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# BEOWULF

A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION

SEAMUS HEANEY



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## *Introduction*

*And now this is 'an inheritance' —  
Upright, rudimentary, unshiftable planked  
In the long ago, yet willable forward*

*Again and again and again.*

### **BEOWULF: THE POEM**

The poem called *Beowulf* was composed sometime between the middle of the seventh and the end of the tenth century of the first millennium, in the language that is to-day called Anglo-Saxon or Old English. It is a heroic narrative, more than three thousand lines long, concerning the deeds of a Scandinavian prince, also called Beowulf, and it stands as one of the foundation works of poetry in English. The fact that the English language has changed so much in the last thousand years means, however, that the poem is now generally read in translation and mostly in English courses at schools and universities. This has contributed to the impression that it was written (as Osip Mandelstam said of *The Divine Comedy*) "on official paper," which is unfortunate, since what we are dealing with is a work of the greatest imaginative vitality, a masterpiece where the structuring of the tale is as elaborate as the beautiful contrivances of its language. Its narrative elements may belong to a previous age but as a work of art it lives in its own continuous present, equal to our knowledge of reality in the present time.

The poem was written in England but the events it describes are set in Scandinavia, in a "once upon a time" that is partly historical. Its hero, Beowulf, is the biggest presence among the warriors in the land of the Geats, a territory situated in what is now southern Sweden, and early in the poem Beowulf crosses the sea to the land of the Danes in order to clear their country of a man-

eating monster called Grendel. From this expedition (which involves him in a second contest with Grendel's mother) he returns in triumph and eventually rules for fifty years as king of his homeland. Then a dragon begins to terrorize the countryside and Beowulf must confront it. In a final climactic encounter, he does manage to slay the dragon, but he also meets his own death and enters the legends of his people as a warrior of high renown.

We know about the poem more or less by chance because it exists in one manuscript only. This unique copy (now in the British Library) barely survived a fire in the eighteenth century and was then transcribed and titled, retranscribed and edited, translated and adapted, interpreted and reinterpreted, until it has become canonical. For decades it has been a set book on English syllabuses at university level all over the world. The fact that many English departments require it to be studied in the original continues to generate resistance, most notably at Oxford University, where the pros and cons of the inclusion of part of it as a compulsory element in the English course have been debated regularly in recent years.

For generations of undergraduates, academic study of the poem was often just a matter of construing the meaning, getting a grip on the grammar and vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon, and being able to recognize, translate, and comment upon random extracts which were presented in the examinations. For generations of scholars too the interest had been textual and philological; then there developed a body of research into analogues and sources, a quest for stories and episodes in the folklore and legends of the Nordic peoples which would parallel or foreshadow episodes in *Beowulf*. Scholars were also preoccupied with fixing the exact time and place of the poem's composition, paying minute attention to linguistic, stylistic, and scribal details. More generally, they tried to establish the history and genealogy of the dynasties of Swedes and Geats and Danes to which the poet makes constant allusion; and they devoted themselves to a consideration of the world-view behind the poem, asking to what

extent (if at all) the newly Christian understanding of the world which operates in the poet's designing mind displaces him from his imaginative at-homeness in the world of his poem—a pagan Germanic society governed by a heroic code of honour, one where the attainment of a name for warrior-prowess among the living overwhelms any concern about the soul's destiny in the afterlife.

However, when it comes to considering *Beowulf* as a work of literature, there is one publication that stands out. In 1936, the Oxford scholar and teacher J.R.R. Tolkien published an epoch-making paper entitled "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*" which took for granted the poem's integrity and distinction as a work of art and proceeded to show in what this integrity and distinction inhered. He assumed that the poet had felt his way through the inherited material—the fabulous elements and the traditional accounts of an heroic past—and by a combination of creative intuition and conscious structuring had arrived at a unity of effect and a balanced order. He assumed, in other words, that the *Beowulf* poet was an imaginative writer rather than some kind of back-formation derived from nineteenth-century folklore and philology. Tolkien's brilliant literary treatment changed the way the poem was valued and initiated a new era—and new terms—of appreciation.

It is impossible to attain a full understanding and estimate of *Beowulf* without recourse to this immense body of commentary and elucidation. Nevertheless, readers coming to the poem for the first time are likely to be as delighted as they are discomfited by the strangeness of the names and the immediate lack of known reference points. An English speaker new to *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* or *The Aeneid* will probably at least have heard of Troy and Helen, or of Penelope and the Cyclops, or of Dido and the golden bough. These epics may be in Greek and Latin, yet the classical heritage has entered the cultural memory enshrined in English so thoroughly that their worlds are more familiar than that of the first native epic, even though it was composed cen-

turies after them. Achilles rings a bell, but not Scyld Scēfing. Ithaca leads the mind in a certain direction, but not Heorot. The Sibyl of Cumae will stir certain associations, but not bad Queen Modthryth. First-time readers of *Beowulf* very quickly rediscover the meaning of the term “the dark ages,” and it is in the hope of dispelling some of the puzzlement they are bound to feel that I have added the marginal glosses which appear in the following pages.

Still, in spite of the sensation of being caught between a “shield-wall” of opaque references and a “word-hoard” that is old and strange, such readers are also bound to feel a certain “shock of the new.” This is because the poem possesses a mythic potency. Like Shield Sheafson (as Scyld Scēfing is known in this translation), it arrives from somewhere beyond the known bourne of our experience, and having fulfilled its purpose (again like Shield), it passes once more into the beyond. In the intervening time, the poet conjures up a work as remote as Shield’s funeral boat borne towards the horizon, as commanding as the horn-pronged gables of King Hrothgar’s hall, as solid and dazzling as Beowulf’s funeral pyre that is set ablaze at the end. These opening and closing scenes retain a haunting presence in the mind; they are set pieces but they have the life-marking power of certain dreams. They are like the pillars of the gate of horn, through which wise dreams of true art can still be said to pass.

What happens in between is what William Butler Yeats would have called a phantasmagoria. Three agons, three struggles in which the preternatural force-for-evil of the hero’s enemies comes springing at him in demonic shapes. Three encounters with what the critical literature and the textbook glossaries call “the monsters.” In three archetypal sites of fear: the barricaded night-house, the infested underwater current, and the reptile-haunted rocks of a wilderness. If we think of the poem in this way, its place in world art becomes clearer and more secure. We can conceive of it re-presented and transformed in performance

in a *bunraku* theatre in Japan, where the puppetry and the poetry are mutually supportive, a mixture of technicolour spectacle and ritual chant. Or we can equally envisage it as an animated cartoon (and there has been at least one shot at this already), full of mutating graphics and minatory stereophonics. We can avoid, at any rate, the slightly cardboard effect which the word “monster” tends to introduce, and give the poem a fresh chance to sweep “in off the moors, down through the mist bands” of Anglo-Saxon England, forward into the global village of the third millennium.

Nevertheless, the dream element and overall power to haunt come at a certain readerly price. The poem abounds in passages which will leave an unprepared audience bewildered. Just when the narrative seems ready to take another step ahead into the main Beowulf story, it sidesteps. For a moment it is as if we have been channel-surfed into another poem, and at two points in this translation I indicate that we are in fact participating in a poem-within-our-poem not only by the use of italics but by a slight quickening of pace and shortening of metrical rein. The passages occur in lines 883–914 and lines 1070–1158, and on each occasion a minstrel has begun to chant a poem as part of the celebration of Beowulf’s achievement. In the former case, the minstrel expresses his praise by telling the story of Sigemund’s victory over a dragon, which both parallels Beowulf’s triumph over Grendel and prefigures his fatal encounter with the *wyrm* in his old age. In the latter—the most famous of what were once called the “digressions” in the poem, the one dealing with a fight between Danes and Frisians at the stronghold of Finn, the Frisian king—the song the minstrel sings has a less obvious bearing on the immediate situation of the hero, but its import is nevertheless central to both the historical and the imaginative world of the poem.

The “Finnsburg episode” envelops us in a society that is at once honour-bound and blood-stained, presided over by the laws of the blood-feud, where the kin of a person slain are bound to exact a price for the death, either by slaying the killer or by re-

ceiving satisfaction in the form of *wergild* (the “man-price”), a legally fixed compensation. The claustrophobic and doom-laden atmosphere of this interlude gives the reader an intense intimation of what *wyrd*, or fate, meant not only to the characters in the Finn story but to those participating in the main action of *Beowulf* itself. All conceive of themselves as hooped within the great wheel of necessity, in thrall to a code of loyalty and bravery, bound to seek glory in the eye of the warrior world. The little nations are grouped around their lord, the greater nations spoil for war and menace the little ones, a lord dies, defencelessness ensues, the enemy strikes, vengeance for the dead becomes an ethic for the living, bloodshed begets further bloodshed, the wheel turns, the generations tread and tread and tread. Which is what I meant above when I said that the import of the Finnsburg passage is central to the historical and imaginative world of the poem as a whole.

One way of reading *Beowulf* is to think of it as three agons in the hero’s life, but another way would be to regard it as a poem which contemplates the destinies of three peoples by tracing their interweaving histories in the story of the central character. First we meet the Danes—variously known as the Shieldings (after Shield Sheafson, the founder of their line), the Ingwines, the Spear-Danes, the Bright-Danes, the West-Danes, and so on—a people in the full summer of their power, symbolized by the high hall built by King Hrothgar, one “meant to be a wonder of the world.” The threat to this gilded order comes from within, from marshes beyond the pale, from the bottom of the haunted mere where “Cain’s clan,” in the shape of Grendel and his troll-dam, trawl and scavenge and bide their time. But it also comes from without, from the Heathobards, for example, whom the Danes have defeated in battle and from whom they can therefore expect retaliatory war (see ll. 2020–69).

Beowulf actually predicts this turn of events when he goes back to his own country after saving the Danes (for the time being, at any rate) by staving off the two “reavers from hell.” In the

hall of his “ring-giver,” Hygelac, lord of the Geats, the hero discourses about his adventures in a securely fortified cliff-top enclosure. But this security is only temporary, for it is the destiny of the Geat people to be left lordless in the end. Hygelac’s alliances eventually involve him in deadly war with the Swedish king, Ongentheow, and even though he does not personally deliver the fatal stroke (two of his thanes are responsible for this—see ll. 2484–89 and then the lengthier reprise of this incident at ll. 2922–3003), he is known in the poem as “Ongentheow’s killer.” Hence it comes to pass that after the death of Beowulf, who eventually succeeds Hygelac, the Geats experience a great foreboding and the epic closes in a mood of sombre expectation. A world is passing away, the Swedes and others are massing on the borders to attack, and there is no lord or hero to rally the defence.

The Swedes, therefore, are the third nation whose history and destiny are woven into the narrative, and even though no part of the main action is set in their territory, they and their kings constantly stalk the horizon of dread within which the main protagonists pursue their conflicts and allegiances. The Swedish dimension gradually becomes an important element in the poem’s emotional and imaginative geography, a geography which entails, it should be said, no very clear map-sense of the world, more an apprehension of menaced borders, of danger gathering beyond the mere and the marshes, of *mearc-stapas* “prowling the moors, huge marauders / from some other world.”

Within these phantasmal boundaries, each lord’s hall is an actual and a symbolic refuge. Here is heat and light, rank and ceremony, human solidarity and culture; the *duguð* share the mead-benches with the *geogoð*, the veterans with their tales of warrior kings and hero-saviours from the past rub shoulders with young braves—*pegnas*, *eorlas*, thanes, retainers—keen to win such renown in the future. The prospect of gaining a glorious name in the *wael-raes*, in the rush of battle-slaughter, the pride of defending one’s lord and bearing heroic witness to the

integrity of the bond between him and his hall-companions—a bond sealed in the *glēo* and *gidd* of peace-time feasting and ring-giving—this is what gave drive and sanction to the Germanic warrior-culture enshrined in *Beowulf*.

Heorot and Hygelac's hall are the hubs of this value system upon which the poem's action turns. But there is another, outer rim of value, a circumference of understanding within which the heroic world is occasionally viewed as from a distance and recognized for what it is, an earlier state of consciousness and culture, one which has not been altogether shed but which has now been comprehended as part of another pattern. And this circumference and pattern arise, of course, from the poet's Christianity and from his perspective as an Englishman looking back at places and legends which his ancestors knew before they made their migration from continental Europe to their new home on the island of the Britons. As a consequence of his doctrinal certitude, which is as composed as it is ardent, the poet can view the story-time of his poem with a certain historical detachment and even censure the ways of those who lived *in illo tempore*:

*Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
offerings to idols, swore oaths  
that the killer of souls might come to their aid  
and save the people. That was their way,  
their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
they remembered hell. (ll. 175–80)*

At the same time, as a result of his inherited vernacular culture and the imaginative sympathy which distinguishes him as an artist, the poet can lend the full weight of his rhetorical power to *Beowulf* as he utters the first principles of the northern warrior's honour-code:

*It is always better  
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.*

*For every one of us, living in this world  
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
that will be his best and only bulwark. (ll. 1384–89)*

In an age when "the instability of the human subject" is constantly argued for if not presumed, there should be no problem with a poem which is woven from two such different psychic fabrics. In fact, *Beowulf* perfectly answers the early modern conception of a work of creative imagination as one in which conflicting realities find accommodation within a new order; and this reconciliation occurs, it seems to me, most poignantly and most profoundly in the poem's third section, once the dragon enters the picture and the hero in old age must gather his powers for the final climactic ordeal. From the moment *Beowulf* advances under the crags, into the comfortless arena bounded by the rock-wall, the reader knows he is one of those "marked by fate." The poetry is imbued with a strong intuition of *wyrd* hovering close, "unknowable but certain," and yet, because it is imagined within a consciousness which has learned to expect that the soul will find an ultimate home "among the steadfast ones," this primal human emotion has been transmuted into something less "zero at the bone," more metaphysically tempered.

A similar transposition from a plane of regard which is, as it were, helmeted and hall-bound to one which sees things in a slightly more heavenly light is discernible in the different ways the poet imagines gold. Gold is a constant element, gleaming solidly in underground vaults, on the breasts of queens or the arms and regalia of warriors on the mead-benches. It is loaded into boats as spoil, handed out in bent bars as hall gifts, buried in the earth as treasure, persisting underground as an affirmation of a people's glorious past and an elegy for it. It pervades the ethos of the poem the way sex pervades consumer culture. And yet the bullion with which Waels's son, Sigemund, weighs down the



hold after an earlier dragon-slaying triumph (in the old days, long before Beowulf's time) is a more trustworthy substance than that which is secured behind the walls of Beowulf's barrow. By the end of the poem, gold has suffered a radiation from the Christian vision. It is not that it yet equals riches in the medieval sense of worldly corruption, just that its status as the ore of all value has been put in doubt. It is *lāne*, transitory, passing from hand to hand, and its changed status is registered as a symptom of the changed world. Once the dragon is disturbed, the melancholy and sense of displacement which pervade the last movement of the poem enter the hoard as a disabling and ominous light. And the dragon himself, as a genius of the older order, is bathed in this light, so that even as he begins to stir, the reader has a premonition that the days of his empery are numbered.

Nevertheless, the dragon has a wonderful inevitability about him and a unique glamour. It is not that the other monsters are lacking in presence and aura; it is more that they remain, for all their power to terrorize, creatures of the physical world. Grendel comes alive in the reader's imagination as a kind of dog-breath in the dark, a fear of collision with some hard-boned and immensely strong android frame, a mixture of Caliban and hoplite. And while his mother too has a definite brute-bearing about her, a creature of slouch and lunge on land if seal-swift in the water, she nevertheless retains a certain non-strangeness. As antagonists of a hero being tested, Grendel and his mother possess an appropriate head-on strength. The poet may need them as figures who do the devil's work, but the poem needs them more as figures who call up and show off Beowulf's physical might and his superb gifts as a warrior. They are the right enemies for a young glory-hunter, instigators of the formal boast, worthy trophies to be carried back from the grim testing-ground—Grendel's arm is ripped off and nailed up, his head severed and paraded in Heorot. It is all consonant with the surge of youth and the compulsion to win fame "as wide as the wind's home, /

as the sea around cliffs," utterly a manifestation of the Germanic heroic code.

