

A REASSESSMENT OF UNFERÐ'S
FRATRICIDE IN *BEOWULF*

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The uncertainty that seems to cling to the character of Unferð¹ in *Beowulf* has resulted in some of the most unusual critical contortions and distortions of a text which, by its very nature, is sufficiently complex and convoluted on its own. Indeed, a genuine difficulty that one encounters in attempting to discuss this enigmatic figure is sifting through the overwhelming body of critical work that, in the absence of concrete textual data, actually *creates* evidence to support its argument. Perhaps the most outlandish example of an article of this sort is in Fidel Fajardo-Acosta's "Intemperance, Fratricide, and the Elusiveness of Grendel." In it Fajardo-Acosta takes Beowulf's assertion that Unferð is drunk with beer and uses it to allege that

[t]he vices of intemperance in the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the drunken, brutish, destructive, and often criminal behavior associated with alcoholism appear to stand foremost in the mind of the poet in his articulation of his criticism of the Danish people. Unferð, Hroðgar's ineffectual champion, is the particular figure in the story which the poet seems to have chosen to represent the essence of the moral problems in rendering even the greatest of the Danish warriors into boastful but useless defenders of the kingdom against the threat of Grendel. (207)

Here, Fajardo-Acosta transforms the relatively innocuous comment that Unferð has consumed too much beer on this one particular occasion and that he has therefore spoken of things which stand well outside the sphere of his knowledge into a harbinger of the moral and military decay of the Danish kingdom. Similarly, in referring to Unferð as "Hroðgar's ineffectual champion," Fajardo-Acosta again exceeds the bounds of the text, for after Grendel's mother attacks Heorot, Hroðgar states that Æschere, not Unferð, was his trusted counselor, confidante, and shoulder-companion in the heat of battle. In addition, although both Hroðgar and Hroðulf trust in the bravery of Unferð, *Beowulf* makes it clear that no stories exist concerning Unferð's deeds of true valor, and it is only Unferð himself who maintains that no one in middle-earth cared more for valorous deeds than he himself did. Indeed, the only battle that the reader can be certain that Unferð took part in is the one in which he killed his brothers.²

Thankfully, not all of the work that has been done on Unferð has been quite as unusually imaginative as Fajardo-Acosta's. Yet, to say that not everyone stretches the text of *Beowulf* to the extremes that are outlined above is not to say that no other scholar speculatively augments the character of Unferð in discussing him. In point of fact, quite the contrary seems to be true. Whether it is the significance of his name, his title, or his conspicuously contradictory nature that is being discussed, the approach most frequently taken by modern scholars is one which allows them to advance their respective theories about Unferð by relying on questionable etymological information or on inapplicable or created categories as a basis for discussion—that is, they largely depend on evidence found *outside* the poem.³ In so doing, they maintain that Unferð's name is a compound which means either "mar-peace" or "unspirited" or "very brave"; that his title, *hyle*, denotes that he is a "spokesman," a "counselor," or a "pagan priest" who has ties to Woden; and that his caustic exchange with Beowulf is either an "unwarranted attack" or a ritualistic *flyting* which simultaneously serves as both a call to action and a harmless diversion for Hroðgar and his thanes.⁴ It should perhaps be hastily noted that this is neither an attack on the use of etymological information in literary criticism, nor a diatribe against comparative studies, but an expression of a genuine concern that the critical focus seems to be growing away from the actual character of Unferð and his role in the heroic poem *Beowulf*, and towards establishing exterior categories to which his character can be forced to conform in one way or another. This approach, though certainly creative, seems largely unnecessary, for it is not only possible, but also essential to see Unferð not as a part of an "intermezzo," or as an inexplicable flash in the *Beowulf*-poet's pan, but as a deliberate part of the larger landscape of the poem.

