

# Unferth: Another Look at the Emendation

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THE NAME OF ONE of the most fascinating and elusive characters in *Beowulf*, Unferð the *pyle*, has been so long emended that we often forget that all four occurrences of the word in the manuscript begin with an *h*, and that modern scholars rather than the poet interpret it as “mar-peace.” The emendation, originally made to accommodate the needs of alliteration at a time when critics were less concerned than we are today with preserving manuscript readings, was conveniently found to serve the onomastic purpose of characterizing an argumentative person as well. Indeed, Lewis E. Nicholson has called the emendation “a firmly established literary tradition, one which only the *collen-ferð*—the bold in spirit—would dare to question.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet increasingly critics, including Nicholson, in an exhibition of the *collen-ferð* he cites, are finding such a reading less persuasive than it once appeared; it not only disclaims the scribal orthography, but also requires metathesis of the name’s second element from *ferð*, “mind” or “spirit,” to *frið*, “peace.” I propose to show that without so stretching the manuscript form several possibilities exist for a clearer reading of Unferð’s function in the poem, and for an even more apt characterization. I have not undertaken this study to unravel, except, perhaps, in some incidental details, the tangled web that conjecture about Unferð has become, but only to establish that there are firmer grounds for retaining the elements *hun* and *ferð* than there are for emending them.

An argument for rejection of the emendation, strengthened by its vigorous reminder that proper names *need* not have characterizing value in *Beowulf*, has been made by M. F. Vaughan from both literary and linguistic considerations.<sup>2</sup> In the former case Vaughan maintains that a return to the manuscript reading might clarify the prevalent scholarly confusion about the *pyle*’s role in the narrative (p. 47). That

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<sup>1</sup>“Hunlafing and the Point of the Sword,” in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 50-61.

this can be achieved without violating Old English metrics is argued by Vaughan in an extensive discussion of the development of the glottal spirant, and of other appearances of *h* in a position of alliteration with vowels. Fred C. Robinson, as well as Nicholson and Vaughan, has also recently presented a case for a revised reading of Unferð's name.<sup>3</sup>

To their suggestions, which will be pursued further later in this paper, must be added arguments from the narrative itself, and from the customary diction of the *Beowulf* poet. Most previous interpretations of the role of Unferð stem, as Vaughan points out (p. 35), from preconception that his name is synonymous with discord, and often depend for evidence on departures from the text to fragmentary historic sources and to later Scandinavian analogues. Most critics accept, in whole or in part, four assumptions about the *þyle*: he is a privileged counsellor to Hroðgar; jealous of Beowulf's heroic exploits, he attempts in the flyting to discredit the Geat; he is a warrior of the *comitatus*; he will play a role in Hroþulf's treacherous attack on Heorot.<sup>4</sup> A close look at the lines on which these assumptions are based will, at least, raise questions about their soundness, or, more likely as I believe, provide reasons for rejecting them entirely. A major problem with the assumptions is that they lend themselves to circular arguments: because Unferð sits in a position of honor, he must hold high office in the court, proving that *þyle* must be a title for a ranking official, and that a seat at the king's feet must be a position of honor. I have found no allusions other than scholarly conjecture to a seat at the king's feet as indicative of exalted rank. Indeed, Norman E. Eliason calls this "a lowly position fit only for a jester or court entertainer."<sup>5</sup>

"Æt fōtum sǣt frēan Scyldinga" appears in lines 500 and 1166. If this seat is a mark of a trusted advisor, there is no support in the text, for Unferð is not consulted by the king at any point in the dire events of the poem, nor does he volunteer any advice. There is clear evidence, however, that a trusted retainer at this court, where manners are

<sup>2</sup>"A Reconsideration of 'Unferð'," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77 (1976), 32-48.

<sup>3</sup>"Personal Names in Medieval Narrative and the Name of Unferth in *Beowulf*," in *Essays in Honor of Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams*, ed. Howard Creed (Birmingham, Ala.: Birmingham-Southern College, 1970), 43-48. See also Robinson's "Elements of the Marvelous in *Beowulf*: A Reconsideration of the Textual Evidence," in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. Robert Burlin and Edward B. Irving (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>The note on Unferð in Klaeber's edition is representative of the tone and interpretation of the majority of critics and editors. The *þyle*, an "orator" or "spokesman" "has a seat of distinction . . . a reputation for valor," and is a type of the "wicked counselor." *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3d ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1950), pp. 148-149.

