Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 49/2 2014
doi: 10.2478/stap-2014-0006

LINGUISTICS

SAVING THE "UNDOOMED MAN" IN *BEOWULF* (572B-573)

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ABSTRACT

The maxim *Wyrd oft nereð // unfægne eorl, / þonne his ellen deah* "Fate often spares an undoomed man when his courage avails" (*Beowulf* 572b-573) has been likened to "Fortune favors the brave," with little attention to the word *unfægne*, which is often translated "undoomed". This comparison between proverbs emphasizes personal agency and suggests a contrast between the proverb in 572b-573 and the maxim *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel* "Goes always fate as it must" (*Beowulf* 455b), which depicts an inexorable *wyrd*. This paper presents the history of this view and argues that linguistic analysis and further attention to Germanic cognates of *(un)fæge* reveal a proverb that harmonizes with 455b. *(Un)fæge* and its cognates have meanings related to being brave or cowardly, blessed or accursed, *and* doomed or undoomed. A similar Old Norse proverb also speaks to the significance of the status of *unfæge* men. Furthermore, the prenominal position of *unfægne* is argued to represent a characterizing property of the man. The word *unfægne* is essential to the meaning of this proverb as it indicates not the simple absence of being doomed but the presence of a more complex quality. This interpretive point is significant in that it provides more information about the portrayal of *wyrd* in *Beowulf* by clarifying a well-known proverb in the text; it also has implications for future translations of these verses.

Keywords: *wyrd*, *Beowulf*, proverbs, lexicology, adjectives, word order, translation, Germanic languages

1. Introduction

After recounting his successful exploits at sea and his slaying of nine sea monsters, Beowulf remarks, *Wyrd oft nereð // unfægne eorl, / þonne his ellen deah* "Fate often spares / an undoomed man when his courage avails" (572b-573). Both Klaeber (2008: 153) and Tolkien (1936: 290, 291) liken this Old English

(OE) proverb to the proverb “Fortune favors the brave.” Drawing the same parallel, Deskis (1996: 73), however, suggests that “[t]he *Beowulf*ian version is somewhat complicated by the added condition that the *eorl* be *unfæge*”. Indeed, the interpretation of this proverb hinges on understanding the complex relationship between *wyrd*, personal agency, and the state of being *(un)fæge*.

Given the wealth of scholarship on the concept of *wyrd* (e.g., Phillpotts 1928; Timmer 1941; Kasik 1979; Weil 1989; Pollack 2006) and Old English maxims (e.g., Williams 1914; Cavill 1993, 1999; Deskis 1996, 2005, 2013; Shippey 1977, 1978; Thayer 2003; Kramer 2010; O’Camb 2013), this proverb has enjoyed considerable scholarly attention.[1] The significance of the word *unfæge* in this proverb, however, has received relatively less treatment. For more than a century, readers have contrasted the proverb with the earlier assertion that *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel* “Goes always fate as it must” (455b), e.g., “Household Words” (Dickens 1858); Williams (1914); Weil (1989); emphasizing the idea that a man may change his fate through brave acts. This essay seeks to complicate this interpretation by addressing the significance of the word *unfæge*, as related to but distinct from the meanings associated with the word *wyrd* and the phrase *þonne his ellen deah* in this proverb. In doing so, this paper offers additional insight into the concept of *wyrd* in *Beowulf* as well as further lexicographical information that may be relevant to the definition of the word *unfæge.*

With only two attestations of the word *unfæge* in Old English (both of which are in *Beowulf*), evidence from related languages, such as Old Norse (ON) and other Germanic languages, provides some of the little information we have for understanding this word. In addition to drawing parallels between this proverb and others pertaining to bravery, as provided by Klaeber and Tolkien, we might also compare the proverb with those that discuss individuals who are *fæge* or *unfæge*. Related maxims in Old Norse suggest that being *unfæge* is as immutable as being *fæge*. Secondary meanings of these words pertaining to courage or cowardice in Old Norse and other Germanic languages further indicate that a man’s bravery may in fact be connected with his being *unfæge*. In this case, the maxims concerning *wyrd* in 572b-573 and 455b may present a coherent worldview, in which fate – good or bad – is inescapable.

Patterns of word meaning and use associated with *unfæge* and its cognates may also be supplemented with insights from other fields, such as theoretical linguistics, in an effort to offer additional glimpses into the specter of this word and of the world it represents. In particular, the characterizing nature of the word *unfæge* in this maxim is corroborated by independent insights from theoretical semantics and syntax. Haumann (2010) suggests that in Old English, as in many languages, prenominal adjectives, e.g., *unfægne eorl*, indicate a quality that is characteristic of the noun modified, and this contrasts with the temporary or incidental nature of qualities depicted by postnominal adjectives. In other words, according to this theory, one of the defining or characterizing features of the *eorl* in this maxim is that he is *unfæge*. He is not incidentally undoomed as a result of *wyrd's* saving him because of his bravery at that moment, nor is he *unfæge* simply because he is not *fæge*. In contrast, he is an *unfægne eorl*, "an undoomed man".[2] The adjective's prenominal position highlights the fact that the proverb addresses a particular kind of man, not just someone who incidentally exhibits this quality, measurable only by the outcome of the events themselves.

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[1] See Kramer (2009) for an excellent discussion of some of the research on Old English proverbs, including early research and more recent studies.

Considering these patterns of word order variation and their hypothesized significance in Old English, this paper aims to illustrate how insight from linguistic theory can supplement traditional philological insight in the analysis of a well-known Old English proverb. Through surveying a diachronic sample of scholarly discussion and translation of this proverb, this paper also illustrates how subtle syntactic change can compound the challenges of interpreting Old English proverbs since the reader has neither full knowledge of the cultural context nor native speaker intuitions regarding the grammar of the language. Both of these factors complicate our incomplete understanding of culturally invested words such as *wyrd* and *unfæge*, especially when one of these words is a low frequency form, such as *unfæge*. Using insights from Old Norse and other Germanic languages and from theoretical linguistics, I argue that the meanings of the word *unfæge* and its cognates as well as the word's prenominal position suggest a relationship between being brave and being an *unfægne eorl*. In this case, being *unfæge* and being brave need not be separate conditions for *wyrd*'s sparing the man.

2. Survey of scholarly discussion

Before Klaeber's first edition, before Tolkien's famous lecture, there was already a growing body of literature on *Beowulf* and this maxim in particular. Yet, some early readers struggled to interpret the proverb, perhaps because of the 'universalizing' quality of Old English maxims that can be foreign to modern audiences (Fulk & Cain 2013: 241). For instance, Tolman (1887: 44) remarks:

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[2] This distinction is perhaps akin to Wallace Stevens' "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." To use the prenominal adjective *unfægne* is to assert the presence of a negated quality, which is distinct from asserting the absence of an unnegated quality, as in *næs ic fæge þa gyt* (2141b) or *næs he fæge þa git* (2975b), where the temporal nature of not being *fæge* is highlighted by the adverb *gyt/git* 'yet'.