In all fairness to my predecessors, the diverse readings of Unferð's character stem not so much from the scholars themselves as from the nature of the figure with which they are dealing: Unferð is all but impossible to characterize. He appears in five separate areas of the poem,⁵ and though a brief recitation of what occurs in these appearances may seem tedious, it will nevertheless provide an ample illustration of the interpretive traps that the poet seemingly sets with this character. Unferð's first, and arguably most memorable, emergence in the poem occurs in his initial exchange with Beowulf. From it, we learn that he is a jealous man who holds an important, if ambiguous, office in the court of Hroðgar, that he is an eloquent

speaker, and that he is probably guilty of fratricide. Unferð is literally silent in the poem from this point on: he is “swigra . . . on gylpspræce guðgeweorca,” or more silent in [his] boasting speech of warlike deeds⁶ in the face of Beowulf’s victory over Grendel (980-81);⁷ he quietly sits at the feet of Hroðgar, who trusts his courage and strength despite his fratricidal past; he lends Hrunting to Beowulf—whom he envies—without speaking a word; and finally, he stoically accepts the return of his sword, along with Beowulf’s charitable remarks about its quality, without reply. Given the fact that Unferð is a spokesman of sorts, whatever one takes *pyle* to mean, his apparent silence in so much of the poem poses genuine problems, for the reader is simultaneously forced to assess the gravity of the charge of fratricide against him, to determine its relative truth value, to explain—whether the charge is true or not—why it is ignored, and thereby to interpret his actions in the poem. This is a tall order indeed! Yet, if Unferð is placed back into the contexts of both secular Old English Poetry and *Beowulf* itself, and if his character is assessed on the basis of *internal* rather than *external* evidence, it nevertheless becomes possible to demonstrate how the concept of kin killing resonates throughout *Beowulf* and to discuss the probable significance of this resonance to an informed reading of Unferð.

To speak of placing Unferð in his proper position in the tradition of Old English heroic verse, however, is perhaps a bit optimistic since so little of it survives. Nevertheless, a look at the second of the two surviving fragments of “Waldere” is still instructive for it reveals a narrative stance that is strikingly similar to the one that is reportedly taken toward Unferð. The poem itself, which has been repeatedly commented—though seldom agreed—upon, fits into the legend of Walter of Aquitaine and his flight with Hildegund from Attila’s court.⁸ According to what can be gathered from other versions of the legend, most notably from Ekkehard the First’s *Waltharius*, the characters in the fragment must be Genther, the Burgundian king, Hagena, his retainer, who is a sworn brother of Waldere, and Waldere himself. There is general agreement among scholars “that the Old English poem must have followed the general line of the *Waltharius*,” so that one can place the action of the second fragment somewhere in the middle of Waldere’s battle against Gunther and Hagena (Shippey 222). The action of the fragment is governed by two stereotypical speeches. The first, presumably spoken by Gunther, is about his superlative sword and how he acquired it. The second, spoken by Waldere, contains the usual challenge to his

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opponent and the praise of his own sword, but then it becomes peculiarly philosophical:

[N]e bið fah wið me,
þonne [me] un*mægas* eft ongynnað,
mecum gemetað, swa ge me dydon.

.....
Se ðe him to ðam halgan helpe gelifeð,
to gode gioce, he þær gearo findeð. (22b-24, 26-7)

[the shining [one] is not against me when the hostile kinsmen attack me again, [when they] meet me with swords, as you did to me. . . . He who trusts in help from the holy one, in help from God, readily finds it.]

Waldere makes it clear here that he intends to defend himself in the future as he has in the past—with the edge of his sword. What is of particular interest, however, is not the fact that Waldere mouths a heroic mainstay in the middle of battle, but that he feels the need to defend himself against the *unmægas*, or the hostile kinsmen, whom he expects to attack him in the future. In practical terms, this should come as no surprise. Anglo-Saxon writing is filled with just such conflicts, and if the passage had ended abruptly after Waldere's promise to use his sword, there would be relatively little to discuss—but it doesn't. It is followed with the gnomic statement about trusting in, and receiving help from, God. The implication, of course, is that Waldere, who has been victorious against *unmægas* in the past, will continue to be so in the future because of divine assistance. In "Waldere," then, the narrator pits hero and heaven alike against these unnamed perpetrators of familial hostility.

This narrative tendency to cast intra-family aggressors in an unflattering light manifests itself in a much different manner in a much different poem, the "Fight at Finnsburg," and, while it is true that the picture one gets from the fragment itself is far from complete, the supplemental information that one can glean from the Finnsburg Episode can give a rudimentary picture of what occurred.⁹ In "The Fight at Finnsburg," Hnæf and his warriors are awakened by a sudden attack in which Hnæf is slain and Hengest, his captain, is forced to assume command. Presumably, this is where the *Beowulf*-poet picks up the story, which opens, not with a heroic speech, as one might expect, but with a mourning woman:

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Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte
Eotena treowe; unsynnum wearð
beloren leofum æt þam lindplegan
bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron
gare wunde; þæt wæs geomuru ides
.....
syþðan morgen com,
ða heo under swegle geseon meahte
morþorbealo maga. . . . (1071-75, 1077-79)

[Nor indeed did Hildeburh have need to praise the fidelity of the Jutes; she was guiltlessly deprived of her loved ones, her son(s) and brother(s) at the shield-play; they fell in fate, wounded with spears; that was a sad woman . . . after morning came, when she could see the slaughter of kinsmen under the sky.]