<sup>5</sup>"The Thyle and Scop in *Beowulf*," *Speculum* 38 (1963), p. 269.

always correct and gracious, assumes a quite different posture *vis-à-vis* Hroðgar. We learn of Wulfgar:

wæs his mōdsefa manegum gecyðed,  
wig ond wisdōm (349-50).<sup>6</sup>  
[His keen mind, his valor and experience,  
were known well by many.]

As he approaches the king to report on Beowulf's arrival, the *ellenrof* Wulfgar

for eaxlum gestōd  
Deniga frean; cuþe hē dugude þēaw (358-59).  
[He stood at the shoulder of the Danes'  
Lord; he knew the custom of the *duguð*.]

There is no question of the wise and brave warrior breaking with custom by sitting at the king's feet to advise Hroðgar, as he does in lines 366-67, not to refuse an audience to the Geats. Further, Æschere, well-attested as advisor to the king by such epithets as *rūnwita* and *rædbora* (1325), *selerædende* (1346), and *frodan fyrnwitan*, is also called *eaxlgestealla* (1326), not *fōt-sittend*.

Just as the position of Unferð does not indicate that he is of higher rank than other members of the court, nor even a member of the *comitatus*, so his unleashing of a *beadurune* to challenge Beowulf does not prove he is a jealous warrior.

wæs him Bēowulfes sīð,  
mōdges merefaran, micel æfþunca,  
forþon þe hē ne uþe, þæt ænig oðer man  
æfre mærdā þon mā middangeardes  
gehēde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa (501-505).  
[The undertaking of the spirited sea-venturer,  
Beowulf, was to him a great annoyance because  
he would not grant that any other man on earth  
should ever achieve under heaven more fame than  
he himself.]

In fact, the only renown in question at this point in the poem is that which Beowulf bestows upon himself in his stirring account of defeating the sea monsters (419-24). Unferð's *æfþunca* or chagrin, hardly the passionate sentiment of a great champion who fears a challenge to his physical courage, is far more likely to have been occasioned by

<sup>6</sup>All quotations from *Beowulf* are from Klaeber's Third Edition.

Beowulf's masterful rhetoric. In view of the *pyle's* subsequent tale of a sea contest in which Beowulf is bested, it makes better sense to see his office as that of court story teller who fears that a mere fighting man may outshine him at his trade.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from these lines, the only information about Unferð which might characterize him as a warrior is his possession of a sword with the elusive but suggestive name, Hrunting, which he lends Beowulf.<sup>8</sup> But, although the sword is touted as having never failed in battle (1460-64), we hear a quite different account less than a hundred lines later when Beowulf tests it against Grendel's mother;

ðā se gist onfand,  
 þæt se beadolēoma bītan nolde,  
 aldre scepðan, ac sēo ecg geswāc  
 ðēodne aet þearfe (1522-25).  
 [Then the stranger found that the battle-  
 light would neither bite nor do harm to  
 life, but that its blade failed its lord at need.]

Without exploring the phallic significance of an impotent sword, a consideration of his mental state when he presents the battle-light to Beowulf should be enough to dispel conviction that Unferð is or ever was a valiant warrior:

selfa ne dorste  
 under yða gewin aldre genēþan  
 drihtscype drēogan; þær hē dōme forlēas,  
 ellenmærdum (1468-71).  
 [He himself would not risk his life beneath  
 the waves' tumult performing lordly deeds;  
 by this he forfeited a reputation for valor.]

He is not concerned here about loss of renown as he was at Heorot when words, not deeds, were in question.

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<sup>7</sup>Ida Masters Hollowell, in a persuasive interpretation that is not, unfortunately, well-supported by the text, identifies Unferð as a wizard and orator, and asserts, "The *þulr* was professionally, I believe, a talker." "Unferð the Thyle in *Beowulf*," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 239-265. Robinson notes that "the 'pyle' [may have] represented for the audience . . . some social role involving a combination of grave and playful elements which is now beyond our ken." "Elements," p. 127.

