

IN ADDITION →

AFTER
LINE 124
PAGE 36

- 125 Then they sailed, set their ship
Out on the waves, under the cliffs.
Ready for what came they wound through the currents,
The seas beating at the sand, and were borne
In the lap of their shining ship, lined
- 130 With gleaming armor, going safely
In that oak-hard boat to where their hearts took them.
The wind hurried them over the waves,
The ship foamed through the sea like a bird
Until, in the time they had known it would take,
- 135 Standing in the round-curved prow they could see
Sparkling-hills, high and green,
Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing
In those rock-steep cliffs they quietly ended
Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, the Geats
- 140 Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it
In place, mail shirts and armor rattling
As they swiftly moored their ship. And then
They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.
High on a wall a Danish watcher
- 145 Patrolling along the cliffs saw
The travelers crossing to the shore, their shields
Raised and shining; he came riding down,
Hrothgar's lieutenant, spurting his horse,
Needing to know why they'd landed, these men
- 150 in armor. Shaking his heavy spear
In their faces he spoke:
"Whose soldiers are you,
You who've been carried in your deep-keeled ship
Across the sea-road to this country of mine?
Listen! I've stood on these cliffs longer
- 155 Than you know, keeping our coast free
Of pirates, raiders sneaking ashore
From their ships, seeking our lives and our gold.
None have ever come more openly—
And yet you've offered no password, no sign
- 160 From my prince, no permission from my people for your
landing
Here. Nor have I ever seen,
Out of all the men on earth, one greater
Than has come with you; no commoner carries
Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,
- 165 Are both lies. You! Tell me your name,
And your father's; no spies go further onto Danish
Soil than you've come already. Strangers,
From wherever it was you sailed, tell it,
And tell it quickly, the quicker the better.
- 170 I say, for us all. Speak, say
Exactly who you are, and from where, and why."

3. Healfdane's (há' alf
den' nez) son: Hrothgar.

4. Higlac's (hig' laks):
Higlac was the king of the
Geats (gá' ats) and
Beowulf's feudal lord and
uncle.

Their leader answered him, Beowulf unlocking
Words from deep in his breast:

"We are Geats,

Men who follow Higlac. My father
175 Was a famous soldier, known far and wide
As a leader of men. His name was Edgetho.
His life lasted many winters;
Wise men all over the earth surely
Remember him still. And we have come seeking
180 Your prince, Healfdane's son, protector
Of this people, only in friendship: instruct us.
Watchman, help us with your words! Our errand
Is a great one, our business with the glorious king
Of the Danes no secret; there's nothing dark
185 Or hidden in our coming. You know (if we've heard
The truth, and been told honestly) that your country
Is cursed with some strange, vicious creature
That hunts only at night and that no one
Has seen. It's said, watchman, that he has slaughtered
190 Your people, brought terror to the darkness. Perhaps
Hrothgar can hunt, here in my heart,
For some way to drive this devil out—
If anything will ever end the evils
Afflicting your wise and famous lord.
195 Here he can cool his burning sorrow.
Or else he may see his suffering go on
Forever, for as long as Herot towers
High on your hills."

The mounted officer

Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:

200 "A soldier should know the difference between words
And deeds, and keep that knowledge clear
In his brain. I believe your words, I trust in
Your friendship. Go forward, weapons and armor
And all, on into Denmark. I'll guide you
205 Myself—and my men will guard your ship,
Keep it safe here on our shores,
Your fresh-tarred boat, watch it well,
Until that curving prow carries
Across the sea to Geatland a chosen
210 Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature
Haunting our people, who survives that horror
Unhurt, and goes home bearing our love."
Then they moved on. Their boat lay moored,
Tied tight to its anchor. Glittering at the top
215 Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,
Shining decorations, swinging as they marched,
Erect like guards, like sentinels, as though ready
To fight. They marched, Beowulf and his men
And their guide, until they could see the gables
220 Of Herot, covered with hammered gold
And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all dwellings,
Towering majestic, its glittering roofs
Visible far across the land.
Their guide reined in his horse, pointing
225 To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best
And bravest of his men; the path was plain,
They could see their way . . .