> Some of the massive generalities in such passages are almost 'Bunsbyisms' in their solemn saying of little or nothing;[3]
>
> Fate oft preserves
> The undoomed earl, if his strength holds out.
> Beo., 572
>
> The beautiful close of 'Widsith' is weakened by an expression like this. Passages which have a touch of the humorous to us, very certainly did not have it to the serious Anglo-Saxons.

Beyond painting the Anglo-Saxons as humorless, this early interpretation of the maxim illustrates a further misunderstanding of Anglo-Saxon culture, one that is linguistically and culturally motivated. It illustrates the trouble with translating this maxim into a language and cultural context in which neither *wyrd* nor the idea of being *fæge* or *unfæge* is a reality. The result is an amused (and bemused) reader who recognizes that he or she is not able to connect with the original meaning of this maxim.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this maxim was frequently referenced in short summaries and discussions of the poem, often in contrast with the maxim *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel* (455b). "A Primitive Old Epic," which Howe (2005) attributes to Henry Morley, printed in Dickens' *Household Words* from May 1, 1858, includes both of these proverbs, translated as follows:

(1) a. What is to be goes ever as it must.
b. The Must Be often helps an undoomed man when he is brave. (461)

In *A first sketch of English literature* (1873), Morley discusses these lines together, introducing the idea of personal agency as a significant feature of the second maxim and fatalism as the defining note of the first: "The poem includes also expression of the heathen fatalism, 'What is to be goes ever as it must,' tinged by the energetic sense of men who feel that fate helps those who help themselves; or as it stands in *Beowulf*, that 'the Must Be often helps an undoomed man when he is brave'" (14). This same description appears in Burnett (1886: 14) and Bell (1900: 37), and Baldwin (1882: 15) also contrasts these proverbs.

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[3] The word 'Bunsbyism' here is apparently a coinage based on Charles Dickens' character Captain Jack Bunsby from *Dombey and Son*. Bunsby, who is ironically called a 'sage,' confounds those around him with his opinions because of the "difficulty (…) experienced in making anything of out them" (123).

Notions of Englishness were also attached to these two proverbs, especially the proverb in 572b-573 because of its apparent attention to the importance of personal agency, which writers appropriated as a feature of English identity. For example, Scudder (1901) addresses the importance of "an inevitable Fate" as illustrated by the maxim in 455b, but goes on to contrast this verse with the maxim in 572b-573:

> Yet blended with this [fatalism], in the illogical union always to be found in the English race, and source of much of its power, is a stern sense of personal duty. 'Weird goeth ever as it must!' exclaims Beowulf; yet 'Fate often preserves an undoomed earl, if his courage is good'. The poem reveals to us many of the sources of the future power of the English: it shows us a race that can dream as well as fight, a race permeated by the instinct of moral responsibility, a race that can compass much, but that cannot compass light-heartedness. (Scudder 1901: 33-34).

Dixon (1912: 73) similarly contrasts the proverb in 572b-573 with other *Beowulf* proverbs on fate, again emphasizing the Englishness of "challeng[ing] the fates themselves," as he interprets this proverb.

Welsh (1890) connects these proverbs and the poem more generally not only with Englishness but also with masculinity: "Its [*Beowulf's*] characteristics are English to the root – Nature – worship, pride, melancholy, fatalism, manliness. 'Let him who can, work high deeds ere he die'. 'What is to be, goes ever as it must.' 'The Must-Be often helps an undoomed man when he is brave'" (Welsh 1890: 5). Given the discourse that generally surrounds the comparison of 455b and 572b-573, one cannot help but wonder if Welsh connects one proverb with 'fatalism' and the other with 'manliness.' In any case, here we see the same translations from Morley's writing in *Household Words* and *A first sketch of English literature*, and one can see the influence of these texts in highlighting these two maxims, and in setting up a contrast between them, where the first maxim represents fatalism and the second maxim addresses the power of personal agency.

Some early scholars framed the discussion of the proverb concerning the undoomed man in terms of the paradox of the apparent claim that fate *and* bravery might both play a role in the man's success, but there is comparatively little direct treatment of the word *unfæge*. In their edition of *Beowulf*, the influential scholars Wyatt and Chambers (1914: 31) note of verses 572b-573 that "The paradox is a favorite one in Germanic literature. cf. ll. 670, 1056, 1552, where Beowulf is saved by God and his mail". Klaeber similarly writes on this proverb of "die fast sprichwörtlich ausgeprägte Idee der Dualität von Geschick (Gott) und eigener Kraft" [the almost proverbially formulated idea of the duality of fate (God) and one's own strength] (1905b: 179). He goes on to connect this proverb with the more modern one "God helps those that help themselves". Both in his choice of proverb for comparison and in his discussion, Klaeber seems to judge the word *unfæge* as inessential to the interpretation of the proverb in verses 572b-573. Indeed, Klaeber (1905a) acknowledges the adjective as an epithet, but suggests that it is pleonastic (247), and this interpretation helps explain its omission in the discussion of these verses in his editions of *Beowulf*.

Klaeber expresses the same duality in the first edition of *Beowulf* (1922) in a note for verses 572b-573, again with relatively less attention to the word *unfæge*:

> Fate does not render manly courage unnecessary. A proverbial saying. ('Fortune favors the brave.') Frequently God is substituted for fate: 669 f., 1056 f., 1270 ff., 1552 ff., *Andr*. 459 f. Cf. Grimm D.M. iii 5 (1281 f.); Gummere G.O. 236f.; Cook, *MLN*. Viii 59 (classical and ME. Parallels); *Arch*. cxv 179.

In his comparison between the *Beowulf* proverb and the proverb "Fortune favors the brave," the duality of fate and personal agency is expressed in the tension between the subject "Fortune" and the object "the brave". Like Klaeber, Cook also directly likens this proverb to the proverb "Fortune favors the brave" (59), but Gummere more indirectly connects the two proverbs, also drawing attention to the Old Norse proverbs concerning those who are fey (or *feigr*), and observing that the verses represent a "Germanic commonplace". Gummere suggests that "fate often spares a man who is not doomed, really devoted to death, if he is a brave man, in a word, favors the brave if favor be possible" (1909: 48). While the language of fate "favor[ing] the brave" is represented, it is tempered with an overt treatment of the word *unfæge*. With this emphasis on the word *unfæge*, Gummere's treatment contrasts with Klaeber's, which does not directly address this aspect of the proverb.

Tolkien also connects the proverb in 572b-573 with the more recent "Fortune favors the brave," and further addresses the role of personal agency. In a footnote that mentions this verse, Tolkien writes the following:

> "[T]he words *hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre, mod sceal þe mare þe ure mægen lytlað* are not, of course, an exhortation to simple courage. They are not reminders that fortune favours the brave, or that victory may be snatched from defeat by the stubborn. (Such thoughts were familiar, but otherwise expressed: *Wyrd oft nereð unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah*)". (Tolkien 1936: 291).