<sup>8</sup>Kemp Malone reads *hrunta* as modern English *runt*, and notes that the oldest recorded reading of the latter is "old or decayed treestump." "*Hrungnir*" in *Studies in Heroic Legend and in Current Speech by Kemp Malone*, ed. Stefan Einarsson, and Norman E. Eliason (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1959), pp. 202-203. Eliason calls *Hrunting* a nickname, "not a very glorious one either," "The Thyle and Scop," p. 284. Whatever the meaning, the sword's name seems certainly pejorative.

The poet's use of the epithet *eafodes cræftig* (1466) for Unferð is often seen as additional evidence of his heroism. Yet each of the terms is ambiguous: *eafod* may refer to physical strength or may mean simply capability, while *cræft* may be learning, might, skill, or cunning. Although both words are applied to Beowulf as terms of approbation, *eafod* is also used twice of Heremod, one of the poem's more disagreeable characters; similarly, *cræft* or *cræftig* describe at various times Grendel's mother (1283), the dragon (2290), and the devil (2088). From what the poet has told us of Unferð, "competent in cunning" is an apt translation.

As for the fourth assumption, that Unferð is not only a counsellor, but an evil one, and that he will instigate and take part in Hroþulf's later treachery, it is useful to remember that all critics, even while accepting this charge, speak of the poet's suggestion as a "vague hint" or a "conjecture."<sup>9</sup> Again the weight of tradition has for too long caused the lines themselves to remain unexamined; there is no evidence in the poem that Unferð was part of an intrigue, nor even that such an intrigue ever took place. *Widsið*, with its catalogues of kings, is frequently plundered to prove the historicity of characters in *Beowulf*, but lines 45-49, which speak of the long alliance between Hroðgar and Hroþulf, are not often brought into the discussion.<sup>10</sup>

I do not wish only to deny readings of Unferð that have been so long accepted, but to present positive evidence that this character is a minor figure at court, if not in the poem, and that it is his rude manners and grudging nature that make the name *Hunferð* a suitable one for him. While only the slenderest of cases can be made for the common assumptions above, there are five indisputable cases of fact in the poem, in addition to Unferð's seat and his possession of a sword, that

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<sup>9</sup>Klaeber acknowledges that "there is only a vague hint of a suspicion" that Unferð is "fomenting dissensions" (148). Chambers notes, "It has been conjectured that Unferth is the evil counsellor." *Beowulf with The Finnsburg Fragment*, ed. A. J. Wyatt, rev. R. W. Chambers (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1914), p. 177. Dobbie cautions that the "value [of the Scandinavian documents] as a guide to the interpretation of *Beowulf* is extremely problematical." *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, No. 4 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953), p. xxxvii.

<sup>10</sup> Hroþwulf and Hroðgar heoldon lengest  
 sibbe ætsomne suhtorfaedran,  
 sibban hy forwraecon wicinga cynn  
 ond Ingeldes ord forbigdan,  
 forheowan aet Heorote Heaðobeardna þrym (45-49).

*Widsið* in *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp, and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, No. 3 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 149-153.

tell us more about the character and his function. We know that he is Hroðgar's *þyle*, and though we have not yet learned precisely what a *þyle* is, recent criticism accepts those glosses that indicate the meaning is closer to court entertainer, particularly one with a foul mouth, than to trusted advisor.<sup>11</sup> In view of his unreprimanded challenge to Beowulf, his role seems that of a master of the revels, one who gets the story-telling started and challenges tales from the warriors of the *comitatus*.<sup>12</sup>

We know further of Unferð that he is not very good-tempered. He is disgruntled that Beowulf should surpass him, almost certainly in rhetorical skill rather than in heroic deeds. That his address abounds in insults and is couched in a tone of contempt demonstrate a spiteful nature; the end of his speech comes close to being a curse:

ðonne wēne ic tō þē wyrsan gepingea,  
 ðeah þū heaðoræsa gehwær dohte,  
 grimre gūde, gif þū Grendles dearst  
 nihtlongne fyrst nean bīdan (525-28).

[Then I expect for you an even worse outcome,  
 though you may always be strong in the battle-  
 rush, in grim war, if you dare to wait for  
 Grendel's approach throughout the night.]

When, after the defeat of Grendel, the whole court showers Beowulf with praise, we learn:

ðā wæs swīgra secg, sunu Ec[g]lafes,  
 on gylpspræce gūðgeweorca (980-81).