Enter then, fifty years later, the dragon. From his dry-stone vault, from a nest where he is heaped in coils around the body-heated gold. Once he is wakened, there is something glorious in the way he manifests himself, a Fourth of July effulgence fire-working its path across the night sky; and yet, because of the centuries he has spent dormant in the tumulus, there is a foundedness as well as a lambency about him. He is at once a stratum of the earth and a streamer in the air, no painted dragon but a figure of real oneiric power, one that can easily survive the prejudice which arises at the very mention of the word "dragon." Whether in medieval art or in modern Disney cartoons, the dragon can strike us as far less horrific than he is meant to be, but in the final movement of *Beowulf*, he lodges himself in the imagination as *wyrd* rather than *wyrm*, more a destiny than a set of reptilian vertebrae.

Grendel and his mother enter Beowulf's life from the outside, accidentally, challenges which in other circumstances he might not have taken up, enemies from whom he might have been distracted or deflected. The dragon, on the other hand, is a given of his home ground, abiding in his underearth as in his understanding, waiting for the meeting, the watcher at the ford, the questioner who sits so sly, the "lion-limb," as Gerard Manley Hopkins might have called him, against whom Beowulf's body and soul must measure themselves. Dragon equals shadow-line, the psalmist's valley of the shadow of death, the embodiment of a knowledge deeply ingrained in the species which is the very knowledge of the price to be paid for physical and spiritual survival.

It has often been observed that all the scriptural references in *Beowulf* are to the Old Testament. The poet is more in sympathy with the tragic, waiting, unredeemed phase of things than with any transcendental promise. Beowulf's mood as he gets ready to

fight the dragon—who could be read as a projection of Beowulf’s own chthonic wisdom refined in the crucible of experience—recalls the mood of other tragic heroes: Oedipus at Colonus, Lear at his “ripeness is all” extremity, Hamlet in the last illuminations of his “prophetic soul”:

*no easy bargain  
would be made in that place by any man.*

*The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.  
He wished good luck to the Geats who had shared  
his hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,  
unsettled yet ready, sensing his death.  
His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain. (ll. 2415–21)*

Here the poet attains a level of insight that approaches the visionary. The subjective and the inevitable are in perfect balance, what is solidly established is bathed in an element which is completely sixth-sensed, and indeed the whole slow-motion, constantly self-deferring approach to the hero’s death and funeral continues to be like this. Beowulf’s soul may not yet have fled “to its destined place among the steadfast ones,” but there is already a beyond-the-grave aspect to him, a revenant quality about his resoluteness. This is not just metrical narrative full of anthropological interest and typical heroic-age motifs; it is poetry of a high order, in which passages of great lyric intensity—such as the “Lay of the Last Survivor” (ll. 2247–66) and, even more remarkably, the so-called “Father’s Lament” (ll. 2444–62)—rise like emanations from some fissure in the bedrock of the human capacity to endure:

*It was like the misery felt by an old man  
who has lived to see his son’s body  
swing on the gallows. He begins to keen  
and weep for his boy, watching the raven  
gloat where he hangs: he can be of no help.*

*The wisdom of age is worthless to him.  
Morning after morning, he wakes to remember  
that his child has gone; he has no interest  
in living on until another heir  
is born in the hall . . .*

. . . . .  
*Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed  
and sings a lament; everything seems too large,  
the steadings and the fields.*

Such passages mark an ultimate stage in poetic attainment; they are the imaginative equivalent of Beowulf’s spiritual state at the end, when he tells his men that “doom of battle will bear [their] lord away,” in the same way that the sea-journeys so vividly described in lines 210–28 and 1903–24 are the equivalent of his exultant prime.

At these moments of lyric intensity, the keel of the poetry is deeply set in the element of sensation while the mind’s lookout sways metrically and far-sightedly in the element of pure comprehension. Which is to say that the elevation of *Beowulf* is always, paradoxically, buoyantly down to earth. And nowhere is this more obviously and memorably the case than in the account of the hero’s funeral with which the poem ends. Here the inexorable and the elegiac combine in a description of the funeral pyre being got ready, the body being burnt, and the barrow being constructed—a scene at once immemorial and oddly contemporary. The Geat woman who cries out in dread as the flames consume the body of her dead lord could come straight from a late-twentieth-century news report, from Rwanda or Kosovo; her keen is a nightmare glimpse into the minds of people who have survived traumatic, even monstrous events and who are now being exposed to a comfortless future. We immediately recognize her predicament and the pitch of her grief and find ourselves the better for having them expressed with such adequacy and dignity and unforgiving truth:

On a height they kindled the hugest of all  
 funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke  
 billowed darkly up, the blaze roared  
 and drowned out their weeping, wind died down  
 and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,  
 burning it to the core. They were disconsolate  
 and wailed aloud for their lord's decease.  
 A Geat woman too sang out in grief;  
 with hair bound up, she unburdened herself  
 of her worst fears, a wild litany  
 of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,  
 enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,  
 slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

(ll. 3143–55)

#### ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

When I was an undergraduate at Queen's University, Belfast, I studied *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon poems and developed not only a feel for the language but a fondness for the melancholy and fortitude that characterized the poetry. Consequently, when an invitation to translate the poem arrived from the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, I was tempted to try my hand. While I had no great expertise in Old English, I had a strong desire to get back to the first stratum of the language and to "assay the hoard" (l. 2509). This was during the middle years of the 1980s, when I had begun a regular teaching job at Harvard and was opening my ear to the untethered music of some contemporary American poetry. Saying yes to the *Beowulf* commission would be (I argued with myself) a kind of aural antidote, a way of ensuring that my linguistic anchor would stay lodged on the Anglo-Saxon sea-floor. So I undertook to do it.

Very soon, however, I hesitated. It was labour-intensive work, scriptorium-slow. I worked dutifully, like a sixth-former at home-work. I would set myself twenty lines a day, write out my glos-

sary of hard words in longhand, try to pick a way through the syntax, get the run of the meaning established in my head, and then hope that the lines could be turned into metrical shape and raised to the power of verse. Often, however, the whole attempt to turn it into modern English seemed to me like trying to bring down a megalith with a toy hammer. What had been so attractive in the first place, the hand-built, rock-sure feel of the thing, began to defeat me. I turned to other work, the commissioning editors did not pursue me, and the project went into abeyance.

Even so, I had an instinct that it should not be let go. An understanding I had worked out for myself concerning my own linguistic and literary origins made me reluctant to abandon the task. I had noticed, for example, that without any conscious intent on my part certain lines in the first poem in my first book conformed to the requirements of Anglo-Saxon metrics. These lines were made up of two balancing halves, each half containing two stressed syllables—"the spade sinks into gravelly ground: / My father, digging. I look down"—and in the case of the second line, there was alliteration linking "digging" and "down" across the caesura. Part of me, in other words, had been writing Anglo-Saxon from the start.

This was not surprising, given that the poet who had first formed my ear was Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was a chip off the Old English block, and the earliest lines I published when I was a student were as much pastiche Anglo-Saxon as they were pastiche Hopkins: "Starling thatch-watches and sudden swallow / Straight breaks to mud-nest, home-rest rafter" and so on. I have written about all this elsewhere and about the relation of my Hopkins ventriloquism to the speech patterns of Ulster—especially as these were caricatured by the poet W. R. Rodgers. Ulster people, according to Rodgers, are "an abrupt people / who like the spiky consonants of speech / and think the soft ones cissy" and get a kick out of "anything that gives or takes attack / like Micks, Teagues, tinkers' gets, Vatican."

Joseph Brodsky once said that poets' biographies are present in

the sounds they make and I suppose all I am saying is that I consider *Beowulf* to be part of my voice-right. And yet to persuade myself that I was born into its language and that its language was born into me took a while: for somebody who grew up in the political and cultural conditions of Lord Brookeborough's Northern Ireland, it could hardly have been otherwise.

Sprung from an Irish nationalist background and educated at a Northern Irish Catholic school, I had learned the Irish language and lived within a cultural and ideological frame that regarded it as the language which I should by rights have been speaking but which I had been robbed of. I have also written, for example, about the thrill I experienced when I stumbled upon the word *lachtar* in my Irish-English dictionary and found that this word, which my aunt had always used when speaking of a flock of chicks, was in fact an Irish language word, and, more than that, an Irish word associated in particular with County Derry. Yet here it was, surviving in my aunt's English speech generations after her forebears and mine had ceased to speak Irish. For a long time, therefore, the little word was—to borrow a simile from Joyce—like a rapier point of consciousness pricking me with an awareness of language-loss and cultural dispossession, and tempting me into binary thinking about language. I tended to conceive of English and Irish as adversarial tongues, as either/or conditions rather than both/ands, and this was an attitude which for a long time hampered the development of a more confident and creative way of dealing with the whole vexed question—the question, that is, of the relationship between nationality, language, history, and literary tradition in Ireland.

Luckily, I glimpsed the possibility of release from this kind of cultural determinism early on, in my first arts year at Queen's University, Belfast, when we were lectured on the history of the English language by Professor John Braidwood. Braidwood could not help informing us, for example, that the word “whiskey” is the same word as the Irish and Scots Gaelic word

*uisce*, meaning water, and that the River Usk in Britain is therefore to some extent the River Uisce (or Whiskey); and so in my mind the stream was suddenly turned into a kind of linguistic river of rivers issuing from a pristine Celto-British Land of Cockaigne, a riverrun of Finnegans Wakespeak pouring out of the cleft rock of some pre-political, prelapsarian, ur-philological Big Rock Candy Mountain—and all of this had a wonderfully sweetening effect upon me. The Irish/English duality, the Celtic/Saxon antithesis were momentarily collapsed, and in the resulting etymological eddy a gleam of recognition flashed through the synapses and I glimpsed an elsewhere of potential which seemed at the same time to be a somewhere being remembered. The place on the language map where the Usk and the *uisce* and the whiskey coincided was definitely a place where the spirit might find a loophole, an escape route from what John Montague has called “the partitioned intellect,” away into some unpartitioned linguistic country, a region where one's language would not be a simple badge of ethnicity or a matter of cultural preference or official imposition, but an entry into further language. And I eventually came upon one of these loopholes in *Beowulf* itself.

What happened was that I found in the glossary to C. L. Wrenn's edition of the poem the Old English word meaning “to suffer,” the word *þolian*; and although at first it looked completely strange with its thorn symbol instead of the familiar *th*, I gradually realized that it was not strange at all, for it was the word that older and less educated people would have used in the country where I grew up. “They'll just have to learn to thole,” my aunt would say about some family who had suffered an unforeseen bereavement. And now suddenly here was “thole” in the official textual world, mediated through the apparatus of a scholarly edition, a little bleeper to remind me that my aunt's language was not just a self-enclosed family possession but an historical heritage, one that involved the journey *þolian* had

made north into Scotland and then across into Ulster with the planters and then across from the planters to the locals who had originally spoken Irish and then farther across again when the Scots Irish emigrated to the American South in the eighteenth century. When I read in John Crowe Ransom the line “Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and toughly I hope ye may thole,” my heart lifted again, the world widened, something was furthered. The far-flungness of the word, the phenomenological pleasure of finding it variously transformed by Ransom’s modernity and *Beowulf*’s venerability made me feel vaguely something for which again I only found the words years later. What I was experiencing as I kept meeting up with *thole* on its multicultural odyssey was the feeling which Osip Mandelstam once defined as a “nostalgia for world culture.” And this was a nostalgia I didn’t even know I suffered until I experienced its fulfilment in this little epiphany. It was as if, on the analogy of baptism by desire, I had undergone something like illumination by philology. And even though I did not know it at the time, I had by then reached the point where I was ready to translate *Beowulf*. *Polian* had opened my right-of-way.

So, in a sense, the decision to accept Norton’s invitation was taken thirty-five years before the invitation was actually issued. But between one’s sense of readiness to take on a subject and the actual inscription of the first lines, there is always a problematical hiatus. To put it another way: from the point of view of the writer, words in a poem need what the Polish poet Anna Swir once called “the equivalent of a biological right to life.” The erotics of composition are essential to the process, some pre-reflective excitation and orientation, some sense that your own little verse-craft can dock safe and sound at the big quay of the language. And this is as true for translators as it is for poets attempting original work.

It is one thing to find lexical meanings for the words and to have some feel for how the metre might go, but it is quite another

thing to find the tuning fork that will give you the note and pitch for the overall music of the work. Without some melody sensed or promised, it is simply impossible for a poet to establish the translator’s right-of-way into and through a text. I was therefore lucky to hear this enabling note almost straight away, a familiar local voice, one that had belonged to relatives of my father’s, people whom I had once described in a poem as “big voiced Scullions.”

I called them “big voiced” because when the men of the family spoke, the words they uttered came across with a weighty distinctness, phonetic units as separate and defined as delph platters displayed on a dresser shelf. A simple sentence such as “We cut the corn to-day” took on immense dignity when one of the Scullions spoke it. They had a kind of Native American solemnity of utterance, as if they were announcing verdicts rather than making small talk. And when I came to ask myself how I wanted *Beowulf* to sound in my version, I realized I wanted it to be speakable by one of those relatives. I therefore tried to frame the famous opening lines in cadences that would have suited their voices, but that still echoed with the sound and sense of the Anglo-Saxon:

*Hwaet wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum*  
*þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,*  
*hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.*

Conventional renderings of *hwaet*, the first word of the poem, tend towards the archaic literary, with “lo” and “hark” and “behold” and “attend” and—more colloquially—“listen” being some of the solutions offered previously. But in Hiberno-English Scullionspeak, the particle “so” came naturally to the rescue, because in that idiom “so” operates as an expression which obliterates all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time functions as an exclamation calling for immediate attention. So, “so” it was:

*So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by  
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.*

I came to the task of translating *Beowulf* with a prejudice favour of forthright delivery. I remembered the voice of the poet as being attractively direct, even though the diction was ornate and the narrative method at times oblique. What I had always loved was a kind of foursquareness about the utterance, a feeling of living inside a constantly indicative mood, in the presence of an understanding that assumes you share an awareness of the perilous nature of life and are yet capable of seeing it steadily and, when necessary, sternly. There is an undeluded quality about the *Beowulf* poet's sense of the world which gives his language immense emotional credibility and allows him to make general observations about life which are far too grounded in experience and reticence to be called "moralizing." These so-called "gnomic" parts of the poem have the cadence and force of earned wisdom, and their combination of cogency and verity was again something that I could remember from the speech I heard as a youngster in the Scullion kitchen. When I translate lines 24–25 "Behaviour that's admired / is the path to power among people everywhere," I am attending as much to the grain of my original vernacular as to the content of the Anglo-Saxon lines. But the evidence suggests that this middle ground between oral tradition and the demands of written practice was also the ground occupied by the *Beowulf* poet. The style of the poem is hospitable to the kind of formulaic phrases which are the stock-in-trade of oral bards, and yet it is marked too by the self-consciousness of an artist convinced that "we must labour to be beautiful."

In one area, my own labours have been less than thoroughgoing. I have not followed the strict metrical rules that bound the Anglo-Saxon *scop*. I have been guided by the fundamental pattern of four stresses to the line, but I allow myself several transgressions. For example, I don't always employ alliteration, at

sometimes I alliterate only in one half of the line. When these breaches occur, it is because I prefer to let the natural "sound of sense" prevail over the demands of the convention: I have been reluctant to force an artificial shape or an unusual word choice just for the sake of correctness.

In general, the alliteration varies from the shadowy to the substantial, from the properly to the improperly distributed. Substantial and proper are such lines as

*The fortunes of wár favoured Hróthgar (l. 64)  
the highest in the land, would lend advice (l. 172)  
and find friendship in the Father's embrace (l. 188).*

Here the caesura is definite, there are two stresses in each half of the line, and the first stressed syllable of the second half alliterates with the first or the second or both of the stressed syllables in the first half. The main deviation from this is one which other translators have allowed themselves—the freedom, that is, to alliterate on the fourth stressed syllable, a practice which breaks the rule but which nevertheless does bind the line together:

*We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns (l. 3)  
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping (l. 27).*

In the course of the translation, such deviations, distortions, syncope, and extensions do occur; what I was after first and foremost was a narrative line that sounded as if it meant business, and I was prepared to sacrifice other things in pursuit of this directness of utterance.

The appositional nature of the Old English syntax, for example, is somewhat slighted here, as is the *Beowulf* poet's resourcefulness with synonyms and (to a lesser extent) his genius for compound-making, kennings, and all sorts of variation. Usually—as at line 1209, where I render *yða ful* as "frothing wavevat," and line 1523, where *beado-lēoma* becomes "battle-torch"—I

## A Note on Names

try to match the poet's analogy-seeking habit at its most original; and I use all the common coinages for the lord of the nation, variously referred to as "ring-giver," "treasure-giver," "his people's shield" or "shepherd" or "helmet." I have been less faithful, however, to the way the poet rings the changes when it comes to compounds meaning a sword or a spear or a battle or any bloody encounter with foes. Old English abounds in vigorous and evocative and specifically poetic words for these things, but I have tended to follow modern usage and in the main have called a sword a sword.