In this note, we see the framing of this maxim in terms of triumph in the face of impending 'defeat' as a result of a man's courage and 'stubborn[ness]'. The man is an agent who 'snatch[es]' victory and is apparently enabled by his character. This reading agrees with other early analyses of the proverb that emphasize personal agency in the interpretation of the proverb. Again the significance of the word *unfæge* is diminished in the comparison with the proverb "Fortune favors the brave". It is more challenging to conceive of the possible defeat of an undoomed man, who is literally fated to survive, than simply "the brave". And as is seen in comparison with Germanic cognates of the word *unfæge*, there may actually be a relationship between being *unfæge* and being brave.

More recent scholarship often maintains the focus on the importance of bravery and personal actions in the undoomed man's fate, with little consideration of the significance of being *unfæge*. For example, Raffel (1963: 41) paraphrases the maxim as "Fate saves the living when they drive away death by themselves", and Haarder (1975: 239) suggests that this line may be understood to say that "through action man will confirm his own life". As in earlier scholarship, the contrast between the proverbs in 455b and 572b-573 persists. In indicating two of Beowulf's statements on *wyrd*, Weil (1989: 95) first quotes 455b and then writes "yet also" followed by verses 572b-573. This same contrast is also seen in Flieger (2009: 155) along with the comparison between the latter maxim and "God helps those who help themselves". In both of these cases, 572b-573 is presented in opposition to 455b, with an emphasis on personal actions in the maxim on the *unfægne eorl*. Gwara (2009: 192) also highlights the relationship between fate and courage, but with a slightly different interpretation: "[A] man's courage in evading violent death may be looked upon as the action of fate – a god's protection". Thus it is not the man's being saved that is a product of fate so much as the fact that he was brave enough to combat the threat and triumph. Here bravery is the product of fate rather than a condition on fate, but even so, this interpretation makes no explicit reference to the significance of being *unfæge*.

Scholars who do treat the word *unfæge* in this proverb tend to treat it as indicating the simple absence of being *fæge* (similar to Gummere's treatment), and may not ascribe the same irreversibility to being *unfæge* as to being *fæge*. For instance, Cavill (1993: 482) concurs with Raffel's reading of the maxim, which emphasizes personal agency, while acknowledging "some of the tensions of the *Beowulf* passage" [i.e. 572b-573]. He argues that this maxim emphasizes courage, but then goes on to observe that Beowulf dies in spite of his courage because he was *fæge*. Mitchell (1963: 131), too, emphasizes the significance of being *fæge*, arguing the following: "that death will come on one's death-day is inevitable, for neither *wyrd* (572-3) nor *Waldendes hyldo* (2291-3) can do anything for the man who is *fæge.*" Tietjen (1975: 164) goes further, distinguishing between being *fæge* and being *unfæge*, and arguing that “a man’s fortunes can be reversed if he is *unfæge*, but cannot be reversed if he is *fæge*”. She bases this argument on the following readings of 572b-573 and the related maxim in 2291-93: “The first passage points out that fortune favours the brave man if it has not already decreed that he die, and the second, that a man requires the favour of fate as well as the favour of God if he is to survive misfortune”. However, for the two maxims that Tietjen uses as evidence in making this claim, other interpretations are available, ones in which bravery, God’s favor, and being *unfæge* are not all distinct factors, as discussed below.

More recently Deskis (1996: 76) argues for an interpretation of this proverb that incorporates the roles of “personal responsibility” and fate. And in contrast with some of this earlier scholarship, she argues that “the state of being *fæge* or *unfæge* seems to supersede the powers of *wyrd*” (77). While she compares this proverb with “Fortune favours the brave”, she notes that the proverb in *Beowulf* “is somewhat complicated by the added condition that the *eorl* be *unfæge*” (73), and she further draws parallels with Old Norse proverb *Hverjum bergur nokkuð, er eigi er feigur* “He who is not doomed will escape somehow” (Deskis 1996: 89).

The fourth edition of Klaeber’s *Beowulf* (2008) also addresses the portion of the proverb that pertains to the man’s being *unfæge* in the introductory discussion, but in this reference, only verses 572b-573a are included (thus omitting the clause concerning bravery). These verses are paraphrased as “a person will live if he is not ordained to die” (lxxv), reflecting a similar sentiment to that of the Old Norse proverb above that was referenced by Deskis. Comparatively, the footnote for these verses in this edition still focuses on the parallels with “fortune favors the brave” – thus appearing to put more emphasis on the clause *þonne his ellen deah*, which was omitted in the introduction. As can be seen in this text and many of the other sources referenced above discussions of this proverb tend to focus on the relationship between triumph and being undoomed or the relationship between courage and fate. It is difficult to express in natural Present-Day English the Old English relationship between fate, bravery, and being *unfæge*.

Russom (2009: 245) discusses the difficulty with the proverb’s interpretation well over a century after Tolman’s labeling the maxim a “Bunsbyism”. In doing so, Russom addresses some of the same challenges in interpretation that still inform more recent discussions of the proverb, for example, Shippey (1978: 55), who writes of the ‘semantic emptiness’ of the maxims in 572b-573 and 455b from the modern reader’s perspective. In response to precisely this type of quandary, Russom (2009: 245) suggests that “[t]he abstract sense ‘fate’ seems inadequate” for this passage, and that “[f]rom a Classical or Christian perspective, fate can hardly be conceived as a savior, and the idea of fate saving someone not fated to die seems bizarrely tautological”. Here he argues for the importance of considering Old Norse literature, which features the mythological norns that determine each person's fate. This wider cultural context is invaluable in interpreting such maxims. Based on this context, Russom attempts to rescue the proverb from a tautological interpretation with this analysis: "[T]he author must allude to some power that imposes an outer limit on each human life but also saves courageous individuals from untimely death" (2009: 245). But what seems tautological to a modern audience might have been part of the original effect of the proverb.[4] To avoid tautology, Russom reverses the modifiers in the passage above: making 'courageous' (representing *þonne his ellen deah*) a prenominal modifier and making the modifier representing *unfæge*, i.e., "untimely", part of the verb phrase, opposite of the original Old English proverb. However, as Klaeber's fourth edition of *Beowulf* suggests, the first part of the proverb can be understood to mean something like "a person will live if he is not ordained to die" (lxxv), a common sentiment in Germanic tradition. Based on this reading, *wyrd* cannot do anything but spare the life of an *unfæge* man. This paper builds upon this point and upon Deskis' analysis of the proverb, with additional attention to the significance of the word *unfæge* and its cognates.

