“**Unferth’s Taunt**”

The exchange between Unferth and Beowulf occurs in the **mead hall**, which, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, was the great hall where a lord or chieftain and his men would gather to drink and boasts of their adventures. Hrothgar’s mead hall was known as **Herot**, and was renowned throughout the region.

Remember that the Anglo-Saxons were a seafaring people. Any adventure or heroic feat involving water would be looked upon with great admiration - the fact that Beowulf competed in a swimming contest would be viewed with great admiration!

**Characterization** - more likely than not, Unferth has known success in battle and, quite understandably, is a little annoyed at all the attention Beowulf is receiving from Hrothgar.

Make note of the **rhetoric** used in the boasting match (a monnon event in the mead halls) - events are nearly always described in **mythic** proportions.

**Aphorism** - “Fate saves the living when they drive away death by themselves…” - this is a wonderful example of the Anglo-Saxon warrior’s impatience with people who attribute losses to supernatural powers, not their own inadequacy!

Unferth’s murder of his own brothers violates *both* Christian and Germanic (pagan) value systems, which condemn fratricide as an abomination.

By casting aspersions on Beowulf’s character and bravery, Unferth leaves himself open to the most humiliating retort of all - that if he were anywhere near as strong and brave as he claims, Grendel would never have dared come to Herot to wreak havoc!

Note the continued juxtaposition of Christian and pagan traditions in the poem, as **fate**(“wyrd”) is mentioned frequently throughout the passage, but then, near the end, Welthow (Hrothgar’s queen) “thanked God for answering her prayers…”

Also in this passage is the use of a literary form, common to Anglo-Saxon verse, called the **kenning** - a compressed metaphor often substituted for a noun in Anglo-Saxon poetry - the phrase is a miniature riddle that implies a comparison in a picturesque way. The kenning usually has two parts and is often hyphenated.