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wine min Unferð: A reconsideration of (supposed) sarcasm in *Beowulf*[1]

Abstract: This paper argues for a reconsideration of the pragmatics of *Beowulf*, specifically in relation to speech in what is known as the 'Unferð Episode', and more generally in terms of the poem's placement in the ethnopragmatic history of English. Previous critics have almost unanimously read sarcasm into Beowulf's treatment of the initially hostile Unferð (e.g. in his address to the latter as *wine min*, 'my friend'), and in turn historical pragmaticists have discussed the poem in relation to Germanic insult-boasts, or flyting. By discussing the relevant contextual and co-textual frames, I show that previous interpretations along these lines have failed to recognize the import of Beowulf's courtly speech.

1. Illocution in *Beowulf*

The (mis)interpretation of verbal irony is a notoriously difficult area of pragmatic inquiry; and one that raises issues in contemporary cross-cultural contexts (e.g. for English-Cantonese encounters see Cheang and Pell 2011), as well as in historical texts (e.g. in the Bible, Friedman 2000; and for Middle English, Williams 2012). For modern readers of *Beowulf,* irony in general is one of the big, unavoidable questions (see most recently Liuzza 2011). And while it is unlikely that we will ever be sure of authorial irony (or lack thereof), I will here contend that it is possible to reconstruct frames of historically feasible interpretation for verbal interaction in the poem as situated within its socio-cultural context and poetic co-text. In general, my stance assumes a syncretic view of *Beowulf* as reflecting a Germanic, probably oral 'heroic' tradition (re)written by a Christian writer (hereafter referred to as the poet) for an increasingly Christianized audience.[2] I also see syncretic issues as presented by the poet through some level of intentional pragmatic ambiguity in particular interactions in the poem. The purpose of such ambiguity, I would argue, is to distinguish between old (e.g. feud-based) and new (courtly) cultural practices; and in this context the poet's most likely favored interpretation should be recoverable. Specifically I will focus on the oft-discussed, yet I would argue widely misinterpreted illocution, or 'tone' of Beowulf's speech in what has come to be referred to as the 'Unferð episode' (lines c.499-612).

The episode occurs almost immediately upon Beowulf's arrival at the Danish court, and in this way is crucial to establishing his purpose, but also his interactional disposition in the courtly setting. From the first Beowulf is exceptional in speech; e.g. in a rare indirect Old English construction, *Ic þe . . . biddan wille* 'I wish to ask you' (426-7; see Kohnen 2011: 243) used to ask Hroðgar permission to cleanse Heorot of Grendel. Beowulf is in turn adamantly accepted by Hroðgar as *wine min Beowulf* 'my friend, Beowulf' (457). But then, just as the newcomer goes to sit at the ale-bench, Hroðgar's man, Unferð, launches a verbal attack (499-501; 506-510; 525-528):

> Unferð maþelode, Ecglafes bearn,
> þe æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga,
> onband beadu-rune [. . .]
> "Eart þu se Beowulf, se þe wið Brecan wunne,
> on sidne sæ ymb sund flite,
> ðær git for wlence wada cunnedon
> ond for dol-gilpe on deop wæter
> aldrum neþdon? [. . .]

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[1] I am grateful to my colleagues Dr. Mark Faulkner, Dr. Conor O'Brien and Prof. James Crossley, as well as the two anonymous reviewers of this paper for their valuable comments and suggestions.

[2] Ongoing debate to do with the date of the poem is less relevant for the arguments that follow, as regardless of how 'early' or 'late' one figures the poem, the syncretic element remains undeniable. For a recent discussion of '*Beowulf* and Conversion History', see Hill (2014).

Đonne wene ic to þe wyrsan geþingea,
ðeah þu heaðo-ræsa gehwær dohte,
grimre guðe, gif þu Grendles dearst
niht-longne fyrst nean bidan."

Unferth made a speech, Ecglaf's offspring, who sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings, unbound concealed hostility . . . "Are you the Beowulf who vied with Breca on the open sea, competed at swimming, where you for pride tested the waters and for foolish boasting ventured your lives in deep water? . . . I expect worse results for you, even if you have acquitted yourself in the rush of battle everywhere, in grim warfare, should you dare experience Grendel close up for the space of a night."[3]

In this way Unferð publically casts doubt on Beowulf's reputation, and suggests he is a reckless boaster and foolish for thinking he can defeat Grendel, regardless of any previous successes in battle (exploits that Unferð describes in mock-praise). This unambiguously antagonistic speech is attributed to Unferð's jealous irritation (501-5), but also reflects 'Germanic etiquette' of flyting wherein a newcomer is verbally tried before being officially accepted (Clover 1980: 451; also Baker 1988). The ritualistic frame also helps explain Hroðgar's complicity in allowing Unferð to commit verbal violence against his guest. Less immediately transparent in its communicative purpose, however, is Beowulf's reply (529-94):

Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes:
"Hwæt! þu worn fela, **wine min Unferð,**
beore druncen ymb Brecan spræce,
sægdest from his siðe. [. . .]
þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,
heafod-mægum; þæs þu in helle scealt
werhðo dreogan, **þeah þin wit duge**.
Secge ic þe to soðe, sunu Ecglafes,
þæt næfre Grendel swa fela gryra gefremede,
atol æglæca, ealdre þinum,
hynðo on Heorote, **gif þin hige wære,**
sefa swa searo-grim, swa þu self talast;

Beowulf made a speech, the offspring of Ecgtheo: "Well, **my friend Unferth**, drunk with grog you have said quite a lot about Breca, told of his exploit . . . though you turned out to be your brother's killer, your closest kinsmen's, for which you will suffer damnation in hell, **clever as you are**. I tell you for a fact, son of Ecglaf, that Grendel would never have caused so much alarm, the terrifying troublemaker, to your ruler, humiliation of Heorot, **if your mind, your spirit were as you yourself regard it**."