There was one area, however, where a certain strangeness in the diction came naturally. In those instances where a local Ulster word seemed either poetically or historically right, I felt free to use it. For example, at lines 324 and 2988 I use the word "graith" for "harness" and at 3026 "hoked" for "rooted about" because the local term seemed in each case to have special body and force. Then, for reasons of historical suggestiveness, I have in several instances used the word "bawn" to refer to Hrothgar's hall. In Elizabethan English, bawn (from the Irish *bó-dhún*, a fort for cattle) referred specifically to the fortified dwellings which the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay, so it seemed the proper term to apply to the embattled keep where Hrothgar waits and watches. Indeed, every time I read the lovely interlude that tells of the minstrel singing in Heorot just before the first attacks of Grendel, I cannot help thinking of Edmund Spenser in Kilcolman Castle, reading the early cantos of *The Faerie Queene* to Sir Walter Raleigh, just before the Irish burned the castle and drove Spenser out of Munster back to the Elizabethan court. Putting a bawn into *Beowulf* seems one way for an Irish poet to come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism, a history which has to be clearly acknowledged by all concerned in order to render it ever more "willable forward / Again and again and again."

S.H.

Old English, like Modern German, contained many compound words, most of which have been lost in Modern English. Most of the names in *Beowulf* are compounds. Hrothgar is a combination of words meaning "glory" and "spear"; the name of his older brother, Heorogar, comes from "army" and "spear"; Hrothgar's sons Hrethric and Hrothmund contain the first elements of their father's name combined, respectively, with *ric* (kingdom, empire, Modern German *Reich*) and *mund* (hand, protection). As in the case of the Danish dynasty, family names often alliterate. Masculine names of the warrior class have military associations. The importance of family and the demands of alliteration frequently lead to the designation of characters by formulas identifying them in terms of relationships. Thus Beowulf is referred to as "son of Ecgtheow" or "kinsman of Hygelac" (his uncle and lord).

The Old English spellings of names are mostly preserved in the translation. A few rules of pronunciation are worth keeping in mind. Initial *H* before *r* was sounded, and so Hrothgar's name alliterates with that of his brother Heorogar. The combination *cg* has the value of *dg* in words like "edge." The first element in the name of Beowulf's father "Ecgtheow" is the same word as "edge," and, by the figure of speech called synecdoche (a part of something stands for the whole), *ecg* stands for *sword* and Ecgtheow means "sword-servant."

Alfred David

# **B E O W U L F**



Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum  
þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,  
hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaþena þrēatum,  
monegum mægþum meodo-setla oftēah;  
egsode Eorle, syððan ærest wearð  
fēasceaft funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād:  
wēox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þāh,  
oðþæt him æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra  
ofer hron-rāde hýran scolde,  
gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!  
Ðām eafera wæs æfter cenned  
geong in gearдум, þone God sende  
folce tō frōfre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat,  
þæt hīe ær drugon aldor-lēase  
lange hwīle; him þæs Līf-frēa,  
wuldres Wealdend, worold-āre forgeaf;  
Bēowulf wæs brēme — blæd wīde sprang —  
Scyldes eafera, Scede-landum in.  
Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,  
fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme,  
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by  
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,  
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,  
the long times and troubles they'd come through  
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:  
Beow's name was known through the north.  
And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
giving freely while his father lives  
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts

*The Danes have legends about their warrior kings. The most famous was Shield Sheafson, who founded the ruling house*

wil-gesīpas, þonne wīg cume,  
lēode gelāsten; lof-dāðum sceal  
in mægþa gehwære man geþēon.

Him ðā Scyld gewāt tō gescæp-hwīle,  
fela-hrōr, fēran on Frēan wære.

30 Hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,  
swāse gesīpas, swā hē selfa bæd,  
þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga,  
lēof land-fruma lange āhte.

Þær æt hýðe stōd hringed-stefna,  
īsig ond ūt-fūs, æþelinges fær;  
ālēdon þā lēofne þēoden,

bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,  
mārne be mæste; þær wæs mādma fela  
of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelāded.

40 Ne hýrde ic cýmlīcor cēol gegyrwan  
hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,  
billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg  
mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon  
on flōdes æht feor gewītan.

Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,  
þēod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,  
þe hine æt frumscafte forð onsendon  
æinne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.

50 Þā gýt hī him āsetton segend gyldenne  
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,  
gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs geōmor sefa,  
murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon  
secgan tō sōðe, sele-rædende,

hæleð under heofenum, hwā þām hlæste onfēng.  
Ðā wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,

steadfast companions will stand by him  
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired  
is the path to power among people everywhere.

Shield was still thriving when his time came  
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them  
when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
30 they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,  
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.

A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,  
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.

They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
laid out by the mast, amidships,

the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
were piled upon him, and precious gear.

I never heard before of a ship so well furbished  
with battle tackle, bladed weapons

40 and coats of mail. The massed treasure  
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
on out into the ocean's sway.

They decked his body no less bountifully  
with offerings than those first ones did  
who cast him away when he was a child  
and launched him alone out over the waves.

And they set a gold standard up  
high above his head and let him drift  
to wind and tide, bewailing him

50 and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.

*Shield's fur*

lēof lēod-cyning, longe þrāge  
 folcum gefrāge; fæder ellor hwearf,  
 aldor of earde. Opþæt him eft onwōc  
 hēah Healfdene; hēold, þenden lifde,  
 gamol ond gūð-rēouw, glæde Scyldingas.  
 Ðām fēower bearn forð-gerīmed  
 60 in worold wōcun: weoroda rāswan,  
 Heorogār, ond Hrōðgār ond Hālgā til;  
 hýrde ic þæt . . . . wæs Onelan cwēn,  
 Heaðo-Scilfingas heals-gebedda.  
 Þā wæs Hrōðgāre here-spēd gyfen,  
 wīges weorð-mynd, þæt him his wine-māgas  
 georne hýrdon, oððþæt sēo geogoð gewēox  
 mago-driht micel. Him on mōd be-arn  
 þæt heal-reced hātan wolde,  
 70 medo-ærn micel men gewyrcean,  
 þonne ylðo bearn æfre gefrūnon,  
 ond þær on innan eall gedælan  
 geongum ond ealdum, swylc him God sealde,  
 būton folc-scare ond feorum gumena.  
 Ðā ic wīde gefrægn weorc gebannan  
 manigre mægþe geond þisne middan-geard,  
 folc-stede frætwan. Him on fyrste gelomp,  
 ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wearð eal-gearo,  
 heal-ærna mæst; scōp him Heort naman,  
 sē þe his wordes geweald wīde hæfde.  
 80 Hē bēot ne ālēh, bēagas dælde,  
 sinc æt symle. Sele hlīfade  
 hēah ond horn-gēap, heaðo-wylma bād,  
 lāðan līges; ne wæs hit lenge þā gēn,  
 þæt se ecg-hete āpum-swerian  
 æfter wæl-nīðe wæcnan scolde.

He was well regarded and ruled the Danes  
 for a long time after his father took leave  
 of his life on earth. And then his heir,  
 the great Halfdane, held sway  
 for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.  
 He was four times a father, this fighter prince:  
 60 one by one they entered the world,  
 Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga  
 and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,  
 a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.

The fortunes of war favoured Hrothgar.  
 Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
 young followers, a force that grew  
 to be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
 to hall-building: he handed down orders  
 70 for men to work on a great mead-hall  
 meant to be a wonder of the world forever;  
 it would be his throne-room and there he would dispense  
 his God-given goods to young and old—  
 but not the common land or people's lives.  
 Far and wide through the world, I have heard,  
 orders for work to adorn that wallstead  
 were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,  
 finished and ready, in full view,  
 the hall of halls. Heorot was the name  
 he had settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
 80 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings  
 and torques at the table. The hall towered,  
 its gables wide and high and awaiting  
 a barbarous burning. That doom abided,  
 but in time it would come: the killer instinct  
 unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.

*Shield's heirs: his  
 son Beow succeeds  
 by Halfdane,  
 Halfdane by  
 Hrothgar*

*King Hrothgar  
 builds Heorot Hall*

Ða se ellen-gæst earfoðlice  
 þrage gepolode, sē þe in þystrum bād,  
 þæt hē dōgora gehwām drēam gehyrde  
 hlūdne in healle; þær wæs hearpan swēg,  
 90 swutol sang scopes. Sægde sē þe cūþe  
 frumsceaft fīra feorran reccan,  
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,  
 wlite-beorhtne wang, swā wæter bebūgeð:  
 gesette sige-hrēpig sunnan ond mōnan  
 lēoman tō lēohte land-būendum,  
 ond gefræt wade foldan scēatas  
 leomum ond lēafum; If ēac gesceōp  
 cynna gehwylcum, þāra ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.  
 Swā ðā driht-guman drēamum lifdon,  
 100 ēadiglice, oððæt ān ongan  
 fyrene fremman fēond on helle.  
 Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel hāten,  
 mære mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras hēold,  
 fen ond fæsten; fifel-cynnes eard  
 won-sæli wer weardode hwile,  
 syþðan him Scyppend forscifen hæfde  
 in Caines cynne— þone cwealm gewræc  
 ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Ābel slōg.  
 Ne gefeah hē þære fæhðe, ac hē hine feor forwræc,  
 110 Metod for þy māne, man-cynne fram.  
 Þanon untýdras ealle onwōcon,  
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnēas,  
 swylce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon  
 lange þrage; hē him ðæs lēan forgeald.  
 Gewāt ðā nēosian, syþðan niht becōm,  
 hēan hūses, hū hit Hring-Dene

Then a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark,  
 nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him  
 to hear the din of the loud banquet  
 every day in the hall, the harp being struck  
 90 and the clear song of a skilled poet  
 telling with mastery of man's beginnings,  
 how the Almighty had made the earth  
 a gleaming plain girdled with waters;  
 in His splendour He set the sun and the moon  
 to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,  
 and filled the broad lap of the world  
 with branches and leaves; and quickened life  
 in every other thing that moved.

So times were pleasant for the people there  
 until finally one, a fiend out of hell,  
 100 began to work his evil in the world.  
 Grendel was the name of this grim demon  
 haunting the marches, marauding round the heath  
 and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time  
 in misery among the banished monsters,  
 Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed  
 and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel  
 the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:  
 Cain got no good from committing that murder  
 110 because the Almighty made him anathema  
 and out of the curse of his exile there sprang  
 ogres and elves and evil phantoms  
 and the giants too who strove with God  
 time and again until He gave them their reward.

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out  
 for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes

*Heorot is threatened*

*Grendel, a monster  
descended from  
"Cain's clan,"  
begins to prowl*

*Grendel attacks  
Heorot*

120

æfter bēor-þege gebūn hæfdon;  
 fand þā ðær inne æþelunga gedriht  
 swefan æfter symble— sorge ne cūðon,  
 wonsceaft wera. Wiht unhælo,  
 grim ond grædig, gearo sōna wæs,  
 rēoc ond rēþe, ond on ræste genam  
 þrītig þegna; þanon eft gewāt  
 hūðe hrēmig tō hām faran,  
 mid þære wæl-fylle wīca nēosan.

130

Ðā wæs on ūhtan mid ær-dæge  
 Grendles gūð-cræft gumum undyrne;  
 þā wæs æfter wiste wōp up āhafen,  
 micel morgen-swēg. Mære þeoden,  
 æþeling ær-gōd, unblīðe sæt,  
 þolode ðrȳð-swȳð, þegn-sorge drēah,  
 syðþan hie þæs lādān lāst scēawedon  
 wergan gāstes. Wæs þæt gewin tō strang,  
 lād ond longsum. Næs hit lengra fyrst,  
 ac ymb āne niht eft gefremede  
 morð-beala mære ond nō mearn fore,  
 fāhðe ond fyrene; wæs tō fæst on þām.  
 Þā wæs eād-fynde þe him elles hwær  
 gerūmlīcor ræste sōhte,  
 bed æfter būrum, ðā him gebēacnod wæs,  
 gesægd sōðlice sweotolan tācne  
 heal-ðegnes hete; hēold hyne syðþan  
 fyr ond fæstor sē þām fēonde ætwand.

140

Swā rīxode ond wið rihte wan  
 āna wið eallum, oðþæt idel stōd  
 hūsa sēlest. Wæs sēo hwīl micel:  
 twelf wintra tīd torn gepolode

120

were settling into it after their drink,  
 and there he came upon them, a company of the best  
 asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain  
 and human sorrow. Suddenly then  
 the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:  
 greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men  
 from their resting places and rushed to his lair,  
 flushed up and inflamed from the raid,  
 blundering back with the butchered corpses.

130

Then as dawn brightened and the day broke  
 Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:  
 their wassail was over, they wept to heaven  
 and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,  
 the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,  
 humiliated by the loss of his guard,  
 bewildered and stunned, staring aghast  
 at the demon's trail, in deep distress.  
 He was numb with grief, but got no respite  
 for one night later merciless Grendel  
 struck again with more gruesome murders.  
 Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.  
 It was easy then to meet with a man  
 shifting himself to a safer distance  
 to bed in the bothies, for who could be blind  
 to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness  
 of that hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped  
 kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

140

So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,  
 one against all, until the greatest house  
 in the world stood empty, a deserted wallstead.  
 For twelve winters, seasons of woe,

*King Hrothgar's  
 distress and  
 helplessness*

wine Scyldinga, wēana gehwelcne,  
 sīdra sorga; forðām secgum wearð,  
 150 ylda bearnum, undyrne cūð,  
 gyddum geōmore, þætte Grendel wan  
 hwīle wið Hrōþgār, hete-nīðas wæg,  
 fyrene ond fāhðe fela missēra,  
 singāle sæce; sibbe ne wolde  
 wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,  
 feorh-bealo feorran, fēa þingian,  
 nē þær nānig witena wēnan þorfte  
 beorhtre bōte tō banan folmum;  
 ac se æglāca ēhtende wæs,  
 160 deorc dēaþ-scūa duguþe ond geogoþe,  
 seomade ond syrede; sin-nihte hēold  
 mistige mōras; men ne cunnon  
 hwyder hel-rūnan hwyrftum scrīþað.  
 Swā fela fyrena fēond man-cynnes,  
 atol ān-gengea, oft gefremede,  
 heardra hynða; Heorot eardode,  
 sinc-fāge sel sweartum nihtum;  
 nō hē þone gif-stōl grētan mōste,  
 māþdum for Metode, nē his myne wisse.  
 170 Þæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga,  
 mōdes brecða. Monig oft gesæt  
 rīce tō rūne, rād eahtedon,  
 hwæt swīð-ferhdum sēlest wære  
 wið fār-gryrum tō gefremmanne.  
 Hwīlum hīe gehēton æt hærg-trafum  
 wīg-weorþunga, wordum bædon,  
 þæt him gāst-bona gēoce gefremede  
 wið þeod-þrēaum. Swylc wæs þēaw hyra,

the lord of the Shieldings suffered under  
 his load of sorrow; and so, before long,  
 150 the news was known over the whole world.  
 Sad lays were sung about the beset king,  
 the vicious raids and ravages of Grendel,  
 his long and unrelenting feud,  
 nothing but war; how he would never  
 parley or make peace with any Dane  
 nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.  
 No counsellor could ever expect  
 fair reparation from those rabid hands.  
 All were endangered; young and old  
 160 were hunted down by that dark death-shadow  
 who lurked and swooped in the long nights  
 on the misty moors; nobody knows  
 where these reavers from hell roam on their errands.

So Grendel waged his lonely war,  
 inflicting constant cruelties on the people,  
 atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,  
 haunted the glittering hall after dark,  
 but the throne itself, the treasure-seat,  
 he was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's outcast.