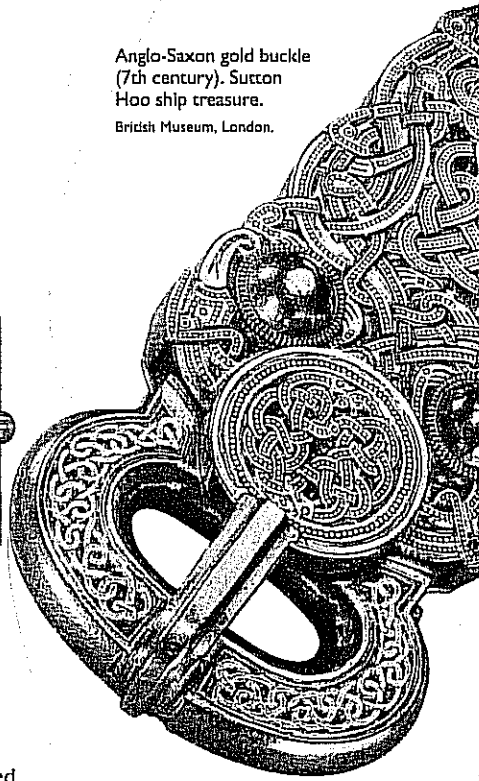
AFTER
LINE 232
PAGE 39

Unferth's Challenge

6

- Unferth spoke, Ecglaf's son,
Who sat at Hrothgar's feet, spoke harshly
2 35 And sharp (vexed by Beowulf's adventure,
By their visitor's courage, and angry that anyone
In Denmark or anywhere on earth had ever
Acquired glory and fame greater
Than his own):
- "You're Beowulf, are you—the same
2 40 Boastful fool who fought a swimming
Match with Brecca, both of you daring
And young and proud, exploring the deepest
Seas, risking your lives for no reason
But the danger? All older and wiser heads warned you
2 45 Not to, but no one could check such pride.
With Brecca at your side you swam along
The sea-paths, your swift-moving hands pulling you
Over the ocean's face. Then winter
Churned through the water, the waves ran you
2 50 As they willed, and you struggled seven long nights
To survive. And at the end victory was his,
Not yours. The sea carried him close
To his home, to southern Norway, near
The land of the Brondings, where he ruled and was loved,
2 55 Where his treasure was piled and his strength protected
His towns and his people. He'd promised to outswim you:
Bonstan's son^o made that boast ring true.
You've been lucky in your battles, Beowulf, but I think
Your luck may change if you challenge Grendel,
2 60 Staying a whole night through in this hall,
Waiting where that fiercest of demons can find you."
Beowulf answered, Edgeth's great son:
"Ah! Unferth, my friend, your face

Anglo-Saxon gold buckle
(7th century). Sutton
Hoo ship treasure.
British Museum, London.



257. Bonstan's son: Brecca.

WORDS TO OWN

vexed (vekst) *adj.*: highly annoyed.

- Is hot with ale, and your tongue has tried
265 To tell us about Brecca's doings. But the truth
Is simple: No man swims in the sea
As I can, no strength is a match for mine.
As boys, Brecca and I had boasted—
We were both too young to know better—that we'd risk
270 Our lives far out at sea, and so
We did. Each of us carried a naked
Sword, prepared for whales or the swift
Sharp teeth and beaks of needlefish.
He could never leave me behind, swim faster
275 Across the waves than I could, and I
Had chosen to remain close to his side.
I remained near him for five long nights,
Until a flood swept us apart;
The frozen sea surged around me,
2 80 It grew dark, the wind turned bitter, blowing
From the north, and the waves were savage. Creatures
Who sleep deep in the sea were stirred
Into life—and the iron hammered links
Of my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal
2 85 Woven across my breast, saved me
From death. A monster seized me, drew me
Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws
Tight in my flesh. But fate let me
Find its heart with my sword, hack myself
2 90 Free; I fought that beast's last battle,
Left it floating lifeless in the sea.

- "Other monsters crowded around me,
Continually attacking. I treated them politely,
Offering the edge of my razor-sharp sword.
A 295 But the feast, I think, did not please them, filled
Their evil bellies with no banquet-rich food;
Thrashing there at the bottom of the sea;
By morning they'd decided to sleep on the shore,
Lying on their backs, their blood spilled out
300 On the sand. Afterwards, sailors could cross
That sea-road and feel no fear; nothing
Would stop their passing. Then God's bright beacon
Appeared in the east, the water lay still,
And at last I could see the land, wind-swept
B 305 Cliff walls at the edge of the coast. Fate saves
The living when they drive away death by themselves!
Lucky or not, nine was the number
Of sea-huge monsters I killed. What man,
Anywhere under Heaven's high arch, has fought
310 In such darkness, endured more misery, or been harder
Pressed? Yet I survived the sea, smashed
The monsters' hot jaws, swam home from my journey.
The swift-flowing waters swept me along
And I landed on Finnish soil. I've heard
C 315 No tales of you, Unferth, telling
Of such clashing terror, such contests in the night!
Brecca's battles were never so bold;
Neither he nor you can match me—and I mean
No boast, have announced no more than I know
320 To be true. And there's more: You murdered your brothers,
Your own close kin. Words and bright wit
Won't help your soul; you'll suffer hell's fires,
D Unferth, forever tormented. Ecglaf's
Proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart
325 As fierce as you think it, no fool would dare
To raid your hall, ruin Herot
And oppress its prince, as Grendel has done.
But he's learned that terror is his alone,
Discovered he can come for your people with no fear
330 Of reprisal; he's found no fighting, here,
But only food, only delight.
He murders as he likes, with no mercy, gorges
And feasts on your flesh, and expects no trouble,
No quarrel from the quiet Danes. Now
335 The Geats will show him courage, soon