[Then was the son of Ecglafr much quieter  
 in boastful speech about warlike deeds.]

The silenced *þyle* may be stunned speechless by the hero's bold exploit, or he may in fact be withholding comment from peevishness and from disappointment at the failure of his prediction. Neither is an example of appropriate behavior at a polite court.

<sup>11</sup>Eliason, Rosier, and Ogilvy all accept "scurrilous jester" as a gloss of *þyle*, but attach different values to it. Eliason, "The Thyle and Scop;" James L. Rosier, "Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue," *PMLA* 77 (1962), 1-7; J. D. A. Ogilvy, "Unferth: Foil to Beowulf?," *PMLA* 79 (1964), 370-375.

<sup>12</sup>That such an exchange of tales might form part of entertainment in the mead-hall is supported by parallels in *Vainglory* (15-19), and in *Fortunes of Men* (51-57), *The Exeter Book*, pp. 147-149 and 154-156. See also C. L. Wrenn, *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment* (Boston: D. C. Heath, N.D.), "The story of the swimming-contest with Breca . . . is just such an exchange of boastful reminiscence as would be expected among noble warriors over an evening's entertainment" (p. 71). Geoffrey Russom cites a Scandinavian analogue for "such a conversational duel." "A Germanic Concept of Nobility in *The Gifts of Men* and *Beowulf*," *Speculum* 53 (1978), p. 10.

Morton Bloomfield is among those who have seen the culminating act of Unferð, his presentation of Hrunting to help Beowulf, as symbolic of reconciliation and of recognition that the Geat is the better man.<sup>13</sup> Since the poet tells us only that the *eafodes cræftig* Unferð would be afraid to undertake such a venture himself, we may equally well conjecture that the jealous and retributive character knowingly presents a worthless sword in hopes of seeing Beowulf dishonored if not destroyed.<sup>14</sup> The poet shows him to be capable of this petty treachery, but not of the plotting on a grander scale usually attributed to him.

Above all, in any consideration of Unferð, we must recall that he does not disturb the peace at Hroðgar's court either during the action of the poem or, in any way for which we have substantive evidence, later. He does challenge Beowulf rudely, but is quickly reduced to silence by the Geat's rhetorically superior rejoinder. That no member of the court considers this as genuine discord is attested by the envelope pattern that encloses lines 499-606. Immediately before Unferð speaks,

Pegn nytte behēold  
 sē þe on handa bær hroden ealowæge  
 scencte scir wered. Scop hwilum sang  
 hador on Heorote. Pær wæs hæleða dream,  
 duguð unlýtel Dena ond Wedera (494-98).  
 [A thane went about his duties, bearing in  
 his hands the ornamented ale cup and pouring  
 the shining liquid. At the same time the  
 clear-voiced scop sang in Heorot. There were  
 contented heroes, the *duguð* augmented  
 by Danes and Weder-Geats.]

This bliss of heroes is enhanced rather than diminished by the exchange between Beowulf and Unferð.

gēoce gelýfde  
 brego Beorht-Dena; gehýrde on Bēowulfe  
 folces hyrde fæstrædne gēpōht.

<sup>13</sup>Morton W. Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 155-164.

<sup>14</sup>Beowulf disdains a sword (677-87) and defeats Grendel with his mighty hand grip. One might speculate that good manners rather than necessity lead him to accept Hrunting. See Rosier, "Whether by malicious intention or not—which we cannot know from the poem—[the sword] does fail Beowulf at a time of great need, and the poet emphasizes it by verbal repetition" (p. 6).

ðær wæs hæleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode,  
word wæron wynsume (608-12).

[The chief of the Bright-Danes looked forward to relief; the guardian of the people learned of Beowulf's resolute mind. There was the laughter of warriors, the sound rang out, the speech was joyful.]

Looked at in this context the flying becomes a part of the evening's entertainment, along with the ale cup and the scop's song; because it has greater significance for the plot, showing as it does that Beowulf is a master of words as well as of sea monsters, the episode merits fuller attention from the poet.