3. The relationship between *wyrd* and *(un)fæge* men

While the literature on the concept of *wyrd* is extensive, and a more general analysis of *wyrd* in Anglo-Saxon literature is beyond the scope of this paper, consideration of the relationship between *wyrd* and free will in *Beowulf* may shed some light on this proverb.[5] Weil (1989: 97) provides a thoughtful analysis of hand-related words in the text, arguing that they are evidence that "the individual was the primary shaper of his fate in Anglo-Saxon poetry". She argues in particular for the importance of bravery, a significant theme in the proverb of 572b-573 and a theme that will emerge again with a closer analysis of the word *unfæge.* Here Weil's qualification "primary" seems especially important. While many scholars have pointed to the importance of bravery in a person's fate even in the discussion of this proverb, it is conceivable that bravery may be related to other factors, such as a person's status as an *(un)fæge* individual. While Weil briefly references this proverb in her discussion of *wyrd*, contrasting it with the earlier proverb "*Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*" (455b), she does not consider the significance of the word *unfæge* as a complicating factor in the interpretation of this maxim. Weil (1989: 102) cautions against "attempts to make *Beowulf* square with the tenets of modern Christianity" in the analysis of *wyrd* in *Beowulf*, yet it seems equally important not to impose contemporary Western notions of personal agency on the text, as well. Since there may be unique interactions between *wyrd* and *(un)fæge* individuals, statements from Old English texts that feature the relationship between these words are the ideal source of evidence for the analysis of this specific proverb.

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[4] Donoghue (1987: 124) argues for the *Beowulf* proverb "*Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*" (455b) that the translation 'Then the occurrences occurred' or 'Occurrences having occurred' is "even more faithful to the tautological originals" than "the smooth Modern English translations" 'Then the event happened' and 'Events brought to pass'. In other words, he argues tautology to be a feature of the original proverb. This is possibly similar to the effect observed in 572b-573.

[5] For a more recent discussion of *wyrd*, a brief history on its research, and a call for additional updated research on this concept, see Pollack (2006).

The two surviving instances of the word *unfæge* in *Beowulf*, and the Old English corpus, provide important glimpses of the relationships between *wyrd*, God, and *unfæge* individuals. In addition to verses 572b-573, we must also consider the assertion that *Swa mæg unfæge eaðe gedigan wean ond wræcsið, se ðe waldendes hyldo gehealdeþ* (2291-2293a) ["So may an undoomed man easily survive woes and misery, he who enjoys the ruler's favor."]. In these maxims, the relationships between *wyrd*, God, and *unfæge* men are illuminated, at least in part, by consideration of the relationships between main clauses and subordinate clauses. While previous scholarship, e.g., Tietjen (1975), treats the clauses *þonne his ellen deah* (573b) and *se þe waldendes hyldo gehealdeþ* (2292b-2293a) as additional stipulations on whether one is spared, they may be descriptions extending naturally from the person's status as an *unfæge* man. In 2291-93a, it is possible to understand the clause *se þe Waldendes hyldo gehealdeþ* as an appositive beginning "he who" or "he whom" rather than an additional restrictive modifier.[6] Thus an *unfæge* man is one who God favors. And in 572b-573, the clause *þonne his ellen deah* may be understood to indicate "the expectation (…) that courage, as part of the very nature of the *eorl*, will assert itself in a crisis at some stage" (Cavill 1993: 483).[7] According to this interpretation, bravery is taken as a prerequisite to being an *unfægne eorl*, and this clause is not an additional condition on *wyrd*'s saving the man. Thus, given these readings, it is also possible that the word *unfæge* has the same status as *fæge* in terms of being an irreversible state. This possibility complicates the traditional interpretation of the maxim in which the adjective *unfæge* and the clause *þonne his ellen deah* are treated separately, if the adjective *unfæge* is treated at all.

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[6] For this interpretation, see Klaeber's *Beowulf*, 4th ed. (2008: 241).

[7] The DOE, in senses 1a and 1b, defines an *eorl* as a "nobleman" or a "man of noble birth or rank, a noble, 'earl' (as distinguished from a *ceorl*)" and "in poetry: warrior, man". Thus, the meaning of *eorl* may be specialized in relation to a man's noble birth, or it may take on a more general meaning in verse. Therefore, some of the meaning of the phrase *unfægne eorl* may come from certain assumptions about the status of being an *eorl*, though this is not necessary in Old English verse, where *eorl* can simply mean "warrior" or "man."

Consideration of the verb *nereð* may also shed light on the relationship between *wyrd* and the *unfægne eorl*. The verb *nereð* is often translated as "saves" or "spares," but these two translations allow subtly different meanings. The former translation of this verb possibly suggests that fate takes a more active role in protecting the man, and the latter allows the possibility that fate is treating the *unfægne eorl* as it must: fate cannot destroy the *unfæge*. Either reading is possible, though recent translators have favored the translation "spares". Further, this reading seems to be more in line with the earlier assertion that "*Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*" (455b). Additional evidence of the relationship between *wyrd* and *(un)fæge* individuals may help inform our understanding of this verb and the proverb more generally.

Besides the proverb in question, unfortunately there are no other cases in the extant Old English corpus where *wyrd* collocates with *unfæge*, but a statement in *Guthlac B* on the relationship between *wyrd* and being *fæge* provides important evidence of *wyrd*'s limitations in (re)assigning fate once a person is already *fæge*. As such, this passage provides additional support for claims concerning the immutable nature of being *fæge*, e.g., Mitchell (1963). It also points to one of *wyrd*'s limitations that may be relevant for the interpretation of *Beowulf* 572b-573.

As Guthlac anticipates his death from illness and his servant mourns his impending death, the narrator comments:

Wyrd ne meahte
in fægum leng feorg gehealdan,
deore frætwe, þonne him gedemed wæs. (1057b-1059)

[Fate could not restrain the spirit, a precious treasure, in the doomed man longer than was allotted to him.]

Gerould (1917: 87) demonstrates these verses to be part of an expansion of a short section in the Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci Auctore Felice: His auditis, praedictus frater flens et gemens crebris lacrimarum rivulis maestas genas rigavit. Quem vir Dei consolans ait:…* "At these words this same brother wept and sighed, bedewed his sad cheeks with floods of tears. But the man of God consoled him, saying:…" (Colgrave 1956: 154-155). In the Latin text, Guthlac goes on to explain that his servant should not be sad since Guthlac anticipates eternity with God: *Fili mi, tristitiam ne admittas; non enim mihi labor est ad Dominum meum, cui servivi, in requiem venire aeternam.* "My son, do not give way to sadness, for it is no hardship to me to enter on eternal rest with my Lord whom I have served" (Colgrave 1956: 154-155). The content of the Old English verses 1057b-1059, however, is original to *Guthlac B*, a reflection on the nature of fate added by the Anglo-Saxon poet. Thus the relationship between the words *wyrd* and *fæge* depicted in these lines must represent a relationship native to Old English, rather than a product of translation. In these lines we see what appears to be *wyrd*'s inability to preserve life longer *þonne him gedemed wæs* ("than was allotted to him") in an individual who is *fæge*. As suggested by previous scholarship on the *Beowulf* 572b-573 and 2291-2293a, once a person is *fæge*, *wyrd*'s ability to overrule that status is checked. In the absence of additional Old English data on the relationship between *wyrd* and *unfæge* men, Old Norse data may provide supplementary data from a related cultural context. Indeed, a related maxim in Old Norse suggests that the same irreversibility associated with being a *fæge* man may have applied to *unfæge* men, as well.