170 These were hard times, heart-breaking  
 for the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counsellors,  
 the highest in the land, would lend advice,  
 plotting how best the bold defenders  
 might resist and beat off sudden attacks.  
 Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
 offerings to idols, swore oaths  
 that the killer of souls might come to their aid  
 and save the people. That was their way,

*The Danes, hard-pressed, turn for help to heathen gods*

180 hāþenra hyht; helle gemundon  
 in mōd-sefan, Metod hīe ne cūþon,  
 dāda Dēmend, ne wiston hīe Drihten God  
 nē hīe hūru heofena Helm herian ne cūþon,  
 wuldres Waldend. Wā bið þām ðe sceal  
 þurh slīðne nīð sāwle bescūfan  
 in fýres fæþm, frōfre ne wēnan,  
 wihte gewendan! Wēl bið þām þe mōt  
 æfter dēað-dæge Drihten sēcean  
 ond tō Fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian!  
 Swā ðā mæl-ceare maga Healfdenes  
 190 singāla sēað; ne mihte snotor hæleð  
 wēan onwendan; wæs þæt gewin tō swýð,  
 lāþ ond longsum, þe on ðā lēode becōm,  
 nýd-wracu nīþ-grim, niht-bealwa mæst.  
 Þæt fram hām gefrægn Higelāces þegn,  
 gōd mid Gēatum, Grendles dāda;  
 sē wæs mon-cynnes mægenes strengest  
 on þām dæge þysse lifes,  
 æþele ond ēacen. Hēt him yð-lidan  
 gōdne gegyrwan; cwæð, hē gūð-cyning  
 200 ofer swan-rāde sēcean wolde,  
 mārne þēoden, þā him wæs manna þearf.  
 Ðone sīð-fæt him snotere ceorlas  
 lýt-hwōn lōgon, þēah hē him lēof wære;  
 hwetton hige-rōfne, hæl scēawedon.  
 Hæfde se gōda Gēata lēoda  
 cempan gecorone, þāra þe hē cēnoste  
 findan mihte; fīf-týna sum  
 sund-wudu sōhte; secg wīsade,  
 lagu-cræftig mon, land-gemyrcu.

180 their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
 they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge  
 of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,  
 Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,  
 was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he  
 who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul  
 in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;  
 he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he  
 who after death can approach the Lord  
 and find friendship in the Father's embrace.  
 So that troubled time continued, woe  
 190 that never stopped, steady affliction  
 for Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.  
 There was panic after dark, people endured  
 raids in the night, riven by the terror.  
 When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane  
 was on home ground, over in Geatland.  
 There was no one else like him alive.  
 In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,  
 high-born and powerful. He ordered a boat  
 that would ply the waves. He announced his plan:  
 200 to sail the swan's road and search out that king,  
 the famous prince who needed defenders.  
 Nobody tried to keep him from going,  
 no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.  
 Instead, they inspected omens and spurred  
 his ambition to go, whilst he moved about  
 like the leader he was, enlisting men,  
 the best he could find; with fourteen others  
 the warrior boarded the boat as captain,  
 a canny pilot along coast and currents.

*At the court of King  
 Hygelac, a Geat  
 warrior prepares to  
 help Hrothgar*

210

Fyrst forð gewāt; flota wæs on ȳðum,  
 bāt under beorge. Beornas gearwe  
 on stefn stigon— strēamas wundon,  
 sund wið sande; secgas bāeron  
 on bearm nacan beorhte frætwe,  
 gūð-searo geatolīc; guman ūt scufon,  
 weras on wil-sīð wudu bundenne.  
 Gewāt þā ofer wāg-holm, winde gefȳsed,

220

flota fāmī-heals, fugle gelīcost,  
 oðþæt ymb ān-tīd oþres dōgores  
 wunden-stefna gewaden hæfde,  
 þæt ðā līðende land gesāwon,  
 brim-clifu blīcan, beorgas stēape,  
 sīde sǣ-næssas; þā wæs sund liden,  
 ēo-letes æt ende. Panon up hraðe  
 Wedera lēode on wang stigon,  
 sǣ-wudu sǣldon —syrca hrysedon,  
 gūð-gewædo; Gode þancedon,  
 þæs þe him ȳþ-lāde ēaðe wurdon.

230

Þā of wealle geseah weard Scildinga,  
 sē þe holm-clifu healdan scolde,  
 beran ofer bolcan beorhte randas,  
 fyrd-searu fūslicu; hine fyrwyt bræc  
 mōd-gehygdum, hwæt þā men wæron.  
 Gewāt him þā tō waroðe wicge rīdan  
 þegn Hrōðgāres, þrymmum cwehte  
 mægen-wudu mundum, meþel-wordum frægn:

240

“Hwæt syndon gē searo-hæbbendra,  
 byrnum werede, þe þus brontne cēol  
 ofer lagu-stræte lādan cwōmon,  
 hider ofer holmas? Ic hwīle wæs

210

Time went by, the boat was on water,  
 in close under the cliffs.  
 Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,  
 sand churned in surf, warriors loaded  
 a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear  
 in the vessel's hold, then heaved out,  
 away with a will in their wood-wreathed ship.  
 Over the waves, with the wind behind her  
 and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird  
 until her curved prow had covered the distance  
 and on the following day, at the due hour,  
 those seafarers sighted land,  
 sunlit cliffs, sheer crags  
 and looming headlands, the landfall they sought.  
 It was the end of their voyage and the Geats vaulted  
 over the side, out on to the sand,  
 and moored their ship. There was a clash of mail  
 and a thresh of gear. They thanked God  
 for that easy crossing on a calm sea.

220

230

When the watchman on the wall, the Shieldings' lookout  
 whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs,  
 saw shields glittering on the gangplank  
 and battle-equipment being unloaded  
 he had to find out who and what  
 the arrivals were. So he rode to the shore,  
 this horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them  
 in formal terms, flourishing his spear:

240

“What kind of men are you who arrive  
 rigged out for combat in coats of mail,  
 sailing here over the sea-lanes  
 in your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed

*The hero and his  
 troop sail from the  
 land of the Geats*

*The Danish coast-  
 guard challenges the  
 outsiders*



ende-sæta, æg-wearde hēold,  
 þē on land Dena lāðra nænig  
 mid scip-herge sceðþan ne meahte.  
 Nō hēr cūðlicor cuman ongunnon  
 lind-hæbbende; nē gē lēafnes-word  
 gūð-fremmendra gearwe ne wisson,  
 māga gemēdu. Næfre ic mārān geseah  
 eorla ofer eorþan, ðonne is ēower sum,  
 secg on searwum; nis þæt seld-guma,  
 250 wæpnum geweorðad; næfre him his wlite lēoge,  
 ænlic ansyn. Nū ic ēower sceal  
 frum-cyn witan, ær gē fyr heonan  
 lēas-scēaweras on land Dena  
 furþur fēran. Nū gē feor-būend,  
 mere-līðende, mīnne gehyrað  
 ānfealdne geþōht; ofost is sēlest  
 tō gecyðanne hwanan ēowre cyme syndon.”

Him se yldesta andswarode,  
 werodes wīsa, word-hord onlēac:  
 260 “Wē synt gum-cynnes Gēata lēode  
 ond Higelāces heorð-genēatas;  
 wæs mīn fæder folcum gecyþed,  
 æpele ord-fruma Ecgþēow hāten,—  
 gebād wintra worn, ær hē on weg hwurfe,  
 gamol of geardum; hine gearwe geman  
 witenā wēl-hwylc wīde geond eorþan.  
 Wē þurh holdne hige hlāford þīnne,  
 sunu Healfdenes, sēcean cwōmon,  
 lēod-gebyrgan; wes þū ūs lārena gōd!  
 270 Habbað wē tō þām mārān micel ærende,  
 Deniga frēan; ne sceal þær dyrne sum  
 wesān, þæs ic wēne. Þū wāst—gif hit is,

as lookout on this coast for a long time.  
 My job is to watch the waves for raiders,  
 any danger to the Danish shore.  
 Never before has a force under arms  
 disembarked so openly—not bothering to ask  
 if the sentries allowed them safe passage  
 or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen  
 a mightier man-at-arms on this earth  
 than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,  
 250 he is truly noble. This is no mere  
 hanger-on in a hero’s armour.  
 So now, before you fare inland  
 as interlopers, I have to be informed  
 about who you are and where you hail from.  
 Outsiders from across the water,  
 I say it again: the sooner you tell  
 where you come from and why, the better.”

The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
 the distinguished one delivered this answer:  
 260 “We belong by birth to the Geat people  
 and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.  
 In his day, my father was a famous man,  
 a noble warrior-lord named Ecgtheow.  
 He outlasted many a long winter  
 and went on his way. All over the world  
 men wise in counsel continue to remember him.  
 We come in good faith to find your lord  
 and nation’s shield, the son of Halfdane.  
 Give us the right advice and direction.  
 270 We have arrived here on a great errand  
 to the lord of the Danes, and I believe therefore  
 there should be nothing hidden or withheld between us.

*The Geat hero  
 announces himself  
 and explains his  
 mission*

swā wē sōþlice secgan hýrdon—  
þæt mid Scyldingum sceaðona ic nāt hwylc,  
dēogol dæd-hata, deorcum nihtum  
ēawed þurh egsan uncūðne nīð,  
hýnðu ond hrā-fyl. Ic þæs Hrōðgār mæg  
þurh rūmne sefan ræd gelæran,  
hū hē frōd ond gōd fēond oferswýðeþ—  
280 gyf him edwenden æfre scolde  
bealuwa bisigu, bōt eft cuman—  
ond þā cear-wylmas cōlran wurðap;  
oððe ā syþðan earfoð-þrāge,  
þrēa-nýd polað, þenden þær wunað  
on hēah-stede hūsa sēlest.”

Weard mæpelode, ðær on wicge sæt,  
ombeht unforht; “Æghwæþres seal  
scearp scyld-wiga gescād witan,  
worda ond worca, sē þe wēl þenceð.  
290 Ic þæt gehýre, þæt þis is hold weorod  
frēan Scyldinga. Gewītaþ forð beran  
wæpen ond gewædu; ic ēow wīsigē:  
swylce ic magu-þegnas mīne hāte  
wið fēonda gehwone flotan ēowerne,  
nīw-tyrwydne nacan on sande  
ārum healdan, oþðæt eft byreð  
ofer lagu-strēamas lēofne mannan  
wudu wunden-hals tō Weder-mearce:  
gōd-fremmendra swylcum gifeþe bið,  
300 þæt þone hilde-ræs hāl gedīgeð.”

Gewiton him þā fēran. Flota stille bād,  
seomode on sāle sīd-fæþmed scip,  
on ancre fæst. Eofor-līc scionon

So tell us if what we have heard is true  
about this threat, whatever it is,  
this danger abroad in the dark nights,  
this corpse-maker mongering death  
in the Shieldings' country. I come to proffer  
my wholehearted help and counsel.  
I can show the wise Hrothgar a way  
to defeat his enemy and find respite—  
280 if any respite is to reach him, ever.  
I can calm the turmoil and terror in his mind.  
Otherwise, he must endure woes  
and live with grief for as long as his hall  
stands at the horizon, on its high ground.”

Undaunted, sitting astride his horse,  
the coast-guard answered, “Anyone with gumption  
and a sharp mind will take the measure  
of two things: what's said and what's done.  
290 I believe what you have told me: that you are a troop  
loyal to our king. So come ahead  
with your arms and your gear, and I will guide you.  
What's more, I'll order my own comrades  
on their word of honour to watch your boat  
down there on the strand—keep her safe  
in her fresh tar, until the time comes  
for her curved prow to preen on the waves  
and bear this hero back to Geatland.  
May one so valiant and venturesome  
300 come unharmed through the clash of battle.”

So they went on their way. The ship rode the water,  
broad-beamed, bound by its hawser  
and anchored fast. Boar-shapes flashed

*The coast-guard  
allows the Geats to  
pass*

ofer hlēor-bergan: gehroden golde,  
 fāh ond fȳ-heard, ferh wearde hēold:  
 gūþ-mōd grummon. Guman ōnetton,  
 sigon ætsomne, oppæt hȳ sæl timbred,  
 geatolīc ond gold-fāh ongyton mihton;  
 þæt wæs fore-mārost fold-būendum  
 receda under roderum, on þām se rīca bād;  
 līxte se lēoma ofer landa fela.  
 Him þā hilde-dēor hof mōdigra  
 torht getāhte, þæt hīe him tō mihton  
 gegnum gangan; gūð-beorna sum  
 wicg gewende, word æfter cwæð:  
 “Mæl is mē tō fēran. Fæder al-walda  
 mid ār-stafum ēowic gehealde  
 sīða gesunde! Ic tō sǣ wille,  
 wið wrāð werod wearde healdan.”

Stræt wæs stān-fāh, stīg wīsoðe  
 gumum ætgædere. Gūð-byrne scān,  
 heard, hond-locen, hring-īren scīr  
 song in searwum. Þā hī tō sele furðum  
 in hyra gryre-geatwum gangan cwōmon,  
 setton sǣ-mēþe sīde scyldas,  
 rondas regn-hearde, wið þæs recedes weal;  
 bugon þā tō bence, byrnan hringdon,  
 gūð-searo gumena. Gāras stōdon,  
 sǣ-manna searo, samod ætgædere,  
 æsc-holt ufan græg; wæs sē īren-þrēat  
 wǣpnum gewurþad. Þā ðær wlonc hæleð  
 ōret-mecgas æfter æpelum frægn:

“Hwanon ferigeað gē fǣtte scyldas,  
 græge syrcan ond grīm-helmas,

above their cheek-guards, the brightly forged  
 work of goldsmiths, watching over  
 those stern-faced men. They marched in step,  
 hurrying on till the timbered hall  
 rose before them, radiant with gold.  
 Nobody on earth knew of another  
 building like it. Majesty lodged there,  
 its light shone over many lands.  
 So their gallant escort guided them  
 to that dazzling stronghold and indicated  
 the shortest way to it; then the noble warrior  
 wheeled on his horse and spoke these words:  
 “It is time for me to go. May the Almighty  
 Father keep you and in His kindness  
 watch over your exploits. I’m away to the sea,  
 back on alert against enemy raiders.”

It was a paved track, a path that kept them  
 in marching order. Their mail-shirts glinted,  
 hard and hand-linked; the high-gloss iron  
 of their armour rang. So they duly arrived  
 in their grim war-graith and gear at the hall,  
 and, weary from the sea, stacked wide shields  
 of the toughest hardwood against the wall,  
 then collapsed on the benches; battle-dress  
 and weapons clashed. They collected their spears  
 in a seafarers’ stook, a stand of greyish  
 tapering ash. And the troops themselves  
 were as good as their weapons.

Then a proud warrior  
 questioned the men concerning their origins:  
 “Where do you come from, carrying these  
 decorated shields and shirts of mail,

*They arrive at  
 Heorot*

here-sceafta hēap? Ic eom Hrōðgāres  
ār ond ombiht. Ne seah ic elpēodige  
þus manige men mōdiglīcran.  
Wēn' ic þæt gē for wlenco, nalles for wræc-sīðum,  
ac for hige-þrymmum Hrōðgār sōhton.”

340 Him þā ellen-rōf andswarode,  
wlanc Wedera lēod, word æfter spræc,  
heard under helme: “Wē synt Higelāces  
bēod-genēatas; Bēowulf is mīn nama.  
Wille ic āsecgan sunu Healfdenes,  
mārum þēodne mīn ærende,  
aldre þīnum, gif hē ūs geunnan wile,  
þæt wē hine swā gōdne grētan mōton.”  
Wulfgār maþelode: þæt wæs Wendla lēod,  
wæs his mōd-sefa manegum gecyðed,  
350 wīg ond wīsdōm: “Ic þæs wine Deniga  
frēan Scildinga frīnan wille,  
bēaga bryttan, swā þū bēna eart,  
þēoden mærne, ymb þīnne sīð,  
ond þē þā andsware ædre gecyðan,  
ðe mē se gōda āgifan þenceð.”

Hwearf þā hrædlīce, þær Hrōðgār sæt,  
eald ond unhār mid his eorla gedriht;  
ēode ellen-rōf, þæt hē for eaxlum gestōd  
Deniga frēan: cūþe hē duguðe þēaw.  
360 Wulfgār maðelode tō his wine-drihtne:  
“Hēr syndon geferede, feorran cumene  
ofer geofenes begang Gēata lēode;  
þone yldestan ōret-mecgas

these cheek-hinged helmets and javelins?  
I am Hrothgar's herald and officer.  
I have never seen so impressive or large  
an assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart,  
bravery not banishment, must have brought you to  
Hrothgar.”

340 The man whose name was known for courage,  
the Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,  
answered in return: “We are retainers  
from Hygelac's band. Beowulf is my name.  
If your lord and master, the most renowned  
son of Halfdane, will hear me out  
and graciously allow me to greet him in person,  
I am ready and willing to report my errand.”