Here, Hildeburh cuts a pathetic figure for she is cast in the role of the powerless woman who is caught between opposing forces. She is the wife of Finn, the king of the East Frisians and obvious aggressor in this battle, and the sister of Hnæf, the chief of the Half-Danes and one of the fatalities in Finn's surprise attack, so that no matter whom she sides with she is a loser. Similarly, in addition to the strained loyalties that occur between husband and wife as a result of this battle stands the moral dilemma that Hengest faces. He is forced to choose between following the slayer of his liege lord and therefore becoming forsworn, or fighting to the death to avenge him. Certainly the heroic choice would be for him to fight to the death, and Hengest seems to sense this, for when he swears oaths to Finn and promises to follow him, he sits around and broods about it for the entire winter. In the end, Hengest breaks his vow to Finn and kills him and is thereby forsworn for a second time. It seems, then, that no matter how one untangles the facts of the "Fight at Finnsburg" and the Finnsburg Episode, at least one thematic strain can be glimpsed which cannot, I think, be questioned—that is, the uninstigated killing of one's kin is an evil which adversely affects society on several levels.

Two short and fragmentary poems, however, do not a tradition make, though they do seem to indicate the predisposition of Anglo-Saxon secular poets against kin killers. Many modern scholars use this apparent poetic tendency to assert that Unferð is a malevolent figure in *Beowulf* and therefore to imply that both his presence and his actions in the poem carry the taint of his past. This reading is not

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without merit, for it seems to be beyond the bounds of credibility that a heroic poem, even one that is as admittedly flawed as *Beowulf*, would allow the hero and the narrator alike openly to attack a character who is supposed to be viewed sympathetically. If this assumption is true, the reader gets his first real clue about how Unferð should be perceived from Beowulf himself.¹⁰ Shortly after Unferð abruptly attacks Beowulf on the basis of his inability to fulfill a childhood boast that he made about a swimming match with Breca, for instance, Beowulf contradicts him and makes a number of interesting accusations along the way:

“Hwæt, þu worn fela, wine min Unferð,
beore druncen ymb Breca spræce,
sægdest from his siðe! Soð ic talige . . . (530-32)

Breca næfre git
æt heaðolace, ne gehwæper incer,
swa deorlice dæd gefremede
.....
þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde. . .” (583-87)

[“Well, my friend Unferð, drunk with beer you spoke a great many things about Breca, you spoke about his adventure! I maintain the truth . . . Breca nor either one of you yet performed a deed so bold at battle-sport . . . although you became the slayer to your brothers.”]

It is apparent from the first few lines of this passage that as a visiting warrior who has volunteered to relieve the kingdom of the monster that has been plaguing it for the last twelve years, Beowulf is understandably put off by the treatment that he is receiving at the hands of Hroðgar’s *þyle*. But there is much more at work here than a little heroic irritation. Beowulf demonstrates so conspicuous a familiarity with his accuser that he addresses him by name—though they have never been introduced—and he makes a list of unflattering assertions about him while he defends himself. He tells Unferð first that, insofar as he was not present at the contest, he is not in full possession of the details of its outcome and it is therefore necessary for him—Beowulf—to tell the truth about the swimming match. Having done that, he states that neither Breca nor Unferð performed a deed in battle that even approached this admittedly minor one of his, and finally, that Unferð’s greatest military accomplishment involved

killing his brothers. In a very real way, Unferð's reputation seems to have preceded him into the poem so that Beowulf immediately recognizes him and knows him to be both a man who misconstrues details to suit his needs and one of unproven mettle who has killed his kindred. Beowulf's accusations gain credibility by the very silence of Hroðgar and the rest of the Danes at the end of his speech, for not one person in the Danish court, not even Unferð himself, attempts to contradict what Beowulf has to say, and Unferð becomes the loser by default.