To sum up, then, what we can know with certainty about Unferð, he is mean-tempered, grudging, and very likely prone to the petty deceptions and pranks that usually accompany such a nature. All of this amounts to excellent reason to believe that the poet's references to Unferð are heavily cloaked in an irony that would be immediately evident to the audience of *Beowulf*. When Beowulf calls him a *wīd-cūþne man* (1489), the reason for his fame is not specified, although the poet's characterization would indicate that he is better known for petulance than for any other trait. Robinson concurs with this in translating the name as "nonsense" or "folly" ("Personal Names," p. 47). I find *Hunferð* more ideally means base-spirited.

As the details of the plot give evidence that the *þyle* is appropriately named *Hunferð*, so do the habits of diction of the poet. While acknowledging that all proper names need not have a meaning that reflects the bearer's personality, there is ample reason to believe that some names are deliberately bestowed to characterize people and things; Heremod, Eofor, and Wulf are frequently cited examples.<sup>15</sup> Further, following a common practice of the poet with such ambiguous words as *fāh*, variously glossed as "gleaming," "stained," and "hostile," and sometimes connoting all at the same time, some proper names are similarly multi-faceted. The prime example of a name illustrating this practice is, perhaps, Heorot, "Hart House," for Hroðgar's hall calls to mind not just the horn shaped gables of the building (82, 704), but also the horn that forms part of the fabric of armor and weapons worn in the hall (2437), the horn that assembles the *comitatus* (1423), the drinking horns that contribute so largely to entertainment within the hall, and probably also a royal standard

<sup>15</sup>Klaeber's glossary provides translations of all proper names.



similar to that found in the Sutton Hoo ship burial.<sup>16</sup> The name of Grendel himself evokes at once his role as destroyer and his habitation at the bottom of the mere.

To these uses of connotation and ambiguity by the *Beowulf* poet must be added more specific practices associated with the elements *un-*, *hun-*, *frīð*, and *ferhð*. There are, of course, no other proper names beginning with *Un-* in the poem. Indeed, Vaughan says that “the name-element *un-* (meaning ‘not’), is not found elsewhere in Old English,” although the occurrence of *Hun-* is frequent and includes several *Hunferðs* (pp. 42, 46). There is in *Beowulf*, moreover, another name in *Hun-*, *Hunlafing*, the warrior of Hengest’s band who appears in the Finn episode (1143). Nicholson has chosen this name to support his return to the manuscript reading, explaining it as a variant of *Hunferth Ecglafing*, and associating it with the savage Huns, a name which “for the eighth century audience must have had exceedingly unpleasant associations” (p. 54). His reading of *Hunferð* as “hun-hearted” or “hun-spirited” in no way conflicts with the view I have outlined of the þyle as an ill-mannered lout.

There is still another reason, one based on syntactic function, for questioning the use of the negative prefix with either *-frīð* or *-ferhð*. There are seventy words formed with *un-* in *Beowulf*, of which Klaeber glosses forty-three as adjectives and nineteen as adverbs; the remaining eight appear to be substantives, but their contexts make it possible to question this identification. It is clearly not the usual practice of the *Beowulf* poet to combine the prefix *un-* with nouns.

A stronger reason for rejecting “un-peace” as a translation of the *þyle*’s name may be drawn from the poem’s tone and the words used to establish it. *Beowulf* is in no sense a poem about peace; the word *freoð* occurs only once as a free morpheme and is found in compounds but eight times. On the other hand, the poem is concerned throughout with the mental states of its characters and their inner response to circumstances, as is witnessed by the frequency with which the poet employs several synonyms for mind, thought, and spirit. *Mōd*, for example, occurs as a simplex in twenty-four places, in another twenty-nine as a compound, and in fourteen as the adjective *modig*. *Sefa* and *hige* follow with fourteen and nine occurrences respectively. *Ferhð* itself appears seven times alone and thirteen as a compound.

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<sup>16</sup>See Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and Other Discoveries* (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1974). Plate 17 shows the drinking horns in the ship-burial deposit. For a discussion of the standard see pp. 7-17.

It is especially significant to note that Unferð's spirit is twice singled out for mention, both times with an ironical thrust. One of these is found in the often cited lines from the scene of celebration in the hall following Beowulf's victory over Grendel:

Swylce þær Unferþ þyle  
 æt fōtum sæt frēan Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his  
*ferhþe* trēowde,  
 þæt he hæfde *mōd* micel (1165-67).  
 [Unferð the *þyle* also sat there, at the feet of  
 the Lord of the Scyldings; each of them trusted  
 in his spirit, for he had much heart.]