Wulfgar replied, a Wendel chief  
renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom  
and the temper of his mind: “I will take this message,  
350 in accordance with your wish, to our noble king,  
our dear lord, friend of the Danes,  
the giver of rings. I will go and ask him  
about your coming here, then hurry back  
with whatever reply it pleases him to give.”

With that he turned to where Hrothgar sat,  
an old man among retainers;  
the valiant follower stood four-square  
in front of his king: he knew the courtesies.  
360 Wulfgar addressed his dear lord:  
“People from Geatland have put ashore.  
They have sailed far over the wide sea.  
They call the chief in charge of their band

*Beowulf announces  
his name*

*Formalities are  
observed*

370 Bēowulf nemnað; hȳ bēnan synt,  
 þæt hīe, þēoden mīn, wið þē mōton  
 wordum wrixlan. Nō ðū him wearne getēoh  
 ðīnra gegn-cwida, glæd-man Hrōðgār:  
 hȳ on wīg-getāwum wyrðe þinceað  
 eorla geæhtlan; hūru se aldor dēah,  
 sē þām heaðo-rincum hider wīsade.”  
 Hrōðgār maþelode, helm Scyldinga:  
 “Ic hine cūðe cniht-wesende;  
 wæs his eald-fæder Ecgþēo hāten,  
 ðām tō hām forgeaf Hrēþel Gēata  
 āngan dohtor; is his eafora nū  
 heard hēr cumen, sōhte holdne wine.  
 Ðonne sægdon þæt sǣ-līþende,  
 þā ðe gif-sceattas Gēata fyredon  
 380 þyder tō þance, þæt hē þritiges  
 manna mægen-cræft on his mund-gripe,  
 heaþo-rōf hæbbe. Hine hālig God  
 for ār-stafum ūs onsende  
 tō West-Denum, þæs ic wēn hæbbe,  
 wið Grendles gryre. Ic þām gōdan sceal  
 for his mōd-þræce mādmas bēodan.  
 Bēo ðū on ofeste, hāt in gān,  
 sēon sibbe-gedriht samod ætgædere;  
 gesaga him ēac wordum þæt hīe sint wil-cuman  
 Deniga lēodum!” Þā tō dura healle  
 390 Wulfgār ēode, word inne ābēad:  
 Ēow hēt secgan sige-drihten mīn,  
 aldor Ēast-Dena, þæt hē ēower æþelu can:  
 ond gē him syndon ofer sǣ-wylmas,  
 heard-hicgende, hider wil-cuman.

370 by the name of Beowulf. They beg, my lord,  
 an audience with you, exchange of words  
 and formal greeting. Most gracious Hrothgar,  
 do not refuse them, but grant them a reply.  
 From their arms and appointment, they appear well born  
 and worthy of respect, especially the one  
 who has led them this far: he is formidable indeed.”

380 Hrothgar, protector of Shieldings, replied:  
 “I used to know him when he was a young boy.  
 His father before him was called Ecgtheow.  
 Hrethel the Geat gave Ecgtheow  
 his daughter in marriage. This man is their son,  
 here to follow up an old friendship.  
 A crew of seamen who sailed for me once  
 with a gift-cargo across to Geatland  
 returned with marvellous tales about him:  
 390 athane, they declared, with the strength of thirty  
 in the grip of each hand. Now Holy God  
 has, in His goodness, guided him here  
 to the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel.  
 This is my hope; and for his heroism  
 I will recompense him with a rich treasure.  
 Go immediately, bid him and the Geats  
 he has in attendance to assemble and enter.  
 Say, moreover, when you speak to them,  
 they are welcome to Denmark.”

390 At the door of the hall,  
 Wulfgar duly delivered the message:  
 “My lord, the conquering king of the Danes,  
 bids me announce that he knows your ancestry;  
 also that he welcomes you here to Heorot  
 and salutes your arrival from across the sea.

*Hrothgar recognizes  
 Beowulf's name and  
 approves his arrival*

Nū gē mōton gangan in ēowrum gūð-getāwum,  
under here-grīman, Hrōðgār gesēon;  
lætað hilde-bord hēr onbīdan,  
wudu, wæl-sceaftas, worda geþinges.”

400 Ārās þā se rīca, ymb hine rinc manig,  
prýðlic þegna hēap; sume þær bidon,  
heaðo-rēaf hēoldon, swā him se hearda bebēad.  
Snyredon ætsomne, þā secg wīsode,  
under Heorotes hrōf; ēode hilde-dēor,  
heard under helme, þæt hē on hēoðe gestōd.  
Bēowulf maðelode —on him byrne scān,  
searo-net seowed smiþes orþancum

“Wæs þū, Hrōðgār, hāl! Ic eom Higelāces  
mæg ond mago-ðegn; hæbbe ic mærdā fela  
ongunnen on geogoþe. Mē wearð Grendles þing  
410 on mīnre ēþel-tyrf undyrne cūð;  
secgað sǣ-līðend, þæt þæs sele stande,  
reced sēlesta, rinca gehwylcum  
īdel ond unnyt, siððan æfen-lēoht  
under heofenes hādor beholen weorþeð.  
Þā mē þæt gelærdon lēode mīne,  
þā sēlestan, snotere ceorlas,  
þēoden Hrōðgār, þæt ic þē sōhte,  
forþan hīe mægenes cræft mīne cūþon:  
selfe ofersāwon, ðā ic of searwum cwōm,  
420 fāh from fēondum, þær ic fīfe geband,  
yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slōg  
niceras nihtes, nearo-þearfe drēah,  
wræc Wedera nīð —wēan āhsodon—  
forgrand gramum: ond nū wið Grendel sceal,  
wið þām āglæcan āna gehēgan  
ðing wið þyrse. Ic þē nū ðā,

You are free now to move forward  
to meet Hrothgar, in helmets and armour,  
but shields must stay here and spears be stacked  
until the outcome of the audience is clear.”

400 The hero arose, surrounded closely  
by his powerful thanes. A party remained  
under orders to keep watch on the arms;  
the rest proceeded, led by their prince  
under Heorot’s roof. And standing on the hearth  
in webbed links that the smith had woven,  
the fine-forged mesh of his gleaming mail-shirt,  
resolute in his helmet, Beowulf spoke:  
“Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac’s kinsman,  
one of his hall-troop. When I was younger,  
I had great triumphs. Then news of Grendel,  
410 hard to ignore, reached me at home:  
sailors brought stories of the plight you suffer  
in this legendary hall, how it lies deserted,  
empty and useless once the evening light  
hides itself under heaven’s dome.  
So every elder and experienced councilman  
among my people supported my resolve  
to come here to you, King Hrothgar,  
because all knew of my awesome strength.  
They had seen me boltered in the blood of enemies  
420 when I battled and bound five beasts,  
raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea  
slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes  
and avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it  
upon themselves, I devastated them).  
Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,  
settle the outcome in single combat.

*Beowulf enters  
Heorot. He gives an  
account of his heroic  
exploits*

*He declares he will  
fight Grendel*

brego Beorht-Dena, biddan wille,  
 eodor Scyldinga, ānre bēne:  
 þæt ðū mē ne forwyrne, wīgendra hlēo,  
 430 frēo-wine folca, nū ic þus feorran cōm,  
 þæt ic mōte āna ond mīnra eorla gedryht,  
 þes hearda hēap, Heorot fālsian.  
 Hæbbe ic ēac geāhsod, þæt se āglāca  
 for his won-hyðum wāpna ne recceð.  
 Ic þæt þonne forhicge, swā mē Higelāc sīe,  
 mīn mon-drihten, mōdes blīðe,  
 þæt ic sweord bere oþðe sīðne scyld,  
 geolo-rand tō gūpe; ac ic mid grāpe sceal  
 440 fōn wið fēonde ond ymb feorh sacan,  
 lāð wið lāpum; ðær gelyfan sceal  
 Dryhtnes dōme sē þe hine dēað nimeð.  
 Wēn' ic þæt hē wille, gif hē wealdan mōt,  
 in þām gūð-sele Gēotena lēode  
 etan unforhte, swā hē oft dyde,  
 mægen hrēð-manna. Nā þū mīnne þearft  
 hafalan hýdan, ac hē mē habban wile  
 drēore fāhne, gif mec dēað nimeð;  
 byreð blōdig wæl, byrgean þenceð;  
 eteð ān-genga unmurnlice,  
 450 mearcað mōr-hopu; nō ðū ymb mīnes ne þearft  
 lices feorme leng sorgian.  
 Onsend Higelāce, gif mec hild nime,  
 beadu-scrūda betst, þæt mīne brēost wereð,  
 hrægla sēlest; þæt is Hræðlan lāf,  
 Wēlandes geweorc. Gæð ā wyrd swā hīo scel!"  
 Hrōðgār maþelode, helm Scyldinga:  
 "For were-fyhtum þū, wine mīn Bēowulf,  
 ond for ār-stafum ūsic sōhtest.

And so, my request, O king of Bright-Danes,  
 dear prince of the Shieldings, friend of the people  
 and their ring of defence, my one request  
 430 is that you won't refuse me, who have come this far,  
 the privilege of purifying Heorot,  
 with my own men to help me, and nobody else.  
 I have heard moreover that the monster scorns  
 in his reckless way to use weapons;  
 therefore, to heighten Hygelac's fame  
 and gladden his heart, I hereby renounce  
 sword and the shelter of the broad shield,  
 the heavy war-board: hand-to-hand  
 is how it will be, a life-and-death  
 440 fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells  
 must deem it a just judgement by God.  
 If Grendel wins, it will be a gruesome day;  
 he will glut himself on the Geats in the war-hall,  
 swoop without fear on that flower of manhood  
 as on others before. Then my face won't be there  
 to be covered in death: he will carry me away  
 as he goes to ground, gorged and bloodied;  
 he will run gloating with my raw corpse  
 and feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy,  
 450 fouling his moor-nest. No need then  
 to lament for long or lay out my body:  
 if the battle takes me, send back  
 this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned  
 and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.  
 Fate goes ever as fate must."

Hrothgar, the helmet of Shieldings, spoke:  
 "Beowulf, my friend, you have travelled here  
 to favour us with help and to fight for us.

*Hrothgar recalls a  
 friendship and tells  
 of Grendel's raids*

460 Geslōh þīn fæder fāhðe mæste,  
 wearþ hē Heapolāfe tō hand-bonan  
 mid Wilfingum; ðā hine wāra cyn  
 for here-brōgan habban ne mihte.  
 Þanon hē gesōhte Sūð-Dena folc  
 ofer yða gewealc, Ār-Scyldinga;  
 ðā ic furþum wēold folce Deniga  
 ond on geogoðe hēold grimme-rīce,  
 hord-burh hæleþa; ðā wæs Heregār dēad,  
 mīn yldra mæg unlifigende,  
 bearn Healfdenes; sē wæs betera ðonne ic!  
 470 Siððan þā fāhðe fēo þingode;  
 sende ic Wylfingum ofer wæteres hrycg  
 ealde mādmas; hē mē āþas swōr.  
 Sorh is mē tō secganne on sefan mīnum  
 gumena ængum, hwæt mē Grendel hafað  
 hȳnðo on Heorote mid his hete-þancum,  
 fār-nīða gefremed; is mīn flet-werod,  
 wīg-hēap gewanod; hīe wyrd forswēop  
 on Grendles gryre. God ēaþe mæg  
 þone dol-sceaðan dæda getwæfan!  
 480 Ful oft gebēotedon bēore druncne  
 ofer ealo-wæge ōret-mecgas,  
 þæt hīe in bēor-sele bīdan woldon  
 Grendles gūþe mid gryrum ecga.  
 Ðonne wæs þeos medo-heal on morgen-tīd,  
 driht-sele drēor-fāh, þonne dæg lixte,  
 eal benc-þelu blōde bestȳmed,  
 heall heoru-drēore; āhte ic holdra þȳ læs  
 dēorre duguðe, þē þā dēað fornam.

460 There was a feud one time, begun by your father.  
 With his own hands he had killed Heatholaf,  
 who was a Wulfing; so war was looming  
 and his people, in fear of it, forced him to leave.  
 He came away then over rolling waves  
 to the South-Danes here, the sons of honour.  
 I was then in the first flush of kingship,  
 establishing my sway over all the rich strongholds  
 of this heroic land. Heorogar,  
 my older brother and the better man,  
 also a son of Halfdane's, had died.  
 470 Finally I healed the feud by paying:  
 I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings  
 and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance.

"It bothers me to have to burden anyone  
 with all the grief Grendel has caused  
 and the havoc he has wreaked upon us in Heorot,  
 our humiliations. My household-guard  
 are on the wane, fate sweeps them away  
 into Grendel's clutches—

but God can easily  
 halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

480 "Time and again, when the goblets passed  
 and seasoned fighters got flushed with beer  
 they would pledge themselves to protect Heorot  
 and wait for Grendel with whetted swords.  
 But when dawn broke and day crept in  
 over each empty, blood-spattered bench,  
 the floor of the mead-hall where they had feasted  
 would be slick with slaughter. And so they died,  
 faithful retainers, and my following dwindled.



490 Site nū tō symle, ond on sǣl meoto  
 sige hrēð-secga, swā þīn sefa hwette!"  
 Pā wæs Gēat-mæcgum geador ætsomne  
 on bēor-sele benc gerȳmed;  
 þær swīð-ferhþe sittan ēodon,  
 þrȳðum dealle; þegn nytte behēold,  
 sē þe on handa bær hroden ealo-wāge,  
 scencte scīr-wered; scop hwīlum sang  
 hādor on Heorote; þær wæs hæleða drēam,  
 duguð unlytel Dena ond Wedera.  
 500 Unferð mapelode, Ecglāfes bearn,  
 þe æt fōtum sæt frēan Scyldinga,  
 onband beadu-rūne: wæs him Bēowulfes sīð,  
 mōdges mere-faran, micel æspunca,  
 forþon þe hē ne ūþe, þæt ænig oðer man  
 æfre mārða þon mā middan-geardes  
 gehēdde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa:  
 "Eart þū sē Bēowulf, sē þe wið Breca wunne,  
 on sīdne sǣ ymb sund flite,  
 ðær git for wlence wada cunnedon  
 ond for dol-gilpe on dēop wæter  
 510 aldrum nēþdon? Nē inc ænig mon,  
 nē lēof nē lād, belēan mihte  
 sorh-fullne sīð, þā git on sund rēon;  
 þær git ēagor-strēam earmum þehton,  
 mæton mere-strāta, mundum brugdon,  
 glidon ofer gār-secg. Geofon ȳpum wēol,  
 wintrys wylmum; git on wæteres æht  
 seofon niht swuncon; hē þē æt sunde oferflāt,  
 hæfde mære mægen; þā hine on morgen-tīd  
 on Heapo-Rāmes holm up ætbær.

490 "Now take your place at the table, relish  
 the triumph of heroes to your heart's content."

Then a bench was cleared in that banquet hall  
 so the Geats could have room to be together  
 and the party sat, proud in their bearing,  
 strong and stalwart. An attendant stood by  
 with a decorated pitcher, pouring bright  
 helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,  
 filling Heorot with his head-clearing voice,  
 gladdening that great rally of Geats and Danes.