It is this final remark of Beowulf's—that Unferð killed his brothers—that seems particularly damning, for if it is true it places him in very bad company in the poem. One may see this in random remarks from the narrator who ominously informs the reader that "ecghete aþumsweoran," or sword-hate between a father-in-law and son-in-law, would ultimately cause Heorot to be consumed in flames (84). Similarly, and perhaps more significantly, Beowulf himself makes the importance of the issue of kin-killing clear in his first death speech, in which he maintains that God will not have to chastise him for "morðorbealu maga" or the murder of kinsmen (2742).¹¹ These isolated comments, however, can hardly be considered to be evidence of a thematic strain in a poem of more than three thousand lines, and if in fact they *were* isolated they would hardly be worth notice. But when they are viewed in conjunction with the fact that the narrator repeatedly brings new cases of kin-killing to the foreground and thereby builds a *prima facie* case against this phenomenon, they cannot be ignored. From Grendel and his mother's descent from Cain to Wealhþeow's concerns about Hroþulf and even to Hæðcyn's inadvertent slaying of his brother, the reader seems to be repeatedly reminded of the disruptive and destructive nature of this all-too-common occurrence.

This, of course, brings us back to Unferð. It has already been established that Beowulf accuses him of killing his brothers, but this has often been treated as anything from a gross exaggeration to an obvious lie. Even scholars like Chambers, who are willing to admit that Unferð is indeed guilty of fratricide, are usually quick to forgive him on the grounds that "amid the tragic complexities of heroic life it often could not be avoided. The comitatus system . . . must often have resulted in slaughter between men united by very close bonds of kin" (28). Chambers is doubtless correct in his basic assertion here, but one may question its application to Unferð, for directly after the Finnsburg Episode has been sung in the hall, the narrator drops a few

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important crumbs of information in order to place the reader on the path towards correctly assessing Unferð's character:

Swylce þær Unferð þyle
æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his ferhþe
treowde,
þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah he his magum nære
arfæst æt ecga gelacum. (1165-8)

[Likewise, Unferð the þyle sat there at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings; each of them trusted in his spirit, that he had great courage, even though he was not honest with his kinsmen at the play(s) of swords.]

This passage is often quoted as the narrator's confirmation of Beowulf's accusation that Unferð is fratricidal, and indeed, such is obviously the case. What is so often overlooked, however, is the significance of the word *arfæst*, or honest. By stating that Unferð was not honest at the play of swords, the poet makes clear that the mitigating tragic circumstances suggested by Chambers were lacking in his battle with his kinsmen. Rather, Unferð is established here as a man who has been treacherous to his brothers in battle and who has perhaps engaged in this activity more than once.¹² Because of his role as an instigator in a family feud, Unferð becomes difficult to see as anything *but* a malevolent figure in the larger context of the poem.

The narrator, then, who has the final word, unmasks the evil and treacherous Unferð and exposes him to the contempt that he so rightly deserves. The problem with this reading, however, is that it sounds much more like Batman than *Beowulf*, for the concepts of absolute good and evil in *Beowulf* are largely twentieth-century critical constructs that have grown to overshadow the complexities of characterization in early Germanic literature. This fact alone inevitably leads readers to see *Beowulf* as a poem with a rather simple story line that deals with vanquishing both real and metaphorical monsters, with distinct lines drawn in the sand between heroes and villains—and this is why Unferð is so disturbing.

But even a cursory glance at the poem will show that, at least among the major characters, absolutes are the exception, not the rule. It has a hero who is perhaps guilty of pride and greed, a monster who sings a sad song when he is beaten in battle, and a monster's mother who has seemingly human emotions and who exacts wergild from

Hroðgar for the death of her son. In addition, it has a king whose primary actions during a twelve-year siege include sitting, crying, and sleeping near the women when danger is apparent, but who is nevertheless repeatedly called a good, brave king.

Unferð, I submit, is no exception to this rule. He is a *widcuðne mon* who owns the finest sword in the kingdom, but who nonetheless is not as brave as Beowulf. This is not particularly damning since no one is—or has cause to be—as brave as Beowulf, so to condemn Unferð on this point is to condemn the entire kingdom. But the charge of fratricide remains, and this requires some explanation. It has already been noted that Beowulf is the first to level this charge at Unferð and that he is doubtless telling the truth. The fact that he throws the accusation in as a parting shot and that he fails to elaborate upon it, however, makes one wonder whether he is telling the *whole* truth. That is, unlike Unferð, who gives specific, if inaccurate, details in his allegations of Beowulf's boyhood folly, Beowulf levels the charge of fratricide at Unferð and immediately drops the subject. It is almost as if he does not know the full details of the battle himself, or he desires to cast Unferð's actions in the least flattering light that he possibly can in order to win the verbal duel in which he is engaged. Either way, Beowulf's claim seems highly suspect.