WORDS TO OWN

reprisal (ri·pri'zəl) *n.*: punishment in return for an injury.

He can test his strength in battle. And when the sun
 Comes up again, opening another
 bright day from the south, anyone in Denmark
 who enters this hall: That evil will be gone!"
 340 Hrothgar, gray-haired and brave, sat happily
 listening, the famous ring-giver sure,
 At least, that Grendel could be killed; he believed
 in Beowulf's bold strength and the firmness of his spirit.
 There was the sound of laughter, and the cheerful clanking
 345 of cups, and pleasant words. Then Welthow,
 Hrothgar's gold-ringed queen, greeted
 the warriors; a noble woman who knew
 what was right, she raised a flowing cup
 to Hrothgar first, holding it high
 350 for the lord of the Danes to drink, wishing him
 joy in that feast. The famous king
 drank with pleasure and blessed their banquet.
 Then Welthow went from warrior to warrior,
 pouring a portion from the jeweled cup
 355 for each, till the bracelet-wearing queen
 had carried the mead-cup among them and it was Beowulf's
 turn to be served. She saluted the Geats'
 Great prince, thanked God for answering her prayers,
 for allowing her hands the happy duty
 360 of offering mead to a hero who would help
 her afflicted people. He drank what she poured,
 Edgetho's brave son, then assured the Danish
 Queen that his heart was firm and his hands
 ready:
 "When we crossed the sea, my comrades
 365 And I, I already knew that all
 My purpose was this: to win the good will
 Of your people or die in battle, pressed
 by Grendel's fierce grip. Let me live in greatness
 And courage, or here in this hall welcome
 My death!"
 370 Welthow was pleased with his words,
 His bright-tongued boasts; she carried them back
 to her lord, walked nobly across to his side.
 The feast went on, laughter and music
 And the brave words of warriors celebrating
 375 their delight. Then Hrothgar rose, Healfdane's
 Son, heavy with sleep; as soon
 As the sun had gone, he knew that Grendel
 would come to Herot, would visit that hall
 when night had covered the earth with its net
 380 and the shapes of darkness moved black and silent
 through the world. Hrothgar's warriors rose with him.
 He went to Beowulf, embraced the Geats'
 Brave prince, wished him well, and hoped
 That Herot would be his to command. And then
 He declared:
 385 "No one strange to this land
 Has ever been granted what I've given you,
 No one in all the years of my rule.
 Make this best of all mead-halls yours, and then
 Keep it free of evil, fight
 390 With glory in your heart! Purge Herot
 And your ship will sail home with its treasure-holds full." . . .

*The feast ends. Beowulf and his men take the place of
 Hrothgar's followers and lie down to sleep in Herot.
 Beowulf, however, is wakeful, eager to meet his enemy.*

5

The Battle with Grendel's Mother

Beowulf resolves to kill the "lady monster." Arriving at the lake under which she lives, Beowulf and his companions see serpents in the water and sea beasts on the rocks. The young hero kills one of the beasts with an arrow and then prepares to fight with Grendel's mother.

Then Edgetho's brave son' spoke:

"Remember,

450

Hrothgar, Oh knowing king, now

When my danger is near, the warm words we uttered,

And if your enemy should end my life

Then be, oh generous prince, forever

The father and protector of all whom I leave

455

Behind me, here in your hands, my beloved

Comrades left with no leader, their leader

Dead. And the precious gifts you gave me,

My friend, send them to Higlac. May he see

In their golden brightness, the Geats' great lord

460

Gazing at your treasure, that here in Denmark

I found a noble protector, a giver

Of rings whose rewards I won and briefly

Relished. And you, Unferth,² let

My famous old sword stay in your hands:

I shall shape glory with Hrunting, or death

Will hurry me from this earth!"

465

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's

Answer;

As his words ended

1. Edgetho's brave son: Beowulf. Elsewhere he is identified by such phrases as "the Geats' proud prince" and "the Geats' brave prince." These different designations add variety and interest to the poem.

2. Unferth: A Danish warrior who had questioned Beowulf's bravery before the battle with Grendel.