4. Insights from an Old Norse maxim and narrative

Many scholars have highlighted the importance of using Old Norse data in interpreting this proverb (e.g., Shippey (1978: 55); Russom (2009: 245); Williams (1914: 37); Gummere (1892: 236, 237)). However, scholarly discussion that juxtaposes this *Beowulf* proverb with Old Norse proverbs, if it treats the word *(un)fæge*, tends to focus on Old Norse proverbs that discuss *feigr* individuals, not *úfeigr* individuals. With only two attestations of the word *unfæge* in the extant Old English corpus, consideration of relevant proverbs concerning the *úfeigr*, the Old Norse cognate of *unfæge*, can provide invaluable evidence related to the meaning and use of this word in Old English.

Deskis (1996: 85) discusses the Old Norse proverb *Ecki kemr vfeigum i hel ok ecki ma feigum forda* "No undoomed person is sent to death and one cannot save the doomed" from *Sverris saga* as a useful proverb for providing insight into the relationship between death and fate in *Beowulf*.[8] However, it may also shed light on the meaning of the word *unfæge* by providing a similar proverbial usage of its cognate *vfeigr* in Old Norse. The proverb appears at the conclusion of a short narrative featuring a dialog between a father and son in which the father encourages his son to be brave in battle since his triumph or fall in battle is already predetermined (Hauksson 2007: 72-73). In this narrative and proverb, the *vfeigr* 'undoomed' and the *feigr* 'doomed' are treated the same: in both cases, the person's fate is sealed, whether it is victory or death.

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[8] Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie (1957: 57) in their entry for *bella* also provide the maxim *Ekki má ófeigum bella*, which they translate "One not fated to die is proof against all shots" or more literally "Nothing can hurt the undoomed". This Old Norse maxim expresses a similar sentiment, though its source, *Heiðarvíga Saga*, is somewhat problematic since the manuscript was badly damaged in a fire, and parts of the text were reconstructed from memory (Kålund 1904).

5. Defining *(un)fæge*

Further consideration of the meaning of the word *unfæge* and its cognates provides additional insight into the relationship between bravery, blessing, and being *unfæge*: in particular, secondary meanings associated with *(un)fæge* and its cognates complicate the translation of this word as simply 'undoomed.' The OE words *(un)fæge* and other Germanic cognates have various usages associated with bravery or cowardice, blessing or curse, and doom or long life – as described by a range of lexicographical sources. The presence of these secondary meanings contributes additional dimensions to the idea of fate saving a brave man, where the word *unfæge* is taken to indicate merely the absence of being doomed. With these senses, the *unfæge* man takes on qualities that are more obviously inherent, such as bravery. Given these secondary meanings of *unfæge*, the clause *þonne his ellen deah* becomes more temporal than conditional.

A range of dictionaries depict the complexity of the meaning of *fæge*, opening the possibility for a similarly complex meaning of *unfæge*. While Bosworth-Toller defines *unfæge* simply as "Not fey, not appointed to die", supplying just the two attestations from *Beowulf*, the definition of *fæge* is more detailed. Besides being defined as "fated, doomed, destined" or "dead, killed, slain", this word is listed with a third sense: "accursed, condemned," which is illustrated in Bosworth-Toller by the following sentences:

> *Đonne þær ofer ealle egeslicne cwide sylf sigora weard, sares fulne, ofer þæt fæge folc forð forlæteð, cwið to þara synfulra sawla feþan: Farað nu, awyrgde, willum biscyrede engla dreames, on ece fir þæt wæs Satane ond his gesiþum mid, deofle gegearwad ond þære deorcan scole, hat ond heorogrim.* (DOE Corpus; Christ A,B,C A3.1; 0418 (1515))[9]
>
> *Swapeð sigemece mid þære <swiðran> hond þæt on þæt deope dæl deofol gefeallað in sweartne leg, synfulra here under foldan sceat, fæge gæstas on wraþra wic, womfulra scolu werge to forwyrde on witehus, deaðsele <deofles>.* (DOE Corpus; Christ A,B,C A3.1; 0424 (1530))

Further, Bosworth-Toller lists a fourth sense: "feeble, timid," which they illustrate with the following sentences:

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[9] While the selection of sentences originates from Bosworth-Toller, the actual language of the quotations comes from the Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus, thus providing data from more modern editions of these texts. The citations indicate specific sentence numbers in the DOE Web Corpus.

> *Nis min breostsefa forht ne fæge, ac me friðe healdeð ofer monna cyn se þe mægna gehwæs weorcum wealdeð.* (DOE Corpus; Guth A,B A3.2; 0100 (309))
>
> *Ne willað eow andrædan deade feðan, fæge ferhðlocan, fyrst is æt ende lænes lifes.* (DOE Corpus; Ex A1.2; 0075 (266))

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) supplies Old English, Middle English, and Early Modern English citations of both of these senses under the headword “fey”. The Dictionary of Old English (DOE) lists the third sense, with citations from Guthlac A and Christ C. It also makes reference to a possible meaning of “afraid” in its discussion of *fæge gast* from a passage in Exodus – though it does not list a separate sense such as sense IV in Bosworth-Toller.[10] While there is some variation in terms of the number of senses attributed to this word, what one can see from these citations and dictionary entries is that the meaning of *fæge* is more complicated than a simple indication of a person’s impending death. It appears that the meaning of *unfæge* is similarly complicated.

With so few attestations of the word *unfæge* in Old English, to understand the possible relationship between the meaning of *fæge* and the meaning of *unfæge*, one must take care to analyze the range of meanings of adjectives with *un-* prefixes in Old English verse. With reference to a specific set of such adjectives, Gwara (2009: 367) argues, “Adjectives for ‘brave’ formulated with un- plus a term having the opposite sense of the target portray the ambivalence of heroic action in the face of certain death”. For instance, with reference to *unforhte* in *Maldon* 79b, Gwara argues that “[b]eing ‘unafraid’ differs from being ‘confident’ or ‘bold’ in contexts of inevitable downfall”. Shuman and Hutchings II (1960: 219) argue understatement to be the intended effect for a larger set of such adjectives in *Beowulf*: “As verbal negation, the *un-* prefix very often achieves a high level of understatement by negating a word which is, in itself, essentially negative, unpleasant, or pejorative in connotation.” These studies focus on a single reading of adjectives with *un-* prefixes, whose root forms have negative connotations.

Comparatively, however, Bracher (1937: 916) provides a more nuanced discussion of modifiers with negative prefixes in Old English verse. He provides examples of words that he takes to demonstrate more literal meanings with no understatement, e.g., in the prose *Guthlac*, the word *unforhtlice* “used in reference to the birds who sat on Guthlac’s shoulder, a translation of the Latin *non hæsitantes*”. He also provides examples where the modifier with the negative prefix takes on a more positive meaning, e.g., “*undyrne* is used twice in *Beowulf* (150,

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[10] The DOE does not yet include an entry for *unfæge*; and as the word has not been preserved in Modern English, neither does the OED.

410: 'undyrne cuð') in contexts which indicate pretty clearly that it meant 'plainly, manifestly'" (Bracher 1937: 917). Bracher suggests that consideration of the verse context as well as the meanings of these words in prose, where understatement was not such a common rhetorical device, may help provide insight into the meanings of these words with negative prefixes. He ultimately does not focus his discussion of understatement in Old English verse on these forms, however, since generally speaking "we cannot tell to what extent such words had acquired positive meanings, and since we have consequently no good reason for assuming that they were intended as understatement" (1937: 917).