But the narrator's comment is not so easily dismissed. When he asserts that Hroðgar and Hroþulf trusted that Unferð had great courage though he was not honest to his kinsmen at the sword-play, the clause that begins with the concessive relation *peah*, or *though*, is most often taken as a narrative aside that points out how misplaced their trust really is.¹³ Yet, *peah* can just as easily be read in its elliptical sense so that its "clause enters as an afterthought, which has not sufficient importance to be given a new sentence" (Burnham 4). This elliptical use of the word is therefore not employed to show an inherent conflict between two ideas expressed in a sentence. Rather, it is given life "through the agency of an intermediate thought or through an attempt to express linguistically a blend of two notions" (Quirk 36). If one reads this controversial clause elliptically, then it can easily be seen as a statement of a simple fact—a fact which simultaneously confirms and negates Beowulf's accusation. Simply put, if Hroðgar and Hroþulf know about Unferð's admittedly treacherous past, but trust in his spirit and remain his liege lords anyway, they give tacit approval to the deed that he has done.

On the surface, the assertion that Hroðgar and Hroþulf

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somehow approve of Unferð's past seems to run counter to the comitatus system, the tradition of Old English secular poetry, and more importantly, to *Beowulf* itself, but such is not the case. Just as Wiglaf is about to leap into the dragon's lair to help Beowulf try to win his losing battle, for example, he draws his sword. At this dramatically charged moment, the poet characteristically pauses to give what can only be called a singularly confusing history lesson about the sword:

þæt wæs mid eldum Eanmundes laf,
suna Ohtere[s]; þam æt sæcce wearð,
wræcca(n) wineleasum Weohstan bana
meces ecgum, and his magum ætbær
brunfagne helm, hringde byrnan,
ealdsweord etonisc; þæt him Onela forgeaf,
his gædelinges guðgewædu,
fyrdsearo fuslic,—no ymbe ða fæhðe spræc,
þeah ðe he his broðor bearn abredwade. (2611-2619)

[that was the heirloom of Eanmund, the son of Ohtere, among men; Weohstan became the slayer to him at battle with the edges of a sword, to the lordless exile, and he bore the shining helmet, the ringed corselet, and the eatonish old-sword to his kinsman; for that Onela gave the war-dresses of his kinsman to him, the ready armor—he did not speak about the feud, although he killed the son of his brother.]

When approached from the proper angle, this passage has all the feel of the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of a mafia hit. Weofstan kills the nephew of Onela, the King of Sweden, and, rather than rob the corpse and carry off the spoils of war for himself, as one might expect, he takes them back to Onela—as if he is acting under his orders, or at least with his permission. This feeling becomes much more acute when Onela responds like a gracious liege lord and bestows the war-gear of his own nephew upon the man who killed him. In a poem that at least appears to stand steadfastly against kin-killing, this episode, with its lack of censure on the part of the poet of either Onela or Weohstan, seems highly problematic. The problem that the passage poses, however, is not irresolvable, for while it is true that Eanmund is Onela's nephew, it is also true that he is referred to as "wræccan wineleasum," or a lordless exile. For the nephew of the King of Sweden to be both lordless and an exile, he had to have committed a

crime against the king or kingdom and he is therefore subject to full punishment under the law and, socially, is "no longer entitled to protection from his kin" (Klaeber 217).