Perennial interest in this episode stems from a shared conviction that it informs the poem's 'most enduring puzzles [and involves] the most problematic figure in *Beowulf*: Hunferth' (King 2010: 49). Of interest to the historical pragmaticist, the 'problem' with the episode derives from the communicative significance of Beowulf's response to Unferð's verbal challenge, which we must assess against what is possible and most likely in the medieval context (allowing for the possibility of multiple readings from a medieval perspective as well, of course). Of especial interest here is the way in which Beowulf addresses Unferð using an OE term that at least superficially implies kinship, i.e. *wine min* (530), 'my friend', 'my lord', or 'my lord-friend'. Is Beowulf assuring Unferð that despite any perceived insult to the latter's honor he does indeed desire him as his 'friend'? But then what of the reference to Unferð's fratricide, which not only conjoins with his failure to defeat Grendel but also very explicitly

[3] All *Beowulf* citations and translations are from Fulk (2010).

associates him with the latter by way of the mark of Cain (*Caines cynne* (107))? Conspicuous in its absence is the lack of meta-commentary on Beowulf's illocutionary intent in the surrounding co-text to guide interpretation. Equally ambivalent are descriptions of the immediate perlocutionary effects. Unferð's silence suggests that Beowulf's speech has had some effect, although the cause and import of this are not made explicit. Likewise, we are told that Hroðgar is *on salum* 'content' (607) because of Beowulf's *fæst-rædne geþoht* 'resolute intent' (610), but whether Hroðgar's contentedness results from what he perceives as Beowulf's victory in a Germanic-style contest of insults, or something more (e.g. exceptional faith in the face of faithless adversity?) remains unclear. Even more intriguing is the *hæleþa hleahtor* 'laughter of heroes' (611), when 'there is nothing to suggest the laughter is one of superiority of members of Heorot over Unferð [but] the poet allows the laughter to suggest a kind of "business as usual" that reveals the cracks in the Danish ideals' (Pigg 2010: 210). Certainly, Beowulf never laughs (the only other laughter comes from Grendel (730)), and there is a strong sense that the fictional audience (save perhaps Unferð himself) have somehow missed the point. From the outset then, the meaning of Beowulf's language seems to have been purposefully complicated for the implied audience (i.e. readers/hearers), and a critical eye is cast on verbal behavior and the Danish court.

In his study of 'verbal dueling in heroic narrative', Parks describes Beowulf's address as an 'ironic vocative expression' (1990: 105); and Clark, in a survey of epithets in *Beowulf*, describes what he reads here as the 'obvious ironic tension between the description of Unferþ as a personal friend and the mutually antagonistic behavior between Unferþ and Beowulf that characterizes this part of the story' (2003: 156). Typical glosses found elsewhere include 'taunts' (Bloomfield 1949-51: 412), 'keenly sardonic edge of wit' (Irving 1968: 70), 'sarcastic words' (Clover 1980: 461), 'clearly sarcastic' (Shippey 1993: 116) and Gwara's suggestion that 'in his mocking reaction [. . .] Beowulf calls Hunferð "my friend" quite sarcastically' (2008: 111).[4] Thus it seems clear that the most tempting interpretation for scholars up to this point has been based on framing *wine min Unferð* within present-day Anglo-cultural scripts for sarcastic insult (see Goddard 2006: 85), or the mixed-message of a seemingly positive form (*wine min*) linked to the negative pragmatic function of insult communicating unfriendliness (on sarcasm as a mixed-message see Culpeper 2011: 165-69). Yet, as Taavitsainen and Jucker remind us, 'our modern intuition may often be an unreliable guide [and] the interpretation of irony and politeness requires a large amount of contextual knowledge' (2010: 16-17).

