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The quote “Mine is a fastness” comes from “Wulf and Eadwacer.” It is part of a statement made by Wulf’s wife after he is forced out of the commatatus, and tells us that her village “is a fastness, the fens girdle it,” and is “protected by the fiercest men.” The idea that this quote brings to the reader is separation; the fact that her village is fort-like (a fastness) and well-guarded means that she can never see Wulf again. However, throughout most of the Anglo-Saxon literature we have read, this quote is viewed in a less-depressing light. We see in such poems as “Beowulf,” “The Wanderer,” “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” and the “Prologue” that most Anglo-Saxons seem to cherish the idea of a strong, isolated, well-protected commatatus, since in them, these people could find brotherhood, shelter, food, fame, and other necessities they couldn’t provide alone.

In “Beowulf,” the narrator describes the kingdom of the Danes, beginning with the moment that Beowulf and his small army step off their boats and arrive at the shoreline of the Danish kingdom. We see why this commatatus is well-guarded; this serves to protect the members within from outside enemies. As a result, the Danish people are relatively safe, and can enjoy the finer things in life such as drinking and telling stories in the mead-hall. The mead-hall is a gathering place for the Danish commatatus; in it, people can sleep, eat, and tell boasts that, when successfully acted upon, might one day grant the boaster fame. In contrast to the wife’s feeling of isolation in “Wulf and Eadwacer,” the Danish people are happy to be in their commatatus. We see that only the outsiders, such as Grendel and his mother, feel the same sense of isolation that the wife does because they have been isolated from what means most to them--Wulf for the wife, the commatatus for Grendel and his mother.

“The Wanderer” gives us a similar reasoning; this poem is about a man who longs to reenter the commatatus. Living alone, he is unable to earn fame or an easy life; he must provide by himself

everything that is necessary for his survival. He has no one to communicate his feelings to when he feels bad or lonely. The narrator of this poem tells us that he once was a happy person, who shared mirth and rings with his lord; now, because he has been deprived of the *commatatus*, he has lost all happiness. This is also in direct contrast with the wife's sense of isolation; the narrator of "The Wanderer" would give almost anything to quit his life of wandering and to be in the comfort and protection of her *commatatus*, but the wife would give anything to see her *commatatus* become less stalwart so that she can be with an outcast like the narrator of "The Wanderer."

In "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," the poem opens with a very nice *commatatus* scene, namely the inside of King Arthur's court, where we see the benefits of a good *commatatus*--people have learned to lay aside some of their unnecessary brutishness and to develop their manners because the ideas of chivalry and courtesy to one another have developed in the people of Camelot. The reason for this development is the solid protection that the Knights of the Round Table provide to the *commatatus* against external enemies. This allowed the people to become more artful and thoughtful in their everyday living because they no longer had to fight as horrendously as they used to in the older Anglo-Saxon days. King Arthur's court provides everything for the members of the court--it provides company, protection, shelter, and a place where other knights can learn of one's bravery. Although taking place at a much later time than "Beowulf" and "The Wanderer," we still see here the common idea that "*commatati*" are great things to be in, and the reader may agree that no member of King Arthur's court would want to leave behind everything he or she has had in Camelot to seek a more independent life.

Finally, in "The Prologue" of "The Canterbury Tales," Chaucer has chosen to have twenty or so people ride to Canterbury instead of just one person or a few people because he wants his characters to interact and tell stories; in a way, this interaction simulates the conditions of the old Anglo-Saxon *commatatus* although "The Prologue" is set within a much later time period than most of the Anglo-Saxon literature we have read. Chaucer has created a sort of "traveling *commatatus*" by forming a group of

characters; any type of large group can be thought of as a *commatatus*, since the group members are able to look after one another and can talk, eat, and do many things together. Nowhere in “The Prologue” do we see a character experiencing a sense of isolation--instead, there is a relaxed tone that is produced by having a small band of merry people travel down the English countryside in April. We see that a *commatatus* does not necessarily have to be stationary to be a *commatatus*; a *commatatus* is just as effective in providing happiness for its members while on the move.

We have seen four Anglo-Saxon poems whose characters seem to cherish being in their *commatatus*; in these times, a person rarely knew of anything outside the scope of one’s *commatatus*. All else was strange and dangerous, and being alone meant that one had a lower chance of survival than a person who lived in a *commatatus*. Therefore, it seems quite reasonable that many people would enjoy living in a *commatatus*, and so we ask, why is the wife in “Wulf and Eadwacer” unhappy with her *commatatus*? She is unhappy because she is, emotionally, an outcast like Wulf. The things that people automatically receive when living in a *commatatus*, primarily the ability to love and to be happy, are being denied her; although she has everything else necessary for her well-being, she is being denied love and happiness by her *commatatus*. Both Wulf and his wife have been exiled from the *commatatus*; Wulf by the land, his wife by the isolation and loneliness she feels from his absence. However, despite this, the wife, like the characters of the other Anglo-Saxon poems mentioned previously, still cherishes her membership in the *commatatus*. Without her *commatatus*, she would be in the wretched condition that Wulf is in, and she must feel a certain degree of gratitude for her *commatatus* as other Anglo-Saxons have.