Thus, in *Beowulf*, two radically conflicting views on the etiquette of killing one's relations seem to exist in tandem. The first states that it is a moral and a social taboo which either results in eternal damnation—as with the descendants of Cain—or absolute misery on earth—as with Hildeburh and even Hengest by extension. The second seems to assert that if it serves the purposes of the commonwealth, it is perfectly acceptable to kill one's relatives or to have them killed. This latter view is a clear departure from Germanic tribal custom and it bespeaks the primacy of the relationship between king and retainer over that which could exist between any given family members. Indeed, so important was the loyalty of a free man to his lord or king in Anglo-Saxon law that any man who was lordless—for whatever reason—was forced to find one quickly. If he failed, he was consequently treated as an inherently dangerous exile, and it was considered laudable to kill him.¹⁴

The issue of familial hostility in *Beowulf*, then, is not quite as settled as is so often assumed, for while one cannot ignore the numerous instances in Old English secular poetry, and in *Beowulf* in particular, where kin-killing is cast in a negative light, neither can one deny that passages exist where it is treated ambivalently at worst. The difference between these divergent stances is one of perspective. In "Waldere," "The Fight at Finnsburg," The Finnsburg Episode, and the allusions to the biblical story of Cain in *Beowulf*, the tales are all directly or indirectly told from the perspectives of the persons attacked so that the respective sympathies of the poets and the reader alike rest with the victims. The story of Weohstan, on the other hand, is told from the point of view of the aggressor, a man whom Onela handsomely rewards for having rid the kingdom of his own nephew, a lordless exile—that is, the reader is encouraged not to side with the victim Eanmund, but with the aggressors Weohstan and Onela instead. Unferð's case is little different. While it would be unwise, I think, either to speculate about the circumstances surrounding the death of Unferð's brothers or to dismiss the fact that he may not have fought fairly against them, it would be equally imprudent to overlook the significance of both his position and his actions in Hroðgar's court. Like the coast guard in the poem, he is given a title, one that apparently allows him to probe the character of newcomers to the kingdom, and he is permitted to be in close proximity to the king. In

addition, once Unferð has made trial of Beowulf and the Geat has passed the test, his attitude softens towards him to the extent that he is even willing to lend Beowulf his famous sword as an aid in his imminent battle with Grendal's mother. In both word and deed he acts as a good retainer should. While it may not be pleasing to the modern palate, or indeed to Beowulf's, Unferð is not a stock figure in a morality play, but a Germanic character who, though flawed, must be viewed contextually as such through the eyes of his liege lord. Hroðgar knows of Unferð's fratricide, and despite—or perhaps because of—this knowledge, he treats his *pyle* with honor in his court and he respects his abilities. As has been shown, this creates no legal, ethical, or traditional inconsistencies in the poem, and in the absence of any narrative cues to the contrary, it would seem that the reader should follow Hroðgar's lead. Doing so would go a long way towards clearing up many of the problems posed by Unferð, for if one de-emphasizes the importance of Unferð's having killed his brothers, his character loses the odor of indiscretion—past, present, and future—that it once was thought to have in the poem.

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Notes

1. Here and throughout I accept the emendation on alliterative grounds.
2. It is important to note that even this “battle” could have taken place under less than heroic conditions.
3. For representative articles about the significance(s) of Unferð’s name see Robinson, Chambers, Roberts, and Fulk. For discussions of Unferð’s role as Hroðgar’s þyle see Baird, Eliason, and Hollowell. For commentary on his role as an appointed verbal dueler see Parks’s “Flyting and Fighting: Pathways in the Realization of the Epic Contest,” “The Flyting Speech in Traditional Heroic Narrative,” and *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions*; and Clover.
4. The space required to address each of these critical stances individually is not within the scope of the current study, though my position regarding them will become clear as the essay progresses.
5. This despite Bloomfield’s assertion that Unferð’s final appearance in the poem occurs when he lends Hrunting to Beowulf.
6. All translations from Old English into Modern are my own unless otherwise specified.
7. All quotations of Old English poetry are taken from Klaeber unless otherwise specified.
8. For a brief though instructive synopsis of the Walter legend see *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* xix.
9. For a much more detailed, though somewhat genteel, discussion of the relationship between the “Fight at Finnsburg” and the Finnsburg Episode, see Chambers 245-290.
10. While it is true that the reader learns that Unferð is envious of Beowulf just before he speaks, the reader focuses on this envy only after Beowulf has made his disparaging remarks about Unferð’s

character.

11. It is important to note that *morð* and its many compounds represented a specialized offense in Anglo-Saxon times which involved not the ruthless slaying of another human being, but the act of doing so in *secret*.

12. While it is true that *gelacum* is frequently rendered singularly, and that if rendered as a plural it is possible to conceive of one engaging in the play of swords more than once in the same battle, it is also possible that Unferð is a repeat offender.

13. For an exhaustive study of Old English concession, see Quirk.

14. All information concerning Anglo-Saxon law is taken from Pollock and Maitland unless otherwise specified.

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