To read this exchange within medieval frames of reference we must reconstruct the ethnopragmatic context and consider the episode co-textually alongside other verbal interaction and meta-communicative detail in this 3,182-word poem. This is significant for an appreciation of *Beowulf* for anyone interested in reading the poem in accordance with its historical moment, but specifically here for our understanding of its position in English pragmatic history. Clover's article (1980) has served as the main authority for previous pragmatic considerations of the Unferð episode, which have read this scene in relation to Germanic flyting and the history of ritualistic insult-boasting (Arnovick 1995: 607-10; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 77-8). But in this paper I will argue that reduction of the Unferð episode to macro-level frames taken solely from a 'Germanic context' is not sufficient to reconstruct the full range of possible, or even the most likely meaning(s) in Beowulf's address. In order to argue for the medieval availability and likelihood of a non-sarcastic interpretation, I will discuss the episode: 1) with reference to medieval understandings of

[4] Orchard uniquely suggests that 'Just as Hrothgar began by courteously addressing Beowulf as his friend (*wine min Beowulf*, line 457b; cf. line 1704b), so too, in the only other occurrence of the phrase, Beowulf extends the courtesy to the distinctly discourteous Unferth (*wine mine Unferð,* line 530b)' (2004: 250). But even in this account there seems to be a suggestion of mock-courtesy, as he describes how Beowulf 'effectively throws Unferth's words back in his face' (249).

verbal irony (especially in Bede); 2) in relation to what would have been an increasingly Christianized Anglo-Saxon court culture with concomitant notions of 'friendship'; and 3) co-textually, in parallel with other instances of '*wine*-ship' and meta-pragmatic commentary, e.g. Beowulf as *modig secg* 'a magnanimous man' (1812). Through a reconsideration of the cultural and textual worlds of Beowulf's speech, I will argue against previous interpretations of verbal irony functioning as insult (i.e. sarcasm), and instead suggest a reading based in Christian courtliness with links to later developments in courtesy. For whereas literary historians have on several occasions recognized the significance of *Beowulf* as evidence for early English courtliness (e.g. Stanley 1998; Burnley 1998: 19), language historians have yet to adequately discuss how this figures into the ethnopragmatic history of English.

2. Macro-discursive context: Irony and Damning?

Clark suggests 'there were differing perceptions of the nature of irony in Anglo-Saxon England' (2003: 22), but it is also clear there is no word in OE that specifically designates the concept. However, there were several contemporaneous classically-derived Latin terms for types of language within the remit of verbal irony (i.e. an attitude attached to specific utterances, and not schematic ironies, such as the dramatic or authorial), namely *ironia*, *sarcasmus* and *antiphrasis* (Knox 1989). *Ironia* in particular appears five times in Anglo-Saxon Latin glossaries: '*ironiam allegoriam* husp hux *hironia* hux' (*MS. Brussels, Royal Library 1650*); '*per hironiam, per allegoriam* hux, hosp' (Aldhelm, *De laude virginitatis*); '*Perhironiam* ðorh hosp' (from Hessels' *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary* (1890)); '*Per hironiam* þurh hucx' (*MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III*); and '*Hironiam* þurh smicernesse & hiwunge' (also in *MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III*) (all located via the *Dictionary of OE Web Corpus*). According to Clark Hall (1960) OE *hūsc/hūx* meant 'mockery, scorn, derision (n.)' and *hosp*, 'reproach, insult, blasphemy (n.)'; *smicernesse*, 'smartness (n.)' and *hīwung,* 'appearance, likeness, form, figure; pretence, hypocrisy; irony'.[5] The most common type of verbal irony employed as mockery in OE poetry comes in the form of ironic echoing. A well-know example of this type is found in the *Battle of Maldon*, wherein Byrhtnoth reappropriates and subverts the Viking messenger's suggestion that instead of battle the East Saxons might pay off their would-be attackers with a tribute-price (OE *gafol*). To this Byrhtnoth replies that his host *willað eow to gafole garas syllan* ('[They] will give you spears for your "tribute"!' (45-6)). Simpkins (1994) also identifies ironic echoing as characteristic of 'sacred flytings' in OE saints' lives. Yet Beowulf's employment of *wine min* cannot be an ironic echo; for the only preceding address-form of *wine* comes in Hroðgar's acceptance of Beowulf (457). Thus echoic irony as insult here would suggest that Beowulf was mocking Hroðgar, and would likewise make nonsense of Hroðgar's ensuing approval.[6] Furthermore, I have yet to identify any clear instances of ironic address elsewhere in OE prose or verse.[7]

The reduction of verbal irony to insult is also complicated by the sole meta-linguistic commentary on *ironia* from Anglo-Saxon England, in Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis* ('Concerning Figures and Tropes'; trans. Tannenhaus 1962). Bede draws heavily from the work of Aelius Donatus, but like Augustine and Jerome is primarily interested in rhetoric as a means of interpreting Christian scripture. His typology for verbal irony includes *ironia*,

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[5] A full corpus analysis of all instances of these potentially meta-communicative terms could possibly reveal further instances of verbal irony or sarcasm in OE; however, reading a sample from the DOEC did not produce any such instances, and a complete qualitative analysis of every corpus hit is beyond the remit of this paper.

[6] The socially positive functions for mock impoliteness (e.g. jocular abuse) are to my knowledge not evidenced anywhere in OE sources. The same cannot be said of Old Norse/Icelandic literature: e.g. see the positive currency of sarcastic insults in *Sneglu-Halla þáttur* (trans. Clark 1997).