Here we see that there is a range of different views on the understanding of Old English adjectives with *un*-prefixes. Since there are no Old English prose instances of *unfæge*, this is not a possible data source for exploring the meaning of this word. However, it is difficult to imagine the shades of meaning argued by Gwara (2009) being applied to the word *unfæge*. *Fæge* individuals always die: as many scholars have pointed out, neither God nor *wyrd* can save such individuals. Thus it is difficult to imagine varying degrees of being *(un)fæge.* Still we have a limited sense of the full meaning of *(un)fæge* in Old English, rendering direct assertions about this status in Old Norse prose and Germanic cognates important sources of data.

As a negated form of *fæge*, the word *unfæge* might involve meanings related to being brave or blessed (in contrast with the two secondary senses of *fæge* listed above).[11] The word *fæge* appears in religious contexts, for instance, with reference to doomed people on Judgment Day (Christ C 1515). Indeed, cognates of *(un)fæge* are used with similar senses in other Germanic languages. For instance, Cleasby and Vigfusson's *Icelandic-English Dictionary* of Old Icelandic references a sense of *feigr* meaning 'mad, frantic, evil' that appears in old poetry, and the entry goes on to list the usage *feigr menn* in Vsp. 33, which is taken to mean 'evil men, inmates of hell'. Thus if the word *fæge* and its cognates took on religiously charged meanings, it seems possible that the negated form could also. This could explain the references to God on both occasions in which the word *unfæge* appears (i.e. the *beorht beacen Godes* that shines before the *unfægne eorl* is saved, and the *waldendes hyldo* that accompanies the survival of the *unfæge* in the dragon's lair).

Similarly, if the meaning of *fæge* could be extended to indicate feeble or timid individuals, it is possible that the negated form could be extended to indicate brave or courageous individuals. In the entry for *feigr*, Cleasby and Vigfusson's *Icelandic-English Dictionary* also lists the German cognate *feig*, which means 'coward' or 'craven'. The *Nynorskordboka* also indicates a similar secondary meaning of *feig* in Norwegian: *reddhuga, unmannsleg, stakkarsleg* or 'afraid', 'unmanly', and 'pitiful'. Thus there may even be a comment on someone's masculinity implicit in the use of these words (as suggested in Klaeber's note for verse 572b-573, which mentions 'manly courage'). In the entry for the Swedish cognate *feg*, the *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* actually speculates on the relationship between these meanings, suggesting an older culture and time in which losing courage was associated with death in battle. Further according to *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog*, the word *ufej*, the Danish cognate of *unfæge*, can mean *modig*, *dristig* or 'brave' and 'bold'. And according to the *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*, the word *ofeg*, the Swedish cognate, can mean *orädd, oförfärad, oförskräckt* or 'fearless', 'dauntless', or 'intrepid'. Thus a number of Germanic cognates of *unfæge* indicate bravery, suggesting that a similar association might have been available in Old English. This could explain why the *Beowulf* poet was comfortable with the word *þonne* (as opposed to *gif*) introducing the clause *þonne his ellen deah*. As Cavill suggests, perhaps we can assume that the *unfægne eorl* will be brave, and it is not a question of "if" but "when". Here the expectation of bravery could be associated with the fact that the man is an *unfægne eorl*, where an extended meaning of the word *unfæge* indicates bravery, in contrast with *fæge* individuals who may be "timid" or "afraid."

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[11] Here the term "negated form" simply refers to a feature at the level of morphology, as discussed by Kjellmer (2005). This term does not assume a direct and literal negation of the meaning of *fæge*. As is seen in this section, the meaning of *unfæge* is likely more complicated than that.

Even the sense of the word *unfæge* that pertains directly to impending death is likely subtly different from the simple negation of *fæge*. Johnsson's *Oldnordisk Ordbog* (1863) defines *úfeigr* as *som Skjebnen har bestemt at ikke skal döe* ['that fate has decided should not die']. Fritzner's *Ordbok* (1883-96) even goes so far as to define *úfeigr* as *saadan som Skjæbnen har be-skikket et langt Liv* ['such as fate has be-suited a long life']. In other words, if *unfæge* shares any of the same meaning and associations with its ON cognate *úfeigr*, rather than indicating the simple absence of a death curse, *unfæge* may indicate on the contrary someone who is destined for a long life. All of these meanings would help explain how a word that seems so temporal in its PDE translation (i.e. 'undoomed') could have meanings that are more inherently or permanently associated with a person: meanings related to bravery, long life, and blessing.

6. The significance of adjective word order

The insights gained from comparison with the ON word *úfeigr* and cognates may also be reinforced in Old English by insights from theoretical syntax and semantics. According to Haumann (2010), we may consider the significance of the prenominal position of *unfægne* in the interpretation of this maxim. In particular, prenominal position in Old English is associated with adjectives that indicate a characterizing property of a person or thing, as opposed to an incidental or temporary property. In other words, according to this interpretation, *unfægne eorl* 'an undoomed man' should be understood as a specific kind of person, with the quality of being 'undoomed' as a feature that defines this person, independent of *wyrd*'s doings as described in this maxim.

Since this phrase appears in a verse text, extra consideration is required of word order patterns, especially as related to verse constraints. While scholars agree that adjectives are "characteristically in prenominal position" in Old English (Lightfoot 1979: 205), it has been suggested that negated adjectives may have elevated frequencies of postnominal position in Old English. Fischer remarks, "It is striking in my data that strong, negated adjectives occur much more frequently after the noun than adjectives without negation" (2001: 263-264). And as *unfægne eorl* alliterates, and as both word orders are well-formed verse types in Old English, either word order would have theoretically been available to the poet. Thus it is possible that linguistic factors such as those described by Haumann motivated this word order choice.

A wealth of linguistic literature points to the interpretive differences between prenominal and postnominal adjectives in many languages, including Old English.[12] Fischer (2000, 2001) is concerned with differences in meaning related to the position of the adjective. She argues that Old English adjective position demonstrates some of the same iconicity discussed by Bolinger (1952) and Stavrou (1996) for Spanish and Modern Greek respectively.[13] In particular, Fischer (2000, 2001), with Bolinger and Stavrou, argues that there is a connection between prenominal adjective position and an inherent or pre-existing property of the noun, as well as a connection between postnominal adjective position and a more temporary possession of such a property. Raumolin-Brunberg (1991: 76) makes a similar argument for Early Modern English, and this same distinction is preserved in some cases in Present-Day English.

To illustrate this contrast, Haumann (2010: 72) provides the following pair of frequently discussed sentences:

(2) a. The visible stars include Capella.
b. The stars visible include Capella.

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[12] See Bolinger (1967); Sadler & Arnold (1994); Stavrou (1996); Larson (1998); Fischer (2000, 2001, 2006); Cinque (2010); Larson & Marušić (2004); Larson & Takahashi (2010).