Can a poet who is concerned with the genuine spirit of valor possessed by Beowulf, Wiglaf, and other warriors mean seriously to praise the thought or heart of one who has spoken so contemptuously to a visitor at the court and failed pointedly to congratulate him on his success? The earlier words of Beowulf to Unferð should be sufficient answer to the question:

Secge ic þē tō sōðe, sunu Ecglăfes,  
 þæt næfre Gre[n]del swā fela gryra gefremede,  
 atol æglæca ealdre þinum,  
 h̆yndō on Heorote, gif þīn hige wære,  
 sefa swā searogrim, swā þū self talast (590-94).  
 [I tell you truly, son of Ecglăf, that never  
 would the fearful monster Grendel have caused  
 such terror to your prince, such injury to  
 Heorot, if your heart and spirit were as  
 indomitable as you consider them.]

Neither the poet nor the hero intends a compliment to one whose spirit is embittered and churlish rather than brave and honorable. Far more probable is a sarcastic reference to baseness of spirit.

What, then, is a Hun-spirit literally? Dictionaries and glosses offer several possibilities, and provide support for an illuminating play on words. I have already mentioned Nicholson's reading of *Hun* as a direct reference to the savage tribes that terrorized Europe. In its sense of "uncivilized" it obviously applies to the uncouth manners of Unferð at what is certainly a sophisticated court. *Hune, marrubium* or "horehound," is an herb reputed for its bitterness then as it is today.<sup>17</sup> Such

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<sup>17</sup>The word *hune* occurs a number of times in Leechbooks and glosses. See especially Leechbook 1.14, 15, and 45. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. Oswald Cockayne, Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle

an association would surely be made by an audience hearing of the rancorous heart of Unferð. Finally, we must include the obscure word, *hunu* or *hunel*, which apparently means unclean or diseased, perhaps even leprous.<sup>18</sup> All of these pejorative definitions fit well with the personality of Unferð thus far established—rude, bitter, and base—and I believe all connotations were intended by the poet.

Further, taken together with the meaning of *Hun* as an element in proper names, we find not just an onomastic description of personality, but an explanation of the flyting between Beowulf and Unferð. As an Old English name element, *Hun* meant “bear cub.”<sup>19</sup> As we know from the bestiaries, bears “produce a formless foetus, giving birth to something like a bit of pulp, and this the mother-bear arranges into the proper legs and arms by licking it.”<sup>20</sup> Since Beowulf is a “bee-wolf” or “bear” the figurative parallel is clear; the ill-formed cub, by the action of Beowulf’s mouth, is shaped into a less crude, *swiġra secg* (980). The rhetorical contest puts the *þyle* in his place, exposing him as a knave who allows his envy to prevent him from fulfilling properly his real role at court, that of telling a good story. Beowulf, on the other hand, emerges with greater stature than before. The function of a character like Unferð is certainly to show that Beowulf excels not just in his handgrip, but in his perception, wit, and *fæstrædne ġeþoht* (610), and in courtesy as well.

What need have we to search for some mysterious fratricide in the past, or an equally mysterious plot in the future to find that *Hunferð*, who never in any significant way mars the peace, fits his hunnish name in all of its connotations, and that the audience of *Beowulf* would surely have enjoyed the intricate word play involved?

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Ages, No. 35 (London, 1864); and *The Oldest English Texts*, ed. Henry Sweet, Early English Text Society, No. O.S. 83 (London: N. Trubner, 1885), p. 77.

<sup>18</sup>*Tabo: hune vel adle* appears in Thomas Wright, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, 2d ed., ed. R. Wülcker (London, 1884), 502.31. Herbert Dean Meritt explains it as a metathesized version of *unhele*. *Fact and Lore about Old English Words* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1954), 2.B.30.

<sup>19</sup>F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1963) glosses “junger Bär in Pn.” See also Hilmer Ström, *Old English Personal Names in Bede’s History: An Etymological-Phonological Investigation* (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1968), pp. 24-25; and Sweet, p. 529.

<sup>20</sup>T. H. White, *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954), p. 61. See also Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, *Etymologiarum sive Originum* (Oxford: The Univ. Press, 1957), *Vrsus fertur dictur quod ore suo formet fetus, quasi orsus* (12.2.22).