[7] Clark (2003) describes many epithetical addresses in *Beowulf* as somehow ironic, but most of these are both radical and conjectural readings.

antiphrasis and *sarcasmus*. Significantly, only the latter is specified as meant to communicate insult. Sarcasm, says Bede, is 'hostile derision, laden with hate' as when onlookers mocked Christ on the cross, '(Matt. 27:42): He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross, and we will believe on him' (trans. Tannenhaus 1962: 116-118). Most interesting is Bede's description of *antiphrasis* (Latin from Clark 2003: 21; trans. Tannenhaus 1962: 116-17):

> Antiphrasis est unius verbi ironia, ut, Matth. xxvi: Amice, ad quid venisti? Inter ironiam et antiphrasin hoc distat, quod ironia pronuntiatione sola indicat quod intelligi vult. Antiphrasis vero, non voce pronuntiantis significat contrarium, sed suis tantum verbis, quorum est origo contraria.
>
> *Antiphrasis* is irony expressed in one word, as for example (Matt. 26:50): *Douay trans.:* Friend, whereto art thou come? Irony and antiphrasis differ in the following respect: irony, from the manner of delivery alone, indicates what it wishes to be understood; antiphrasis does not express a contrary thought through the vocal intonation, but merely through words used with a meaning contrary to their true, original meaning.

Bede's biblical example is almost certainly derived from his reading of Jerome's commentary on Matthew, who likewise glosses Jesus's address to Judas as an example of *antiphrasis* (ed. by Bonnard 1979: 261). Incidentally, this verse also contains an address term similar to *wine* in *Beowulf* - i.e. vocative *amice* in Latin; always translated in this verse as *freond* in the OE gospels, as *wine* seems to have been a strictly poetic word. The potential for irony here is derived from the context, in which Jesus is addressing Judas as the latter delivers his infamous kiss of betrayal.[8] But unlike *ironia* and *sarcasmus*, *antiphrasis* was not typically associated with a 'humorous or derisive tone' or 'mockery' (Knox 1989: 164-66), and it seems unlikely that Bede meant to reduce Jesus's address for Judas to sarcasm - and as we have seen he contrastively attributes *sarcasmus* to Jesus's mocking persecutors (like Unferð, lacking in faith).[9] 'Love your enemies' is unambiguously expressed in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44), and is repeated throughout Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, 'On Christian Doctrine' (a text almost certainly known to Bede and the *Beowulf*-poet, and possibly members of the poem's audience). So if we are to describe Jesus's calling Judas 'friend' as ironic it is unlikely (from Bede's perspective) to be because Jesus does not consider him a friend, but because Jesus continues to consider him a friend *even though* this defies the expectations of pre-Christian ethos given Judas's actions (i.e. 'eye for an eye', Matt. 5:38). From this perspective, the irony is not that the address 'friend' *signifies* its opposite in Jesus's meaning, but rhetorical (hence Bede's citation) in that it *indicates* (*significat*) its contrary (*contrarium*) elsewhere in Judas's betrayal and in the thoughts/norms of the implied audience. Thus the Matthean Jesus offers the lesson 'turn the other cheek' (Matt. 5:39) by remaining 'friendly to his betrayer' (Davies and Allison 1997: 509).[10]

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[8] The semantic and phraseological relationship between *wine* and *freond* in OE, as well as the relationship between Latin *amicitia* ('friendship') and the verb *diligere* ('to love' your enemies in the Sermon on the Mount) are relevant considerations that I cannot pursue here.

[9] It should be admitted that the differences between these forms of speech are not always clear or consistent in medieval rhetoric. And it is of course problematic that Bede does not describe the function of *antiphrasis*. That said, Jerome's teacher, Donatus, seems to specify *antiphrasis* as an irony meant to be interpreted by the audience, rather than as an insult for the addressee (see Knox 1989: 161-62). And Donatus and Jerome would have been two of the most influential sources for Bede.

[10] Equally, although to a PDE reader it may seem as if Jesus condemned Judas in Mark (14:21), Wierzbicka demonstrates this is actually a performance of period cultural scripts to do with compassion and 'woe' (2004: 593-94).

As I will continue to argue in this paper, there is significant potential for interpretive overlap between the kiss scene from *Matthew* and the Unferð episode via 'the kinship values of brotherly kindness and support' emphasized by Hill as characterizing Beowulf's 'new way' of responding to the old traditions (1996: 268). Thus a ready medieval interpretation of Beowulf's speech to Unferð lies generally in its reflection of the teaching 'love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you' (Matt. 5:44), which runs congruently with what King argues by way of parallels in (for example) the *Blickling Homilies* and Alfred's *Pastoral Care* (2010: 57):

> Beowulf is not damning Hunferth [i.e. telling him to 'go to Hell'], but warning him [and] challenges him to alter what would inevitably be his spiritual destiny by casting off his old ways and adopting a new moral code [. . .] Thus underlying the relationship of Beowulf and Hunferth is the model of the Christian act which is perhaps the dearest of all to the hearts of the Anglo-Saxons.