*A feast in Heorot*

500 From where he crouched at the king's feet,  
 Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke  
 contrary words. Beowulf's coming,  
 his sea-braving, made him sick with envy:  
 he could not brook or abide the fact  
 that anyone else alive under heaven  
 might enjoy greater regard than he did:  
 "Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca  
 in a swimming match on the open sea,  
 risking the water just to prove that you could win?  
 It was sheer vanity made you venture out  
 510 on the main deep. And no matter who tried,  
 friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,  
 neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.  
 You waded in, embracing water,  
 taking its measure, mastering currents,  
 riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,  
 winter went wild in the waves, but you vied  
 for seven nights; and then he outswam you,  
 came ashore the stronger contender.  
 He was cast up safe and sound one morning

*Unferth strikes a  
 discordant note*

*Unferth's version of  
 a swimming contest*

520 Donon hē gesōhte swāesne ēðel,  
 lēof his lēodum, lond Brondinga,  
 freoðo-burh fægere, þær hē folc āhte,  
 burh ond bēagas. Bēot eal wið þē  
 sunu Bēanstānes sōðe gelāste.  
 Donne wēne ic tō þē wyrstan geþingea,  
 ðēah þū heaðo-rāsa gehwær dohte,  
 grimre gūðe, gif þū Grendles dearest  
 niht-longne fyrst nēan bīdan.”  
 Bēowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:  
 530 “Hwæt þū worn fela, wine mīn Unferð,  
 bēore druncen ymb Breca sprāce,  
 sægdest from his sīðe! Sōð ic talige  
 þæt ic mere-strengo māran āhte,  
 earfeþo on ȳpum, ðonne ænig oþer man.  
 Wit þæt gecwādon cniht-wesende  
 ond gebēotedon — wæron bēgen þā gīt  
 on geogoð-fēore— þæt wit on gār-secg ūt  
 aldrum nēðdon; ond þæt geæfndon swā  
 Hæfdon swurd nacod, þā wit on sund rēon,  
 540 heard on handa; wit unc wið hron-fixas  
 werian þōhton; nō hē wiht fram mē  
 flōd-ȳpum feor flēotan meahte,  
 hraþor on holme, nō ic fram him wolde.  
 Ðā wit ætsomne on sē wæron  
 fīf nihta fyrst, oþþæt unc flōd tōdrāf,  
 wado weallende, wedera cealdost,  
 nīpende niht, ond norþan-wind  
 heaðo-grim ondhwearf. Hrēo wæron ȳþa,  
 wæs mere-fixa mōd onhrēred.  
 550 Þær mē wið lādum lic-syrce mīn,  
 heard, hond-locen, helpe gefremede,

520 among the Heathoreams, then made his way  
 to where he belonged in Bronding country,  
 home again, sure of his ground  
 in strongroom and bawn. So Breca made good  
 his boast upon you and was proved right.  
 No matter, therefore, how you may have fared  
 in every bout and battle until now,  
 this time you'll be worsted; no one has ever  
 outlasted an entire night against Grendel.”  
 Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:  
 530 “Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say  
 about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer  
 that was doing the talking. The truth is this:  
 when the going was heavy in those high waves,  
 I was the strongest swimmer of all.  
 We'd been children together and we grew up  
 daring ourselves to outdo each other,  
 boasting and urging each other to risk  
 our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.  
 Each of us swam holding a sword,  
 540 a naked, hard-proofed blade for protection  
 against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never  
 move out farther or faster from me  
 than I could manage to move from him.  
 Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on  
 for five nights, until the long flow  
 and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,  
 night falling and winds from the north  
 drove us apart. The deep boiled up  
 and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.  
 550 My armour helped me to hold out;  
 my hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,

*Beowulf corrects  
 Unferth*

beado-hrægl brōden on brēostum læg  
golde gegyrwed. Mē tō grunde tēah  
fāh fēond-scaða, fæste hæfde  
grim on grāpe; hwæpre mē gyfeþe wearð,  
þæt ic āglācan orde gerāhte,  
hilde-bille; heaþo-ræs fornam  
mihtig mere-dēor þurh mīne hand.

560 “Swā mec gelōme lādo-getēonan  
þrēatedon þearle; ic him þēnode  
dēoran sweorde, swā hit gedēfe wæs.  
Næs hīe ðære fülle gefēan hæfdon,  
mān-fordædlan, þæt hīe mē þēgon,  
symbol ymbsæton sǣ-grunde nēah;  
ac on mergenne mēcum wunde  
be yð-lāfe uppe lāgon,  
sweordum āswefede, þæt syðþan nā  
ymb brontne ford brim-liðende  
570 lāde ne letton. Lēoht ēastan cōm,  
beorht bēacen Godes; brimu swaþredon  
þæt ic sǣ-næssas gesēon mihte,  
windige weallas. Wyrð oft nereð  
unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah.  
Hwæpere mē gesælde, þæt ic mid sweorde ofslōh  
niceras nigene. Nō ic on niht gefrægn  
under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan,  
nē on ēg-strēamum earmran mannon.  
Hwæpere ic fāra feng fēore gedīgde,  
580 sīþes wērig. Ðā mec sǣ oþbær,  
flōd æfter faroðe on Finna land,  
wadu weallendu. Nō ic wiht fram þē  
swylcra searo-nīða secgan hýrde,

a fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,  
kept me safe when some ocean creature  
pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast  
and swathed in its grip, I was granted one  
final chance: my sword plunged  
and the ordeal was over. Through my own hands,  
the fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

560 “Time and again, foul things attacked me,  
lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,  
gave as good as I got with my sword.  
My flesh was not for feasting on,  
there would be no monsters gnawing and gloating  
over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.  
Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping  
the sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated  
like the ocean’s leavings. From now on  
sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids  
were over for good. Light came from the east,  
570 bright guarantee of God, and the waves  
went quiet; I could see headlands  
and buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,  
fate spares the man it has not already marked.  
However it occurred, my sword had killed  
nine sea-monsters. Such night-dangers  
and hard ordeals I have never heard of  
nor of a man more desolate in surging waves.  
But worn out as I was, I survived,  
580 came through with my life. The ocean lifted  
and laid me ashore, I landed safe  
on the coast of Finland.

Now I cannot recall  
any fight you entered, Unferth,

*Beowulf tells of his  
ordeal in the sea*

billa brōgan. Breca nǣfre gīt  
 æt heaðo-lāce, nē gehwæþer incer,  
 swā dēorlice dǣd gefremede  
 fāgum sweordum —nō ic þæs fela gylpe—  
 þēah ðū þīnum brōðrum tō banan wurde,  
 hēafod-mægum; þæs þū in helle scealt  
 werhðo drēogan, þēah þīn wit duge.  
 590 Secge ic þē tō sōðe, sunu Ecglāfes,  
 þæt nǣfre Grendel swā fela gryra gefremede,  
 atol æglāca ealdre þīnum,  
 hȳnðo on Heorote, gif þīn hige wære,  
 sefa swā searo-grim, swā þū self talast;  
 ac hē hafað onfunden, þæt hē þā fāhðe ne þearf,  
 atole ecg-þræce ēower lēode  
 swīðe onsittan, Sige-Scyldinga.  
 Nymeð nȳd-bāde, nānegum ārað  
 lēode Deniga, ac hē lust wigeð,  
 600 swefeð ond sendeþ, secce ne wēneþ  
 tō Gār-Denum. Ac ic him Gēata sceal  
 eafod ond ellen ungeāra nū,  
 gūþe gebēodan. Gāþ eft sē þe mōt  
 tō medo mōdig, siþþan morgen-lēoht  
 ofer ylða bearn oþres dōgores,  
 sunne swegl-wered sūþan scīneð!”  
 Þā wæs on sǣlum sīnces brytta,  
 gamol-feax ond gūð-rōf; gēoce gelȳfde  
 brego Beorht-Dena, gehȳrde on Bēowulfe  
 610 folces hyrde fæst-rædne gepōht.  
 Ðær wæs hǣleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode,  
 word wæron wynsume. Eode Wealhþēow forð,  
 cwēn Hrōðgāres, cynna gemyndig;  
 grētte gold-hroden guman on healle,

that bears comparison. I don't boast when I say  
 that neither you nor Breca were ever much  
 celebrated for swordsmanship  
 or for facing danger on the field of battle.  
 You killed your own kith and kin,  
 so for all your cleverness and quick tongue,  
 you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell.  
 590 The fact is, Unferth, if you were truly  
 as keen or courageous as you claim to be  
 Grendel would never have got away with  
 such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,  
 havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere.  
 But he knows he need never be in dread  
 of your blade making a mizzle of his blood  
 or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter—  
 from the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear.  
 He knows he can trample down you Danes  
 600 to his heart's content, humiliate and murder  
 without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.  
 I will show him how Geats shape to kill  
 in the heat of battle. Then whoever wants to  
 may go bravely to mead, when morning light,  
 scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south  
 and brings another daybreak to the world.”

Then the grey-haired treasure-giver was glad;  
 far-famed in battle, the prince of Bright-Danes  
 and keeper of his people counted on Beowulf,  
 610 on the warrior's steadfastness and his word.  
 So the laughter started, the din got louder  
 and the crowd was happy. Wealhtheow came in,  
 Hrothgar's queen, observing the courtesies.  
 Adorned in her gold, she graciously saluted

*Unferth rebuked.  
 Beowulf reaffirms his  
 determination to  
 defeat Grendel*

*Wealhtheow,  
 Hrothgar's queen,  
 graces the banquet*

ond þā frēolic wīf ful gesealde  
 ærest Ēast-Dena ēþel-wearde;  
 bæd hine blīðne æt þære bēor-þege,  
 lēodum lēofne; hē on lust geþeah  
 symbol ond sele-ful, sige-rōf kyning.  
 620 Ymb-ēode þā ides Helminga  
 duguþe ond geogoþe dæl æghwylcne,  
 sinc-fato sealde, oþþæt sæl ālamp,  
 þæt hīo Bēowulfe, bēag-hroden cwēn  
 mōde geþungen, medo-ful ætbær.  
 Grētte Gēata lēod, gode þancode  
 wīs-fæst wordum, þæs ðe hire se willa gelamp,  
 þæt hēo on ænigne eorl gelýfde  
 fyrena frōfre. Hē þæt ful geþeah,  
 wæl-rēow wiga, æt Wealhþēon,  
 630 ond þā gyddode gūþe gefýsed;  
 Bēowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþēowes:  
 “Ic þæt hogode, þā ic on holm gestāh,  
 sǣ-bāt gesæt mid mīnra secga gedriht,  
 þæt ic ānunga ēowra lēoda  
 willan geworhte, oþðe on wæl crunge,  
 fēond-grāpum fæst. Ic gefremman sceal  
 eorlic ellen, oþðe ende-dæg  
 on þisse meodu-healle mīnne gebīdan.”  
 640 Ðām wīfe þā word wēl līcodon,  
 gilp-cwide Gēates; ēode gold-hroden  
 frēolicu folc-cwēn tō hire frēan sittan.  
 Þā wæs eft swā ær inne on healle  
 þryð-word sprecen, ðēod on sǣlum,  
 sige-folca swēg, oþþæt semninga

the men in hall, then handed the cup  
 first to Hrothgar, their homeland’s guardian,  
 urging him to drink deep and enjoy it  
 because he was dear to them. And he drank it down  
 like the warlord he was, with festive cheer.  
 620 So the Helming woman went on her rounds,  
 queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,  
 offering the goblet to all ranks,  
 treating the household and the assembled troop  
 until it was Beowulf’s turn to take it from her hand.  
 With measured words she welcomed the Geat  
 and thanked God for granting her wish  
 that a deliverer she could believe in would arrive  
 to ease their afflictions. He accepted the cup,  
 a daunting man, dangerous in action  
 630 and eager for it always. He addressed Wealhtheow;  
 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said:

“I had a fixed purpose when I put to sea.  
 As I sat in the boat with my band of men,  
 I meant to perform to the uttermost  
 what your people wanted or perish in the attempt,  
 in the fiend’s clutches. And I shall fulfil that purpose,  
 prove myself with a proud deed  
 or meet my death here in the mead-hall.”

640 This formal boast by Beowulf the Geat  
 pleased the lady well and she went to sit  
 by Hrothgar, regal and arrayed with gold.

Then it was like old times in the echoing hall,  
 proud talk and the people happy,  
 loud and excited; until soon enough

*Beowulf's formal  
boast*

*Hrothgar leaves  
Heorot in Beowulf's  
keeping*

650 sunu Healfdenes sēcean wolde  
 æfen-ræste. Wiste þām āhlācan  
 tō þām hēah-sele hilde gepinged,  
 siððan hīe sunnan lēoht gesēon mehton,  
 oþ ðe nīpende niht ofer ealle,  
 650 scadu-helma gesceapu scrīðan cwōman  
 wan under wolcnum. Werod eall ārās.  
 Gegrētte þā guma oþerne,  
 Hrōðgār Bēowulf, ond him hæl ābēad,  
 wīn-ærnes geweald, ond þæt word ācwæð:  
 “Nǣfre ic ænegum men ær ālyfde,  
 siþðan ic hond ond rond hebban mihte,  
 ðrȳp-ærn Dena būton þē nū ðā.  
 Hafā nū ond geheald husa sēlest:  
 gemyne mǣrþo, mægen-ellen cȳð,  
 660 waca wið wrāþum! Ne bið þē wilna gād  
 gif þū þæt ellen-weorc aldre gedīgest.”  
 Ðā him Hrōþgār gewāt mid his hælepa gedryht,  
 eodur Scyldinga ūt of healle;  
 wolde wīg-fruma Wealhþēo sēcan,  
 cwēn tō gebeddan. Hæfde kyning-wuldor  
 Grendle tōgēanes, swā guman gefrungon,  
 sele-weard āseted; sundor-nytte behēold  
 ymb aldor Dena, eoton-weard’ ābēad.  
 Hūru Gēata lēod georne truwode  
 670 mōdgan mægnes, Metodes hylde.  
 Ðā hē him of dyde isern-byrgan,  
 helm of hafelan, sealde his hyrsted sweord,  
 irena cyst ombiht-þegne,  
 ond gehealdan hēt hilde-geatwe.  
 Gespræc þā se gōða gylp-worda sum,  
 Bēowulf Gēata, ær hē on bed stige:

650 Halfdane’s heir had to be away  
 to his night’s rest. He realized  
 that the demon was going to descend on the hall,  
 that he had plotted all day, from dawn-light  
 until darkness gathered again over the world  
 and stealthy night-shapes came stealing forth  
 under the cloud-murk. The company stood  
 as the two leaders took leave of each other:  
 Hrothgar wished Beowulf health and good luck,  
 named him hall-warden and announced as follows:  
 “Never, since my hand could hold a shield  
 have I entrusted or given control  
 of the Danes’ hall to anyone but you.  
 Ward and guard it, for it is the greatest of houses.  
 Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame,  
 660 beware of the enemy. There’s nothing you wish for  
 that won’t be yours if you win through alive.”  
 Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.  
 The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,  
 left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,  
 his queen and bedmate. The King of Glory  
 (as people learned) had posted a lookout  
 who was a match for Grendel, a guard against monsters,  
 special protection to the Danish prince.  
 And the Geat placed complete trust  
 670 in his strength of limb and the Lord’s favour.  
 He began to remove his iron breast-mail,  
 took off the helmet and handed his attendant  
 the patterned sword, a smith’s masterpiece,  
 ordering him to keep the equipment guarded.  
 And before he bedded down, Beowulf,  
 that prince of goodness, proudly asserted:

*Beowulf renounces  
the use of weapons*

680 “Nō ic mē an here-wæsmun hnāgran talige  
 gūþ-geweorca þonne Grendel hine;  
 forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle,  
 aldre benēotan, þēah ic eal mæge.  
 Nāt hē þāra gōða, þæt hē mē ongēan slēa,  
 rand gehēawe, þēah ðe hē rōf sīe  
 nīþ-geweorca: ac wit on niht sculon  
 secge ofersittan, gif hē gesēcean dear  
 wīg ofer wāpen: ond siþðan wītig God  
 on swā hwæpere hond, hālig Dryhten,  
 mārðo dēme, swā him gemet þince.”  
 690 Hylde hine þā heaþo-dēor, hlēor-bolster onfēng  
 eorles andwlitan, ond hine ymb monig  
 snellīc sǣ-rinc sele-reste gebēah.  
 Nānig heora þōhte, þæt hē þanon scolde  
 eft eard-lufan æfre gesēcean,  
 folc oþðe frēo-burh, þær hē āfēded wæs;  
 ac hīe hæfdon gefrūnen, þæt hīe ær tō fela micles  
 in þām wīn-sele wæl-dēað fornam,  
 Denigea lēode. Ac him Dryhten forgeaf  
 wīg-spēda gewiofu, Wedera lēodum,  
 frōfor ond fultum, þæt hīe fēond heora  
 700 ðurh ānes cræft ealle ofercōmon,  
 selfes mihtum. Sōð is gecyþed,  
 þæt mihtig God manna cynnes  
 weold wīde-ferhð. Cōm on wanre niht  
 scrīðan sceadu-genga; scēotend swāfon,  
 þā þæt horn-reced healdan scoldon,  
 ealle būton ānum. Þæt wæs yldum cūþ,  
 þæt hīe ne mōste, þā Metod nolde,  
 se syn-scaþa under sceadu bregdan,

680 “When it comes to fighting, I count myself  
 as dangerous any day as Grendel.  
 So it won't be a cutting edge I'll wield  
 to mow him down, easily as I might.  
 He has no idea of the arts of war,  
 of shield or sword-play, although he does possess  
 a wild strength. No weapons, therefore,  
 for either this night: unarmed he shall face me  
 if face me he dares. And may the Divine Lord  
 in His wisdom grant the glory of victory  
 to whichever side He sees fit.”  
 Then down the brave man lay with his bolster  
 under his head and his whole company  
 690 of sea-rovers at rest beside him.  
 None of them expected he would ever see  
 his homeland again or get back  
 to his native place and the people who reared him.  
 They knew too well the way it was before,  
 how often the Danes had fallen prey  
 to death in the mead-hall. But the Lord was weaving  
 a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats.  
 Through the strength of one they all prevailed;  
 they would crush their enemy and come through  
 700 in triumph and gladness. The truth is clear:  
 Almighty God rules over mankind  
 and always has.  
 Then out of the night  
 came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift;  
 the hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,  
 all except one; it was widely understood  
 that as long as God disallowed it,  
 the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.

