. In contrast, three years later an army raised by the king's son Edmund dissolved because Æthelred refused to lead it. Later in that year a second levy came to nothing when Æthelred suddenly left it because of rumors of a plot against him in the ranks. Cf. *Ælfric of Eynsham's homily, "Wyrnwriteras us seegða ða de awrian be cyngum,"* in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope, Early English Text Society, Original Series 259-60 (London, 1967-68) 2:725-33, which justifies the practice of king's depitzing generals to lead their armies, and seems to be replying to contemporary criticism of King Æthelred. On Ælfric's general attitude towards war and his concern that the lay nobility perform its military duty, see John Edward Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 192-246.

<sup>67</sup> Bately, "The Vocabulary of Bravery," p. 294.

matter of choice. This is not to say that the Anglo-Saxons ignored the power of fear. Fear was the proper and expected response to divine prodigies and to the terrors of the sea. Fear, it was acknowledged, was felt by soldiers when they faced a superior enemy in battle, and there was no shame in following one's lord in flight from the battlefield. But the Anglo-Saxons did not credit inner fear with the motive power to override a soldier's rational will, as Aristotle and modern conceptions of cowardice do. To give in to fear was a matter of choice; it was an *unmanly*, sluggishness of will. To an Anglo-Saxon audience, Beowulf's hearth-troop hiding in the woods while their lord engaged in mortal combat were shirkers. This was probably the view throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. But in the context of the military disasters that marked the reign of King Æthelred II, behavior that would have earlier been viewed as a failure of nerve was now characterized as a species of perfidy, a willful betrayal of the lordship bond. This was less dramatic a shift than one might think. To accuse a man of treachery was certainly more damning than to dismiss him as lacking resolution, but, in a sense, the two accusations inhabited the same moral sphere. For the shame of both arose from a man's willful failure to fulfill his duty to his lord.