Perhaps King goes too far in suggesting that this act was 'dearest of all to the hearts of the Anglo-Saxons' (if the Christian ethos was absolute, it seems there would be little need to complicate it by putting it into a 'heroic' narrative); but she is right to emphasize its influence. Although the immediate co-text of Beowulf's speech may initially seem to cast doubt on the socially positive functions of the address *wine min*, sarcasm is an unlikely interpretation if one accepts a reading within a syncretic Germanic-Christian context. Any irony is rhetorical in its foregrounding of Beowulf's innovation in the flyting tradition as a way to counteract Unferð's hostile *beadu-rune*. Not only does this support the friendliness that follows (see further below), but it also fits with Beowulf's reference to Unferð's misguided faith in his *hige* ('mind; heart') using a religiously-marked phraseology - i.e. the DOEC reveals that *Secge ic þe to soðe* 'I tell you truly' (590) is a construction used repeatedly in *Ælfric's Homilies* as well as in speeches from *Elene* and *Juliana* in contexts of religious instruction, but *Beowulf* is the only 'secular' poem to contain it. In this way the modern reader must be careful not to read snarky retort into Beowulf's emphatic focus on Christian truth (i.e. unrepentant sinners *do* go to Hell; and those who misplace their faith *will* fail). Yet we should also be conscious that while this ethic of speech suggests Christian models of behavior, it need not be read allegorically (i.e. Beowulf is not Jesus), but is more immediately indicative of the poet's engagement with cultural developments in courtliness.

3. Macro-Cultural Context: Early English Courtesy

The Danish court of *Beowulf* is a setting fraught not just with monsters, but with serious behavioral problems, and 'the poet links threats from the outside with the internal violence of kin-feud' (Jacobs 2011: 32). The pragmatic implications of this are to do with the way in which Beowulf's linguistic skills in addressing the root of the problem internally (i.e. Unferð's violent, fratricidal disposition) are equally, if not more significant next to his martial dispatch of the symbolic, external one (e.g. the murderous Grendelkin):

> The coexistence of martial ethos and Christian piety, with the early forms of courtesy eventually acting as a catalyst between the two, is not a paradox but a natural response to conditions in the earlier Middle Ages [. . .] Messages of this type resounded in *Beowulf* (Scaglione 1991: 144)

The challenge of course lay in the fact that Christian courtliness (which is what Scaglione is referring to above), with its emphasis on goodly peaceful conduct amongst the warrior classes, was not immediately accepted by a Germanic people used to kin structure dominated by tribal warfare, vengeance and feud (see e.g. Campbell 1986: 92-4). Bede describes how King Sigbert's death in the 650s was instigated by his Christian expression of *humilitas* 'humility', which was perceived by the kinsmen who murdered him as being 'too lenient

towards his enemies and too ready to forgive' (III.22). Similar too were the gripes of the Odin-worshipping Starkaðr of Danish legend, described by Clover as 'the grand master of Old Norse poetic invective' (1980: 452), and a notable producer of the 'sarcasm' she finds typical of Germanic flytings. Saxo Grammaticus's version of the Starkaðr episode in Book Six of the *Gesta Danorum* involves repeated sarcasm that purposefully provokes a feud-based bloodbath at the court of Ingeld. Furthermore Beowulf himself comments on Ingeld's court, and while he does not mention Starkaðr by name, his reference to an *æsc-wiga* ('ash-warrior', 2042) using *sarum wordum* ('hurtful talk', 2058) seems to refer to a similar incident in common Germanic narrative history (Brodeur 1959: 177). Beowulf specifically attributes the instigation of this feud to ill-minded speech to a younger courtier, whom the ash-warrior disingenuously addresses as *min wine* (2047), for which reason Beowulf distrusts *Denum unfæcne freondscipe* 'unfeigned friendship with the Danes' (2068-9). Here Beowulf provides an example of how traditionally-minded heroic speech (outwardly friendly, but bent on prideful vengeance) might prove highly disruptive to courtly stability - a concern also at the heart of the OE *Homiletic Fragment (I)* which describes those *gefylled mid facne* 'filled with treachery' who speak *smeðne syb-cwide, ond in siofan innan þurh deofles cræft dyrne wunde* 'smooth words of friendship, and [hold] in their hearts secret wounds, through the devil's scheming', while also praising one who *soðlice sybbe healde* 'genuinely upholds friendship' (17, 29-30, 38; trans. Jones 2012). The question of sincerity here is another thorny issue (well beyond this paper),[11] but the practical benefits of such an ethos are clear. Jaeger argues that such was the motivation for installing 'courtier bishops' to educate the warrior classes, wherein 'the first rule of court behavior is: maintain unbroken cheerfulness, calm, and amicability. Even disputes must be resolved within the confines of this rule' (1985: 39). And while 'cheerful' is too far a stretch for the Unferð episode, it is highly plausible that just such a figure (re)wrote the poem (i.e. a religious man with court connections), and certainly Beowulf's performance of, and specific concerns to do with speech could be said to prefigure what becomes widespread in later medieval English chivalric culture (e.g. as suggested by Scaglione (above) and in the diachronic summary of English politeness by Jucker 2012).