*The Geats await  
Grendel's attack*

ac hē wæccende wrāpum on andan  
bād bolgen-mōd beadwa geþinges.

710 Dā cōm of mōre under mist-hleoþum  
Grendel gongan, Godes yrre bær,  
mynte se mǎn-scaða manna cynnes  
sumne besyrwan in sele þām hēan.  
Wōd under wolcnum, tō þæs þe hē wīn-reced,  
gold-sele gumena gearwost wisse,  
fættum fāhne. Ne wæs þæt forma sīð  
þæt hē Hrōþgāres hām gesōhte.  
Nǣfre hē on aldor-dagum ær nē siþðan  
heardran hǣle heal-ðegnas fand.  
720 Cōm þā tō recede rinc sīðian  
drēamum bedǣled. Duru sōna onarn  
fȳr-bendum fæst, syþðan hē hire folmum gehrān:  
onbrǣd þā bealo-hȳdig, ðā hē gebolgen wæs,  
recedes mūþan. Raþe æfter þon  
on fāgne flōr fēond treddode,  
ēode yrre-mōd; him of ēagum stōd  
ligge gelicost lēoht unfæger.  
Geseah hē in recede rinca manige,  
swefan sibbe-gedriht samod ætgædere,  
730 mago-rinca hēap. Þā his mōd āhlōg;  
mynte þæt hē gedælde, ær þon dæg cwōme,  
atol āglāca, ānra gehwylces  
līf wið līce, þā him ālumpen wæs  
wist-fylle wēn. Ne wæs þæt wyrd þā gēn,  
þæt hē mā mōste manna cynnes  
ðicgean ofer þā niht. Prȳð-swȳð behēold,  
mæg Higelāces, hū se mǎn-scaða  
under fær-gripum gefaran wolde.

One man, however, was in fighting mood,  
awake and on edge, spoiling for action.

710 In off the moors, down through the mist bands  
God-cursed Grendel came greedily loping.  
The bane of the race of men roamed forth,  
hunting for a prey in the high hall.  
Under the cloud-murk he moved towards it  
until it shone above him, a sheer keep  
of fortified gold. Nor was that the first time  
he had scouted the grounds of Hrothgar's dwelling—  
although never in his life, before or since,  
did he find harder fortune or hall-defenders.  
720 Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead  
and arrived at the bawn. The iron-braced door  
turned on its hinge when his hands touched it.  
Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open  
the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,  
pacing the length of the patterned floor  
with his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,  
flame more than light, flared from his eyes.  
He saw many men in the mansion, sleeping,  
a ranked company of kinsmen and warriors  
quartered together. And his glee was demonic,  
730 picturing the mayhem: before morning  
he would rip life from limb and devour them,  
feed on their flesh; but his fate that night  
was due to change, his days of ravening  
had come to an end.

Mighty and canny,  
Higelac's kinsman was keenly watching  
for the first move the monster would make.  
Nor did the creature keep him waiting

*Grendel strikes*

*A Geat warrior  
perishes*



740 Nē þæt se āglæca yldan þōhte,  
 ac hē gefēng hraðe forman sīðe  
 slæpendne rinc, slāt unwearnum,  
 bāt bān-locan, blōd ēdrum dranc,  
 syn-snæðum swealh; sōna hæfde  
 unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,  
 fēt ond folma. Forð nēar ætstōp,  
 nam þā mid handa hige-þihtigne  
 rinc on ræste —ræhte ongēan  
 fēond mid folme; hē onfēng hraþe  
 750 inwit-þancum ond wið earm gesæt.  
 Sōna þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde,  
 þæt hē ne mētte middan-geardes,  
 eorþan scēatta on elran men  
 mund-gripe mārān; hē on mōde wearð  
 forht on ferhðe; nō þy ær fram meahte.  
 Hyge wæs him hin-fūs, wolde on heolster flēon,  
 sēcan dēofla gedræg; ne wæs his drohtoð þær,  
 swylce hē on ealder-dagum ær gemētte.  
 Gemunde þā se gōda mæg Higelāces  
 æfen-spræce, up-lang āstōd  
 760 ond him fæste wiðfēng; fingras burston:  
 eoten wæs útweard, eorl furþur stōp.  
 Mynte se mæra, þær hē meahte swā,  
 wīdre gewindan ond on weg þanon  
 flēon on fen-hopu; wiste his fingra geweald  
 on grames grāpum; þæt wæs gēocor sīð  
 þæt se hearm-scaþa tō Heorute ātēah.  
 Dryht-sele dynede, Denum eallum wearð,  
 ceaster-būendum, cēnra gehwylcum,  
 eorlum ealu-scerwen. Yrre wæron bēgen,  
 770 rēþe ren-weardas. Reced hlynsode;  
 þā wæs wundor micel, þæt se wīn-sele

740 but struck suddenly and started in;  
 he grabbed and mauled a man on his bench,  
 bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood  
 and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body  
 utterly lifeless, eaten up  
 hand and foot. Venturing closer,  
 his talon was raised to attack Beowulf  
 where he lay on the bed; he was bearing in  
 with open claw when the alert hero's  
 comeback and armlock forestalled him utterly.  
 750 The captain of evil discovered himself  
 in a handgrip harder than anything  
 he had ever encountered in any man  
 on the face of the earth. Every bone in his body  
 quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.  
 He was desperate to flee to his den and hide  
 with the devil's litter, for in all his days  
 he had never been clamped or cornered like this.  
 Then Hygelac's trusty retainer recalled  
 his bedtime speech, sprang to his feet  
 and got a firm hold. Fingers were bursting,  
 760 the monster back-tracking, the man overpowering.  
 The dread of the land was desperate to escape,  
 to take a roundabout road and flee  
 to his lair in the fens. The latching power  
 in his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip  
 the terror-monger had taken to Heorot.  
 And now the timbers trembled and sang,  
 a hall-session that harrowed every Dane  
 inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,  
 the two contenders crashed through the building.  
 770 The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow  
 survived the onslaught and kept standing:

*Beowulf's fight with  
 Grendel*

wiðhæfde heaþo-dēorum, þæt hē on hrūsan ne fēol,  
 fāger fold-bold; ac hē þæs fæste wæs  
 innan ond ūtan īren-bendum  
 searo-þoncum besmiþod. Þær fram sylle ābēag  
 medu-benc monig, mīne gefrāge,  
 golde geregnad, þær þā graman wunnon.  
 Þæs ne wēndon ær witan Scyldinga,  
 þæt hit ā mid gemete manna ænig,  
 780 betlic ond bān-fāg tōbreca meahthe,  
 listum tōlūcan, nympe līges fæþm  
 swulge on swaþule. Swēg up āstāg  
 nīwe geneahhe, Norð-Denum stōd  
 atelic egesa, ānra gehwylcum  
 þāra þe of wealle wōp gehyrdon,  
 gryre-lēoð galan Godes andsacan,  
 sige-lēasne sang, sār wānigean  
 helle hæfton. Hēold hine fæste,  
 sē þe manna wæs mægene strengest  
 790 on þām dæge þysses lifes.  
 Nolde eorla hlēo ænige þinga  
 þone cwealm-cuman cwicne forlætan,  
 nē his lif-dagas lēoda ænigum  
 nytte tealde. Þær genehost brægd  
 eorl Bēowulfes ealde lāfe,  
 wolde frēa-drihtnes feorh ealgian,  
 mæres þeodnes, ðær hīe meahon swā.  
 Hīe þæt ne wiston, þā hīe gewin drugon,  
 heard-hicgende hilde-mecgas,  
 800 ond on healfa gehwone hēawan þohton,  
 sāwle sēcan: þone syn-scaðan  
 ænig ofer eorþan īrenna cyst,

it was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame  
 braced with the best of blacksmith's work  
 inside and out. The story goes  
 that as the pair struggled, mead-benches were smashed  
 and sprung off the floor, gold fittings and all.  
 Before then, no Shielding elder would believe  
 there was any power or person upon earth  
 capable of wrecking their horn-rigged hall  
 780 unless the burning embrace of a fire  
 engulf it in flame. Then an extraordinary  
 wail arose, and bewildering fear  
 came over the Danes. Everyone felt it  
 who heard that cry as it echoed off the wall,  
 a God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,  
 the howl of the loser, the lament of the hell-serf  
 keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,  
 manacled tight by the man who of all men  
 was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.

790 But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined  
 to allow his caller to depart alive:  
 he did not consider that life of much account  
 to anyone anywhere. Time and again,  
 Beowulf's warriors worked to defend  
 their lord's life, laying about them  
 as best they could with their ancestral blades.  
 Stalwart in action, they kept striking out  
 on every side, seeking to cut  
 straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle  
 800 there was something they could not have known at the  
 time,  
 that no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art  
 could ever damage their demon opponent.

*Beowulf's thanes  
 defend him*

gūð-billa nān grētan nolde,  
 ac hē sige-wāpnum forsworen hāfde,  
 ecga gehwylcre. Scolde his aldor-gedāl  
 on ðām dæge þysses līfes  
 earmlic wurðan, ond se ellor-gāst  
 on fēonda geweald feor sīðian.  
 Ðā þæt onfunde sē þe fela æror  
 810 mōdes myrðe manna cynne,  
 fyrene gefremede —hē fāg wið God—  
 þæt him se līc-homa lāstan nolde,  
 ac hine se mōdega mæg Hygelāces  
 hāfde be honda; wæs gehwæper oðrum  
 lifigende lād. Līc-sār gebād  
 atol æglāca; him on eaxle wearð  
 syn-dolh sweotol; seonowe onsprungon,  
 burston bān-locan. Bēowulfe wearð  
 gūð-hrēð gyfeþe; scolde Grendel þonan  
 820 feorh-sēoc flēon under fen-hleoðu,  
 sēcean wyn-lēas wīc; wiste þē geornor,  
 þæt his aldres wæs ende gegongen,  
 dōgera dæg-rīm. Denum eallum wearð  
 æfter þām wæl-rāse willa gelumpen.

Hāfde þā gefālsod, sē þe ær feorran cōm,  
 snotor ond swyð-ferhð, sele Hrōðgāres,  
 genered wið nīðe. Niht-weorce gefeh,  
 ellen-mārþum. Hāfde Eāst-Denum  
 830 Gēat-mecga lēod gilp gelæsted,  
 swylce oncypðe ealle gebētte,  
 inwid-sorge, þē hīe ær drugon  
 ond for þrēa-nyðum þolian scoldon,  
 torn unlytel. Þæt wæs tācen sweotol,  
 syþðan hilde-dēor hond ālegde,

He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge  
 of every weapon. But his going away  
 out of this world and the days of his life  
 would be agony to him, and his alien spirit  
 would travel far into fiends' keeping.

Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men  
 with pain and affliction in former times  
 810 and had given offence also to God  
 found that his bodily powers failed him.  
 Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly  
 locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived,  
 he was hateful to the other. The monster's whole  
 body was in pain, a tremendous wound  
 appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split  
 and the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted  
 the glory of winning; Grendel was driven  
 under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,  
 820 to his desolate lair. His days were numbered,  
 the end of his life was coming over him,  
 he knew it for certain; and one bloody clash  
 had fulfilled the dearest wishes of the Danes.  
 The man who had lately landed among them,  
 proud and sure, had purged the hall,  
 kept it from harm; he was happy with his nightwork  
 and the courage he had shown. The Geat captain  
 had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes:  
 he had healed and relieved a huge distress,  
 830 unremitting humiliations,  
 the hard fate they'd been forced to undergo,  
 no small affliction. Clear proof of this  
 could be seen in the hand the hero displayed  
 high up near the roof: the whole of Grendel's

*Grendel is defeated,  
 Beowulf fulfils his  
 boast*

earm ond eaxle — þær wæs eal geador  
Grendles grāpe— under gēapne hrōf.

840 Ðā wæs on morgen, mīne gefræge,  
ymb þā gif-healle gūð-rinc monig;  
fērdon folc-togan feorran ond nēan  
geond wīd-wegas wundor scēawian,  
lāþes lāstas. Nō his lif-gedāl  
sārlic þūhte secga ænegum,  
þāra þe tīr-lēases trode scēawode,  
hū hē wērig-mōd on weg þanon,  
nīða ofercumen, on nicera mere,  
fæge ond geflymed feorh-lāstas bær.  
850 Ðær wæs on blōde brim weallende,  
atol yða geswing, eal gemenged,  
hāton heolfre, heoro-drēore wēol;  
dēað-fæge dēog, siððan drēama lēas  
in fen-freoðo feorh ālegde,  
hæþene sāwle; þær him hel onfēng.  
Panon eft gewiton eald-gesīðas,  
swylce geong manig of gomen-wāþe,  
fram mere mōdge mēarum rīdan,  
beornas on blancum. Ðær wæs Bēowulfes  
mārðo mæned; monig oft gecwæð,  
þætto sūð nē norð be sām twēonum  
860 ofer eormen-grund oþer nænig  
under swegles begong sēlra nære  
rond-hæbbendra, rīces wyrðra.  
Nē hīe hūru wine-drihten wiht ne lōgon,  
glædne Hrōðgār, ac þæt wæs gōd cyning.

Hwīlum heaþo-rōfe hlēapan lēton,

shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.

840 Then morning came and many a warrior  
gathered, as I've heard, around the gift-hall,  
clan-chiefs flocking from far and near  
down wide-ranging roads, wondering greatly  
at the monster's footprints. His fatal departure  
was regretted by no-one who witnessed his trail,  
the ignominious marks of his flight  
where he'd skulked away, exhausted in spirit  
and beaten in battle, bloodying the path,  
hauling his doom to the demons' mere.  
The bloodshot water wallowed and surged,  
there were loathsome upthrows and overturnings  
of waves and gore and wound-slurry.  
850 With his death upon him, he had dived deep  
into his marsh-den, drowned out his life  
and his heathen soul: hell claimed him there.

860 Then away they rode, the old retainers  
with many a young man following after,  
a troop on horseback, in high spirits  
on their bay steeds. Beowulf's doings  
were praised over and over again.  
Nowhere, they said, north or south  
between the two seas or under the tall sky  
on the broad earth was there anyone better  
to raise a shield or to rule a kingdom.  
Yet there was no laying of blame on their lord,  
the noble Hrothgar; he was a good king.

At times the war-band broke into a gallop,  
letting their chestnut horses race

*The morning after:  
relief and rejoicings*

on geflit faran fealwe mēaras,  
 ðær him fold-wegas fægere þūhton,  
 custum cūðe; hwīlum cyninges þegn,  
 guma gilp-hlæden, gidða gemyndig,  
 870 sē ðe eal-fela eald-gesegena  
 worn gemunde, word oþer fand  
 sōðe gebunden. Secg eft ongan  
 sīð Bēowulfes snyttrum styrian  
 ond on spēd wrecan spel gerāde,  
 wordum wrixlan. Wēl-hwylc gecwæð,  
 þæt hē fram Sigemunde secgan hýrde,  
 ellen-dædum, uncūþes fela,  
 Wælsinges gewin, wīde sīðas,  
 þāra þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston,  
 fāhðe ond fyrena, būton Fitela mid hine,  
 880 þonne hē swulces hwæt secgan wolde,  
 ēam his nefan, swā hīe ā wæron  
 æt nīða gehwām nýd-gesteallan;  
 hæfdon eal-fela eotena cynnes  
 sweordum gesæged. Sigemunde gesprong  
 æfter dēað-dæge dōm unlýtēl,  
 syþðan wīges heard wýrm ācwealde,  
 hordes hyrde. Hē under hārne stān,  
 æþelinges bearn, āna genēðde  
 frēcne dæde; ne wæs him Fitela mid;  
 890 hwæþre him gesælde, ðæt þæt swurd þurhwōd  
 wrætlicne wýrm, þæt hit on wealle æstōd,  
 dryhtlic īren; draca morðre swealt.  
 Hæfde āglæca elne gegongen,  
 þæt hē bēah-hordes brūcan mōste

wherever they found the going good  
 on those well-known tracks. Meanwhile, a thane  
 of the king's household, a carrier of tales,  
 a traditional singer deeply schooled  
 in the lore of the past, linked a new theme  
 to a strict metre. The man started  
 to recite with skill, rehearsing Beowulf's  
 triumphs and feats in well-fashioned lines,  
 entwining his words.