[13] Note that Fischer discusses these examples as being "iconic in that the meaning is determined by the linear order of the elements: what is perceived first, colours the interpretation of the rest of the utterance" (2001: 256).

Haumann points out that (2a) can be interpreted as indicating the stars that are currently visible, i.e. a stage-level interpretation; or it can indicate the stars that are generally or always visible, i.e. an individual-level interpretation. In contrast, (2b) can only refer to those stars that are currently visible, the stage-level interpretation. In other words, the postnominal adjective indicates a quality that is temporary or incidental. Comparatively, the prenonominal adjective can indicate a characterizing and inherent quality or an incidental quality.

Interestingly, however, the case was a bit different during the Old English period, which could result in difficulties for modern readers when interpreting an Old English text, in particular, with lines such as *Beowulf* 572b-573. Haumann (2010: 69, 70) argues that the relationship between Old English prenominal and postnominal adjectives "is a symmetric one with the prenominal expressing attributive function, given information, individual-level properties and nonrestrictive modification and the postnominal position flagging predicative function, new information, stage-level properties and restrictive modification," with these properties being largely "dissociated from adjectival inflection".[14] She illustrates these distinctions with examples such as (3) and (4):[15]

(3) [hi] ofslogon anne giongne<STR> Brettisc monnan (ChronA, 501.1)
= they killed a Briton*i*, he*i* was young
≠ they killed a Briton*i* who*i* was young

(4) se geara mid þone ilcan Ceaddan iungne<STR> . . . syndrig munuclif hæfdon (LS 3 (Chad), 184)
≠ who long ago had separate cloisters with Chad*i*, he*i* was young
= who long ago had separate cloisters with Chad*i* who*i* was young (then)

According to Haumann's analysis, the adjective *giongne* receives an individual-level interpretation since this adjective characterizes *monnan* for the speaker. This interpretation contrasts with the stage-level interpretation of *iungne* in (4), where the adjective does not characterize Chad but instead provides a description that is true of Chad at a given point in time. Contrasting (2) and (3)-(4), we see a different relationship between word order and the interpretation of the adjective-noun relationship as inherent or incidental.

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[14] For a recent alternative view on the significance of adjectival inflection, see Fischer (2011).

[15] The full sentence from which (3) is taken, also provided by Haumann, is as follows: *Her cuom Port on Bretene & his ii suna Bieda & Mægla mid ii scipum. on þære stowe þe is gecueden Portesmuþa & ofslogon anne giongne<STR> Brettisc monnan, swiþe æþelne monnan.*

This contrast, resulting from linguistic change, has the potential to inform the interpretation of verses 572b-573. Namely, in Old English, prenominal position regularly signals individual-level properties, while in PDE, prenominal position can indicate either individual-level or stage-level properties. Thus, because of this syntactic and semantic change, it is possible for modern readers of *Beowulf* to interpret the NP *unfægne eorl* with a stage-level reading, where the fact that the man is *unfæge* may seem more incidental, and perhaps less central to the interpretation of the maxim. Indeed, we see some translations – both older and more recent – that use postnominal modification to render the phrase *unfægne eorl*, possibly signalling this subtle interpretive difference, as discussed below.

7. Translation of the proverb

The question of how to interpret this maxim finds practical realization in translation decisions. As scholarly interpretations of lines 572a-573 vary, so do translations, which make different choices in rendering the words *unfægne eorl*, *wyrd*, and even *þonne*. Some translators preserve *unfægne* as an attributive adjective; others render it as a postnominal modifier. Many translators render *wyrd* as 'fate', but 'events' is another viable alternative. In some translations, *þonne* is rendered as 'when' and in others as 'if'. Often subtly different choices in translation create a poetic world that emphasizes either bravery or fate or that attempts to balance both with attention to the *unfægne eorl*. And these choices reflect the world of *Beowulf* in respect to this culturally important point with varying degrees of accuracy.

Besides variation with the notoriously difficult translation of *wyrd*, some of the greatest variation in the translation of this proverb centers on the rendering of the phrase *unfægne eorl*. Recent translations are divided in terms of their translation of *unfægne* as a prenominal adjective, as in (5), or as a postnominal modifier, as in (6):

(5) a. Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good. (Howe 2002)
b. So fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage holds. (Chickering 1977)
c. Wyrd often spares an undoomed man, when his courage endures. (Liuzza 2013)
d. Fate will often spare an undoomed man, if his courage is good. (Crossley-Holland & O'Donoghue 1999)

(6) a. Often, for undaunted courage, fate spares the man it has not already marked. (Heaney 2000)
b. Wyrd often spares the man unmarked by death if his courage holds. (Hudson 2007)
c. Events often spare a man who is not doomed when his courage is up to it! (Fulk 2010)

Compared with more recent translations, in older translations, prenominal modification, as seen in (7), is not as well represented as other strategies, including postnominal modifiers, as in (8), and modification of only the verb phrase, as in (9). This may be related to an archaizing tendency in some of the earlier translations, where postnominal position of modifiers may be felt as an older feature, along with preservation of the words *wyrd* and *oft* and use of the inflected *-th* verb endings, as seen in several examples in (7) and (8).[16]

(7) a. Weird often preserves an unfated earl, when his might has availed. (Garnett 1892)
b. Fate often saves *an* undoomed man when his valour avails. (Thorpe 1855)
c. Fate often saveth an intrepid earl, when his courage is of true metal. (Arnold 1876)

(8) a. Thuswise Weird oft will be saving the earl that is unfey when his valour availeth. (Morris 1898)
b. Wyrd often saveth the warrior not doomed to die, if he be of good courage. (Cook & Tinker 1902)
c. Wyrd oft spareth one not marked for death, if his courage be good. (Child 1904)
d. For Wyrd oft saveth earl undoomed if he doughty be. (Gummere 1909)
e. While yet his Courage lasteth good, Fate oft preserves a warrior true. (Wackerbath 1849)

(9) Fortune often rescues the warrior, if he is not fated to die; provided that his courage is sound. (Earle 1892)

Presumably, Heaney, Hudson, and Fulk are not motivated by archaism in their use of postnominal modifiers to render *unfægne*, though these translations, too, in their own way, may be subject to the weight of linguistic change. The OE adjective *unfægne* is commonly translated as a participle in Present-Day English, e.g., 'undoomed'; and participles commonly appear in postnominal position in contemporary (and Old) English. Thus the choice of a postnominal verbal modifier, either in the form of a participle (as in Hudson's translation), or in the form of a verb in a dependent clause (as in Fulk's and Heaney's translations) is natural to PDE, though deviating from the original Old English word order.

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[16] This perception, of course, is independent of the original word order in any particular phrase, such as the phrase *unfægne eorl,* which features a prenominal adjective.