As stated previously, Clover (1980) frames the Unferð episode as a typical instance of Germanic 'etiquette', like those evidenced in several Old Norse texts depicting pagan courts. But in this respect the pagan context cannot be sidelined; and it is noteworthy that the later Christian courts depicted in the *Gesta Danorum* are strikingly different in terms of their ethnopragmatics from the verbally and physically violent ones of Ingeld and others: e.g. we are told in Book Ten that the early Christian King Canute employed one Opo of Seeland to 'set law and a spirit of brotherly love [*caritas* in Saxo's Latin] as a most severe guardian over the quarrelsome spirit of the knights' (from Jaeger 1985: 137-138). So while it must be maintained that the Germanic context informs the Unferð episode, it is not absolute, and I would again argue alongside King who contends that '[Clover] does not address the differences in emphasis and tone between the Old Norse texts and *Beowulf*, and these differences are more significant than the similarities' (2010: 51). Cultural context is crucial here, and in addition to King's emphasis on religious analogues one must consider the Unferð episode as an interaction that epitomizes the ethnopragmatic motivations for the early stages of Germanic-Christian courtesy, particularly as flyting often leads to physical violence in pre-Christian narratives, and, as Baker observes of Unferð's *beadu-rune* 'the words are themselves a form of violence' (1988: 13), which are also linked (by Beowulf) to his homicidal past. From this perspective, Beowulf reappropriates the discursive frame of flyting initiated by Unferð to communicate something new (i.e. syncretic) wherein the employment of *wine* may be seen as integrating Germanic kinship and Christian ethos in a way that suggests knightly 'Christian brothers in arms'. In the next section, I will show how the poet further supports these themes via a network of *wine*-forms, and in descriptions of Beowulf's relationship with language.

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[11] I am currently researching the ideological-linguistic currency of sincerity in Old English.

4. Co-text: the *wine*-lexeme

There are many Old English address terms that might be categorized within the broad PDE semantic field of FRIEND. By far the most common in *Beowulf* is *wine*, defined by Clark Hall as 'friend, protector, lord'.[12] Romano elaborates *wine* as a 'friend and lord whose functions are mainly restricted to the domain of war' (1996: 346); but while this may capture some of its sense, Romano's method of ostensibly cognitive categorization is based on a reduction of such terms to a cultural frame of the clan-based 'vassalage structure (*Gefolgschaft*) of traditional Germanic culture' (343). This is a highly problematic assumption for almost all surviving OE literature, for the extent to which any of these texts might be seen as straightforwardly reflecting 'traditional Germanic culture' is extremely doubtful. In this sense it is also significant that by the time we have evidence for OE writing *wine* was a purely poetic form (Clark Hall 1960), and by extension its usage must necessarily be associated with forwarding new ideas/practices in a not entirely traditional context, i.e. a monastic and/or courtly one (on authorship see Bjork and Obermeier 1996). Kohnen has discussed the way in which cultural change may have affected Old English address terms such as *broþor*, wherein 'the patterns may have developed away from defiant proud provocation of the heroic world towards Christian models of *humilitas* [humility] and *caritas* [compassion; love]' (2008: 143). To use *broþor* as an address term in *Beowulf* would have been inappropriate due to the form's restriction to holy orders, but shifts in address term usage (as per Kohnen) combined with the Christian context of the (re)writing and reception of the poem could support a contemporary interpretation that would recognize the fictional artifice (i.e. the strictly poetic *wine*) being exploited to conjoin the old and the new. Again, this syncretism might be glossed as 'Christian brothers in arms' amidst the poet's depiction of (hopes for?) a courtliness that predates, but also prefigures ideals more commonly associated with post-Conquest England.

The *wine*-lexeme occurs a total of thirty-nine times in the poem, including both singular (e.g. *wine min*) and compound (e.g. *winemagas* 'friends, kinsmen') forms. The first instance comes at line 30, *wine Scyldinga* as an effigial reference to Scyld, and the last at line 3175, *winedryhten* in reference to Beowulf at his funeral. The intervening co-textual repetitions of *wine* are important to interpreting what Beowulf means in his initial (and only) direct address for Unferð at line 530, and also for the way in which the poem formally, via a textualized network of *wine*-words suggests those values outlined in previous sections. As is evident from Beowulf's quoting of the ash-warrior (2047; 2068-9), 'friendship' and its enactment through the address term *wine* is not to be taken lightly. The one occurrence of *wine*-ship as an abstract noun in OE writings occurs at a profoundly affective moment between Guthlac and his disciple in *Guthlac B*: *Læst ealle well wære ond winescype, word þa wit sprœcon, leofast manna* 'Carry out well all the promise and friendship, the words we two have spoken, dearest of men' (1171-1173; trans. Bjork 2013).[13] And in fact the concept of *wine*-ship (via the lexeme) is engaged at every thematic intersection in *Beowulf*: in kingship (e.g. *wine Deniga* 'lord-friend of the Danes' (350)), in spoken address (as we have seen), and in relation to seemingly external threats (e.g. Grendel is described as *winigea leasum* 'friendless' (1664) and the hoarder of treasure is *wine-geomor* 'disconsolate over friends' (2239)). The lexico-semantic link to theme is perhaps most profoundly evident after the sword-exchange between Unferð and Beowulf - although some preceding text is needed to appreciate the eventual

[12] Bosworth-Toller lists the general meaning of *wine* as 'friend', but more specifically demonstrates how the form was used in exchanges between 'equals' (for which it cites Beowulf's address to Unferð), when addressing 'a friendly lord, a (powerful) friend', and when speaking to 'one to whom favour or protection may be shewn'.
I do not have space here to discuss other kinship terms for 'friend' in *Beowulf*; but such a study would be very helpful in further illuminating this central theme.

[13] *Wine* is also an address form used several times in *Guthlac B*; including one occurrence of the phrase *wine min* (1227).

description of Unferð's sword as *guð-wine* 'war-friend' (1810). The exchange occurs when Unferð offers his family's sword to Beowulf before he sets out to the den of the Grendelkin (1455-68):

> wæs þæm hæft-mece Hrunting nama;
> þæt wæs an foran eald-gestreona;
> ecg wæs iren, ater-tanum fah,
> ahyrded heaþo-swate; Næfre hit æt hilde ne swac
> manna ængum þara þe hit mid mundum bewand,
> se ðe gryre-siðas gegan dorste,
> folc-stede fara. [. . .]
> Huru ne gemunde mago Ecglafes,
> eafoþes cræftig, þæt he ær gespræc
> wine druncen, þa he þæs wæpnes onlah
> selran sweord-frecan.

> the name of that hilted sword was Hrunting; it was uniquely foremost of heirlooms; the blade was iron, painted with poison-twigs, hardened in battle sweat; in warfare it had never failed anyone who had wrapped his hands around it [. . .] Certainly, the son of Ecglaf, skillful in his strength, did not [have in mind] what he had said, intoxicated with wine, when he lent that weapon to the better swordsman;

I fully agree with Baker that '*gemunde* cannot mean "remembered" [. . .] Rather [it] means "had in mind". Unferth does not now harbour the angry and envious thoughts he had before; rather, his thoughts are friendly' (2013: 95). Beowulf accepts in turn, and before embarking announces that if he dies in the attempt (1488-1491):

> [. . .] þu Unferð læt ealde lafe,
> wrætlic wæg-sweord, wid-cuðne man
> heard-ecg habban. Ic me mid Hruntinge
> dom gewyrce, oþðe mec deað nimeð.

> let Unferth, that widely known man, have the old inheritance, splendid, hard-edged wave-sword; I shall get myself glory with Hrunting, or death will take me

Clearly reconciliation has taken place for Beowulf to bequeath his own sword to Unferð. But as Beowulf reports publically on his return after defeating Grendel's mother (1659-60; 1807-12):

> Ne meahte ic æt hilde mid Hruntinge
> wiht gewyrcan, þeah þæt wæpen duge;
> [. . .]
> Heht þa se hearda Hrunting beran
> sunu Ecglafes, heht his sweord niman,
> leoflic iren; sægde him þæs leanes þanc,
> cwæð, he þone guð-wine godne tealde,
> wig-cræftigne, nales wordum log
> meces ecge; þæt wæs modig secg.

> With Hrunting I could not accomplish anything in the fight, though the weapon is good [. . .] The hardy man directed that Hrunting be brought to the son of Ecglaf, told him to take his sword, the valued iron; he offered thanks to him for the loan, said, he regarded that war-friend good, strong in battle, by no means explicitly found fault with the sword's edge; that was a magnanimous man.

Again, pragmatically intriguing words. That Beowulf's speech about Hrunting implies Unferð the man derives from the fact that in Anglo-Saxon culture the sword was symbolic of its owner (Hughes 1977: 394), but also by way of verbal echoing back to Beowulf's original speech to Unferð. Previous scholars have explained the relational developments between Beowulf and Unferð in terms of a Germanic 'economy of honour' (Baker 2013: 77-102) and/or Christian conversion (King 2010), but again the pragmatics through which such processes are effected have yet to be accounted for. Significantly, the phrasing here includes verbal echoes back to Beowulf's original reply to Unferð, particularly when he qualifies the uselessness of Hrunting by stating *þeah þæt wæpen duge* 'though the weapon were good' (1660), which echoes *þeah þin wit duge* 'though your wit were good' (589). The suggestion that Beowulf originally meant to offer sarcastic praise of Unferð's wit as *duge* (implied by previously mentioned critics) is nonsensical, and Silber (1981) has shown that Beowulf bases much of his (albeit superior) reply on the rhetorical structures set out by his assailant. What is more is how Beowulf tells Unferð that he considers the sword (and by extension, Unferð himself) as a *guð-wine* 'war-friend', and the poet glosses this speech to make it clear that Beowulf does not verbally reproach the sword. This is key in understanding the ethos of Beowulf, and the fact that the poet feels the need to provide explanation evidences its being exceptional in its context (i.e. what is the point of praising a useless sword?). Baker suggests that Beowulf praises Hrunting so as not to offend the Danish nobility (2013: 92), but I would add that he goes out of his way to acknowledge Unferð's caustic rhetorical skill in parallel with Hrunting's poison-handled strength to clarify how both are limited to pre-Christian modes of behavior, i.e. traditions of verbal and physical violence no longer suitable to a changing court culture. Thus 'it would seem that the poet, while prizing the heroic code for its martial virtues, is striving toward a new kind of hero, not explicitly Christian but freed from the internecine violence constituting the traditional Germanic narrative' (Jacobs 2011: 61-62). This is why Beowulf is so explicit about Unferð and Hrunting's shared shortcomings, not because he wishes to insult them or be seen as witty and sarcastic, but because the poem reflects a transitional period of martial and courtly ethos; and the poet requires such foils in order to exhibit in-context the significance of Beowulf's pragmatic innovations. Helpfully the poet informs us that the reason Beowulf behaves this way is because *þæt wæs modig secg*, 'that was a magnanimous man' (1812) - a description that echoes Grendel and by implication Unferð as *sinninge secg* 'sinful man' (1379). *Modig* was a polysemous word in OE, and could mean 'magnanimous' (as it is translated in Fulk 2010) or 'noble-minded', but also 'bold, brave, courageous (physically or morally)' (which is the sense Bosworth-Toller attributes to line 1812 in *Beowulf*) or even 'arrogant' (Clark Hall 1960). That said, I do not agree with those who would suggest that the pejorative meaning is being engaged by the poet here. The 'magnanimous' reading is further supported by the fact that Beowulf's martial exploits are qualified, and actually outweighed by praise of his being *wis word-cwida* 'judicious of speech' (1845); he *ne sohte searo-niðas, ne me swor fela aða on unriht* 'did not go looking for unwarranted aggression, did not swear multitudes of oaths of injustice' (2738-2739); a *winia bealdor* 'leader of friends' (2567) who ruled through *freond-larum* 'benign instruction'; and in his final epitaph the Geats *cwædon þæt he wære wyruld-cyninga manna mildust ond mon-ðwærust* 'said that of worldly kings he was the most benevolent of men and the kindest' (3180-3181).