The choice between prenominal and postnominal modification in the rendering of this phrase may seem like a relatively small point; however, given Haumann's insights concerning the significance of adnominal adjective position in Old English, this choice would have subtle consequences in the modern interpretation of this maxim. For instance, there are interpretive differences between a maxim describing an *unfægne eorl* whose status as such is assigned by *wyrd*'s ruling at a crucial moment of human bravery and a maxim in which this status is assigned by the grammar of the sentence itself (reflecting a much earlier dictate from *wyrd* that is not directly informed by a person's brave acts or personal agency at the critical moment). This latter interpretation is supported by the grammar of Old Norse analogs, which go so far as to indicate the *(ú)feigr* as a substantive, where the characteristic of being *(ú)feigr* is so central to the interpretation of the maxims that it supplies the basis of the nominalized forms used in them. This interpretation is also supported by Old Norse mythology, where "the norns' decision, the final outcome of which is death, can never be changed" (Pulsiano & Wolf 1993: 626).[17] If the word *unfæge* shares a similar meaning and cultural context with ON cognate *úfeigr*, the *unfæge eorl* must survive the situation, just as a *fæge* person cannot be spared by *wyrd* and live past his or her appointed time, as seen in *Guthlac B*. *Wyrd* cannot suddenly change its previous dictates in response to human action or inaction or other factors.[18]

In this case, rendering *þonne* as 'when' (as opposed to 'if') in the translation is not only more loyal to the original text, but it also avoids imposing conditions on the survival of the *unfægne eorl*. Cavill (1999: 148) argues for a temporal sense of the word in this proverb, suggesting that bravery is an inherent characteristic of the man: it is assumed that he will be brave, and it is not a question of *if* he will be brave. Thus *þonne* is appropriate for introducing this clause, which contrasts with the *gif* that introduces a similar clause in *Andreas* (460).

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[17] *Wyrd* is cognate with *Urðr*, the oldest of the norns (Pulsiano & Wolf 1993: 625) and demonstrates some of the same powers and properties.

[18] Though the appearance of *oft* (as opposed to *a* 'always') in this proverb may seem to suggest that *wyrd* may sometimes behave in other ways, it is worth noting that *oft* can provide "the temporal generalization required by proverbs, especially if 'oft' is read as litotes for 'always'" (Deskis 2013: 675).

Translation of *þonne* as 'when' appears with a bit more frequency than translations as 'if', with 'if' translations in particular suggesting an interpretation of the maxim in which personal agency plays a central role. Thorpe (1855); Arnold (1876); Garnett (1892); Morris (1898); Howe (2002); Chickering (1977); Liuzza (2013); and Fulk (2010) all translate *þonne* as 'when'. Comparatively, Cook and Tinker (1902); Child (1904); Gummere (1909); Crossley-Holland & O'Donoghue (1999); and Hudson (2007) translate this word as 'if'. Other strategies for translation of the clause beginning with *þonne* include "while yet his Courage lasteth good" (Wackerbath 1849); "provided that his courage is sound" (Earle 1892); and "for undaunted courage" (Heaney 2000).

Of those translations sampled, the use of 'when' as the translation for *þonne* correlates with the translation of *unfægne* as a prenominal adjective. Conversely, the use of alternative translations, such as 'if', correlates with a postnominal rendering of *unfægne* in the translation, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The relationship between the translation of *unfægne eorl* and *þonne*

Translation of *unfægne*	Translation of *þonne*		
	'When'	'If'	Other
Prenominal Adjective	6	1	
Postnominal Modifier	2	4	3

The correlation between the prenominal translation of *unfægne* and the rendering of *þonne* as 'when' could be the simple function of a translator's loyalty to the original text, since this most closely mirrors the form of the original Old English proverb. However, the correlation between alternative translations such as 'if' and a postnominal rendering of *unfægne* creates a unified picture in which the undoomed man's being spared is incidental or conditional, a stage-level interpretation of *unfægne*. This table illustrates the significance of the adjective position as a marker of how readers understand the adjective, either as essential or inessential, and thus the clause *þonne his ellen deah* (573b) as primarily temporal or as an additional stipulation.

8. Conclusion

In the preface to Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Toller writes of the challenges associated with compiling an Old English dictionary, pointing out the particular challenge associated with treating words found predominantly in verse, which are often less represented in later stages of Old English. Of the cultural distance between modern readers and the Anglo-Saxons, he writes "there is the difficulty of realizing the condition of those who used the language and thus of appreciating the significance of the language they used". In response to this problem, Toller supplies many citations and indicates hope that these citations "by shewing the actual use of those words, may help to the appreciation of their significance, and so supplement the often necessarily imperfect explanations afforded by Modern English words that are used as the nearest equivalents to the old forms" (1898: ii).

Surely if ever there were a word to which Toller refers in this passage, it is the word *unfæge*. With only two attestations, both from the single verse text *Beowulf*, and with all of the culturally invested meaning associated with fate and doom, the vestiges of this word linger – in the poem and in scholarship, almost as inscrutable as *wyrd* itself. From the range of different translations and from the scholarly treatment of the maxims in which this word appears, it seems that Present-Day English struggles to capture the full meaning of this word. And the citations Toller hopes will fill in the gaps provide scarcely enough points to make even a line, let alone a full picture.

In the same way that the original Anglo-Saxon audience's cultural and linguistic context would have informed their understanding of the word *unfæge* and the oft-quoted proverb in which it is preserved, so too our own context informs our contemporary understanding of it. Some of the early discussion of this proverb is undoubtedly informed by nineteenth century notions of nation, ethnicity, masculinity, and "personal freedom". As contemporary readers, we have our own biases, cultural and linguistic. On interpreting the significance of adjective word order in Old English, Fischer (2001: 257) concedes the difficulty in "prov[ing] the meaningfulness of the variable position conclusively" in the absence of native speakers of Old English. This issue, of course, affects our understanding of the phrase *unfægne eorl* in *Beowulf* and the meaning of the proverb more generally. In this case, comparison with an Old Norse maxim and related Germanic cognates of *unfæge* may assist in the interpretation of this maxim by supplying additional attestations of a cognate form and its meaning and use in a similar cultural context. Indeed, the comparison of maxims has long informed the analysis of verses 572b-573, as evidenced by the long period during which this maxim has been most closely associated with the familiar maxim "Fortune favors the brave". But the act of comparison – selecting which parallels are most relevant – is also culturally invested.

Without native speakers of Old English to query or even a more substantial extant corpus, consideration of a range of data types and sources is essential to the interpretation of Old English proverbs. In this case, theoretical linguistics, lexicographical data, and a related Old Norse maxim all suggest a more complicated meaning of the word *unfæge*, and in turn, a more (and less) complicated interpretation of the proverb of 572b-573. If being *unfæge* also entails being brave, this quality could be intrinsic to a person; and the *unfægne eorl* would be assured a long life as much as a *fæge* man would be assured death. The man's bravery is not an additional stipulation on *wyrd*'s protection of the *unfægne eorl*: it is an inherent characteristic of the man by the virtue of the fact that he is *unfæge*. Thus, the proverbs of 455b and 572b-573 may present a single, coherent world-view; and the contrast between these proverbs depicted in much of the early and even recent literature may be exaggerated. *Wyrd* spares the 'undoomed' man because he is *unfæge* ('undoomed, brave, blessed'): *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel.*

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