That *wine*-ship with Unferð be enacted through verbal politesse is of course important to developments in Anglo-Saxon culture, but also (in the poem) to avoid the monstrous results of feud and the creation of unfriends. Specifically, Unferð is linked to the Grendelkin through the mark of Cain, but Beowulf, as a 'leader of friends' works successfully (at least in the time of the poem's narrative) to keep Unferð within the fold of mutual *wine*-ship and prevent him becoming analogue to the *wine*-less monsters who dwell in hells on Earth. In this way, not only is the link between internal and external threat established in the 'poet's placement of episodes of tribal feud and family conflict' (Jacobs 2011: 32), but also via the lexical-poetic network of *wine*-forms in a way that links relationships between men and the monsters that simultaneously oppose and represent them. This formal repetition lends itself to the message

that what appears to be an external threat (*wine*-less monsters) is actually a manifestation of the internal feud and fratricide at the heart of the Danish court. Crucially, the latter cannot be addressed through the old ways (like Unferð, *wid-cuðne* 'widely known' (1489) but seriously flawed), but require the eventual acceptance of new trends in courtesy epitomized in Beowulf's treatment of Unferð. It is this that the Danish court fails to realize at first when they laugh after Beowulf's original speech, so set are they on 'matters that show a lack of concern for the real problems in Heorot' (Pigg 2010: 210).

5. Conclusion

Although my purpose in this paper has been to argue for one interpretation of Beowulf's speech, I would like to emphasize that I continue to recognize the availability of other interpretations for medieval and modern readers alike. Reading Beowulf's address to Unferð as sarcastic may have been as attractive to some of the poem's medieval audience as it has proven for the vast majority of modern-day scholars. Clearly some of the implied audience, perhaps laughing alongside the drunken Danes, may have been implicated by the poet's ambiguous presentation. But surely ambiguity is intentional and should be recognized as part of the artistry of *Beowulf* as social commentary, particularly if we consider it as a reflection on the pragmatic difficulties of transition in the courtly environments of its day. Having said that, I think that given the discursive, socio-cultural and textual contexts of Beowulf's speech discussed here, it seems most likely that the poet and perhaps much of his audience would have favored interpretations that seemed innovative at the time, even if the poem simultaneously maintains aspects of a heroic past.

That such innovation extends to pragmatics is not surprising, and also helps make sense of the previously discussed indirect directive to Hroðgar, *Ic þe . . . biddan wille* (426-27; Kohnen 2011: 243) and the sermon-like *Secge ic þe to soðe* (590) to Unferð. Nor is the significance localized to these utterances alone. By recognizing *Beowulf* as a poem concerned with previously non-traditional values associated with Christian courtliness, we may move beyond limiting the scope of the Unferð episode to ritualized boast-insults in the flyting tradition and the over-emphasis on 'self-assertion, self-praise and even provocation' in 'secular heroic poetry' (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 168). Furthermore, the close reading of a key text in its entirety in this case pushes our view of the Anglo-Saxon period beyond the mostly quantitative studies that, while providing invaluable macro-information, have up to this point lacked the qualitative focus needed to get past glossing the period as one 'beyond politeness' (see Kohnen 2011: 251; and for a summary Jucker 2012: 425-6). For if we accept *Beowulf* as one of, if not the best piece of evidence we have for Anglo-Saxon courtly culture and the linguistic performances possible therein, reorientating our view of the pragmatic possibilities of the text has significant implications for the way in which we characterize courtliness and courtesy in the long history of English.

In short, when Beowulf replies to the initial antagonism presented by Unferð, we must recognize not just an individual opposition between two warriors in a Germanic context, but also a meeting of that context vis-à-vis the then relatively new Christian one tied to developments in courtesy. To maintain the sarcastic reading here I would argue is akin to taking part in the troubled laughter at Heorot. We continue to entertain ourselves at the expense of missing the point.

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