He told what he'd heard  
 repeated in songs about Sigemund's exploits,  
 all of those many feats and marvels,  
 the struggles and wanderings of Waels's son,  
 things unknown to anyone  
 except to Fitela, feuds and foul doings  
 confided by uncle to nephew when he felt  
 880 the urge to speak of them: always they had been  
 partners in the fight, friends in need.  
 They killed giants, their conquering swords  
 had brought them down.

*After his death*  
 Sigemund's glory grew and grew  
 because of his courage when he killed the dragon,  
 the guardian of the hoard. Under grey stone  
 he had dared to enter all by himself  
 to face the worst without Fitela.  
 But it came to pass that his sword plunged  
 890 right through those radiant scales  
 and drove into the wall. The dragon died of it.  
 His daring had given him total possession  
 of the treasure hoard, his to dispose of  
 however he liked. He loaded a boat:

*Hrothgar's minstrel  
sings about Beowulf*

*The tale of  
Sigemund, the  
dragon-slayer.  
Appropriate for  
Beowulf, who has  
defeated Grendel*

selfes dōme; sǣ-bāt gehleōd,  
bær on bearm scipes beorhte frætwa,  
Wælses eafera; wrym hāt gemealt.

900 Sē wæs wreccena wīde mǣrost  
ofer wer-þeode, wīgendra hlēo,  
ellen-dǣdum —hē þæs ær onðāh—  
siððan Heremōdes hild sweðrode,  
eafod̄ ond ellen; hē mid eotenum wearð  
on fēonda geweald forð forlācen  
snūde forsended. Hine sorh-wylmas  
lemede tō lange; hē his lēodum wearð,  
eallum æpellingum tō aldor-ceare.  
Swylce oft bemearn ærran mǣlum  
swið-ferhþes sið snotor ceorl monig,  
910 sē þe him bealwa tō bōte gelyfde,  
þæt þæt dēodnes bearn gepēon scolde,  
fæder-æpelum onfōn, folc gehealdan,  
hord ond hlēo-burh, hæleþa rīce,  
ēdel Scyldinga. Hē þær eallum wearð,  
mæg Higelāces, manna cynne,  
frēondum gefægra; hine fyren onwōd.

920 Hwīlum flitende fealwe stræte  
mēarum mǣton. Ðā wæs morgen-lēoht  
scofen ond scynded. Eode scealc monig  
swið-hicgende tō sele þām hēan,  
searo-wundor sēon; swylce self cyning  
of brýd-būre, bēah-horda wearð,  
tryddode tīr-fæst getrume micle,  
cystum gecýped, ond his cwēn mid him  
medo-stigge mæt mægþa hōse.

*Wael's son weighted her hold  
with dazzling spoils. The hot dragon melted.*

900 *Sigemund's name was known everywhere.  
He was utterly valiant and venturesome,  
a fence round his fighters and flourished therefore  
after King Heremod's prowess declined  
and his campaigns slowed down. The king was betrayed,  
ambushed in Jutland, overpowered  
and done away with. The waves of his grief  
had beaten him down, made him a burden,  
a source of anxiety to his own nobles:  
that expedition was often condemned  
in those earlier times by experienced men,  
men who relied on his lordship for redress,  
who presumed that the part of a prince was to thrive  
910 on his father's throne and defend the nation,  
the Shielding land where they lived and belonged,  
its holdings and strongholds. Such was Beowulf  
in the affection of his friends and of everyone alive.  
But evil entered into Heremod.*

920 *Meanwhile, the Danes kept racing their mounts  
down sandy lanes. The light of day  
broke and kept brightening. Bands of retainers  
galloped in excitement to the gabled hall  
to see the marvel; and the king himself,  
guardian of the ring-hoard, goodness in person,  
walked in majesty from the women's quarters  
with a numerous train, attended by his queen  
and her crowd of maidens, across to the mead-hall.*

*When Hrothgar arrived at the hall, he spoke,*

*King Heremod  
remembered and  
contrasted with  
Beowulf*

Hrōðgār mæpelode — hē tō healle gēong,  
stōd on stapole, geseah stēapne hrōf  
golde fāhne ond Grendles hond:

930 “Disse ansȳne Al-wealdan þanc  
lungre gelimpe! Fela ic lāpes gebād,  
grynna æt Grendle; ā mæg God wyrcan  
wunder æfter wundre, wuldres Hyrde.  
Ðæt wæs ungeāra, þæt ic ænigra mē  
wēana ne wēnde tō wīdan feore  
bōte gebīdan, þonne blōde fāh  
hūsa sēlest heoro-drērig stōd,  
wēa wīd-scofen wītena gehwylcum  
ðāra þe ne wēndon, þæt hīe wīde-ferhð  
lēoda land-geweorc lāpum beweredon  
940 scuccum ond scinum. Nū scealc hafað  
þurh Drihtnes miht dæd gefremede,  
ðe wē ealle ær ne meahton  
snyttrum besyrwan. Hwæt, þæt secgan mæg  
efne swā hwylc mægþa, swā ðone magan cende  
æfter gum-cynnum, gyf hēo gýt lyfað,  
þæt hyre Eald-metod ēste wære  
bearn-gebyrdo. Nū ic, Bēowulf, þec,  
secg betsta, mē for sunu wylle  
frēogan on ferhþe; heald forð tela  
nīwe sibbe. Ne bið þē nānigre gād  
950 worolde wilna, þē ic geweald hæbbe.  
Ful oft ic for læssan lēan teohhode,  
hord-weorþunge hnāhran rince,  
sāmran æt sæcce. Þū þē self hafast  
dædum gefremed, þæt þīn dōm lyfað  
āwa tō aldre. Al-walda þec  
gōde forgylde, swā hē nū gýt dyde!”

standing on the steps, under the steep eaves,  
gazing at the roofwork and Grendel’s talon:  
“First and foremost, let the Almighty Father  
be thanked for this sight. I suffered a long  
harrowing by Grendel. But the Heavenly Shepherd  
930 can work His wonders always and everywhere.  
Not long since, it seemed I would never  
be granted the slightest solace or relief  
from any of my burdens: the best of houses  
glittered and reeked and ran with blood.  
This one worry outweighed all others—  
a constant distress to counsellors entrusted  
with defending the people’s forts from assault  
by monsters and demons. But now a man,  
with the Lord’s assistance, has accomplished something  
940 none of us could manage before now  
for all our efforts. Whoever she was  
who brought forth this flower of manhood,  
if she is still alive, that woman can say  
that in her labour the Lord of Ages  
bestowed a grace on her. So now, Beowulf,  
I adopt you in my heart as a dear son.  
Nourish and maintain this new connection,  
you noblest of men; there’ll be nothing you’ll want for,  
no worldly goods that won’t be yours.  
950 I have often honoured smaller achievements,  
recognized warriors not nearly as worthy,  
lavished rewards on the less deserving.  
But you have made yourself immortal  
by your glorious action. May the God of Ages  
continue to keep and requite you well.”

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

*King Hrothgar gives  
thanks for the relief  
of Heorot and adopts  
Beowulf “in his  
heart”*

Bēowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:  
 Wē þæt ellen-weorc ēstum miclum,  
 feohtan fremedon, frēcne genēðdon  
 960 eafod uncūþes. Uþe ic swīþor,  
 þæt ðū hine selfne gesēon mōste,  
 fēond on frætewum fyl-wērigne!  
 Ic hine hrædlīce heardan clammum  
 on wæl-bedde wrīþan þōhte,  
 þæt hē for mund-gripe mīnum scolde  
 licgean lif-bysig, būtan his lic swice.  
 Ic hine ne mihte, þē Metod nolde,  
 ganges getwāman, nō ic him þæs georne ætfealh,  
 feorh-genīðlan; wæs tō fore-mihtig  
 970 fēond on fēþe. Hwæþere hē his folme forlēt  
 tō lif-wraþe lāst weardian,  
 earm ond eaxle; nō þær ænige swā þēah  
 fēasceaft guma frōfre gebohte;  
 nō þy leng leofað lād-getēona  
 synnum geswenced, ac hyne sār hafað  
 in nīd-gripe nearwe befongen,  
 balwon bendum; ðær ābīdan sceal  
 maga māne fāh miclan dōmes,  
 hū him scīr Metod scrīfan wille.”

980 Ðā wæs swīgra secg, sunu Ecglāfes,  
 on gylp-sprāce gūð-geweorca,  
 siþðan æþelingas eorles cræfte  
 ofer hēanne hrōf hand scēawedon,  
 fēondes fingras. Foran æghwylc wæs,  
 steda nægla gehwylc stýle gelīcost,  
 hāþenes hand-sporu, hilde-rinces  
 egl unhēoru. Æghwylc gecwæð  
 þæt him heardra nān hrīnan wolde

“We have gone through with a glorious endeavour  
 and been much favoured in this fight we dared  
 against the unknown. Nevertheless,  
 960 if you could have seen the monster himself  
 where he lay beaten, I would have been better pleased.  
 My plan was to pounce, pin him down  
 in a tight grip and grapple him to death—  
 have him panting for life, powerless and clasped  
 in my bare hands, his body in thrall.  
 But I couldn’t stop him from slipping my hold.  
 The Lord allowed it, my lock on him  
 wasn’t strong enough, he struggled fiercely  
 and broke and ran. Yet he bought his freedom  
 970 at a high price, for he left his hand  
 and arm and shoulder to show he had been here,  
 a cold comfort for having come among us.  
 And now he won’t be long for this world.  
 He has done his worst but the wound will end him.  
 He is hasped and hooped and hirpling with pain,  
 limping and looped in it. Like a man outlawed  
 for wickedness, he must await  
 the mighty judgement of God in majesty.”

980 There was less tampering and big talk then  
 from Unferth the boaster, less of his blather  
 as the hall-thanes eyed the awful proof  
 of the hero’s prowess, the splayed hand  
 up under the eaves. Every nail,  
 claw-scale and spur, every spike  
 and welt on the hand of that heathen brute  
 was like barbed steel. Everybody said  
 there was no honed iron hard enough  
 to pierce him through, no time-proofed blade

*Beowulf's account of  
the fight*

*The trophy:  
Grendel's shoulder  
and claw*



990

īren ær-gōd, þæt ðæs āhlæcan  
blōdige beadu-folme onberan wolde.

1000

Ðā wæs hāten hreþe Heort innanweard  
folmum gefrætwod; fela þāra wæs,  
wera ond wīfa, þe þæt wīn-reced,  
gest-sele gyredon. Gold-fāg scinon  
web æfter wāgum, wundor-sīona fela  
secga gehwylcum þāra þe on swylc starað.  
Wæs þæt beorhte bold tōbrocen swīðe,  
eal inneweard īren-bendum fæst,  
heorras tōhlidene; hrōf āna genæs  
ealles ansund, þē se āglāca  
fyren-dædum fāg on flēam gewand,  
aldres orwēna. Nō þæt yðe byð  
tō beflēonne —fremme sē þe wille—  
ac gesēcan sceal sāwl-berendra  
nȳde genȳdde, niþða bearna,  
grund-būendra gearwe stōwe,  
þær his līc-homa, leger-bedde fæst,  
swefep æfter symle.

1010

þā wæs sāl ond mæl  
þæt tō healle gang Healfdenes sunu;  
wolde self cyning symbel þicgan.  
Ne gefrægen ic þā mægþe māran weorode  
ymb hyra sinc-gyfan sēl gebāran.  
Bugon þā tō bence blæd-āgande,  
fylle gefægon; fægere gepægon  
medo-ful manig māgas þāra,  
swīð-hicgende, on sele þām hēan,  
Hrōðgār ond Hropulf. Heorot innan wæs  
frēondum āfyllled; nalles fācen-stafas

that could cut his brutal, blood-caked claw.

990

Then the order was given for all hands  
to help to refurbish Heorot immediately:  
men and women thronging the wine-hall,  
getting it ready. Gold thread shone  
in the wall-hangings, woven scenes  
that attracted and held the eye's attention.  
But iron-braced as the inside of it had been,  
that bright room lay in ruins now.  
The very doors had been dragged from their hinges.  
Only the roof remained unscathed  
by the time the guilt-fouled fiend turned tail  
in despair of his life. But death is not easily  
escaped from by anyone:  
all of us with souls, earth-dwellers  
and children of men, must make our way  
to a destination already ordained  
where the body, after the banqueting,  
sleeps on its deathbed.

1000

1010

Then the due time arrived  
for Halfdane's son to proceed to the hall.  
The king himself would sit down to feast.  
No group ever gathered in greater numbers  
or better order around their ring-giver.  
The benches filled with famous men  
who fell to with relish; round upon round  
of mead was passed; those powerful kinsmen,  
Hrothgar and Hrothulf, were in high spirits  
in the raftered hall. Inside Heorot  
there was nothing but friendship. The Shielding nation  
was not yet familiar with feud and betrayal.

*The damaged hall  
repaired*

*A victory feast*

1020 *Þ*ēod-Scyldingas þenden fremedon.  
 Forgeaf þā Bēowulfe brand Healfdenes  
 segen gyldenne sigores tō lēane,  
 hroden hilde-cumbor, helm ond byrnan;  
 mære māðpum-sweord manige gesāwon  
 beforan beorn beran. Bēowulf geþah  
 ful on flette; nō hē þære feoh-gyfte  
 for sceotendum scamigan ðorfte.  
 Ne gefrægn ic frēondlicor fēower mādmas  
 golde gegyrede gum-manna fela  
 in ealo-bence oðrum gesellan.  
 1030 *Y*mb þæs helmes hrōf hēafod-beorge  
 wīrum bewunden walu ūtan hēold,  
 þæt him fēla lāfe frēcne ne meahton  
 scūr-heard sceþðan, þonne scyld-freca  
 ongēan gramum gangan scolde.  
 Heht ðā eorla hlēo eahta mēaras  
 fæted-hlēore on flet tēon,  
 in under eoderas; þāra ānum stōd  
 sadol swearwum fāh, since gewurþad.  
 Þæt wæs hilde-setl hēah-cyninges,  
 1040 ðonne sweorda gelāc sunu Healfdenes  
 efnan wolde; nāfre on ore læg  
 wīd-cūpes wīg, ðonne walu feollon.  
 Ond ðā Bēowulfe bēga gehwæþres  
 eodor Ingwina onweald getēah,  
 wicga ond wæpna; hēt hine wēl brūcan.  
 Swā manlice mære þēoden,  
 hord-weard hæleþa heaþo-rāsas geald  
 mēarum ond mādnum, swā hī nāfre man lyhð,  
 sē þe secgan wile sōð æfter rihte.  
 1050 *Ð*ā gýt æghwylcum eorla drihten

1020 Then Halfdane's son presented Beowulf  
 with a gold standard as a victory gift,  
 an embroidered banner; also breast-mail  
 and a helmet; and a sword carried high,  
 that was both precious object and token of honour.  
 So Beowulf drank his drink, at ease;  
 it was hardly a shame to be showered with such gifts  
 in front of the hall-troops. There haven't been many  
 moments, I am sure, when men exchanged  
 four such treasures at so friendly a sitting.  
 An embossed ridge, a band lapped with wire  
 1030 arched over the helmet: head-protection  
 to keep the keen-ground cutting edge  
 from damaging it when danger threatened  
 and the man was battling behind his shield.  
 Next the king ordered eight horses  
 with gold bridles to be brought through the yard  
 into the hall. The harness of one  
 included a saddle of sumptuous design,  
 the battle-seat where the son of Halfdane  
 rode when he wished to join the sword-play:  
 1040 wherever the killing and carnage were the worst,  
 he would be to the fore, fighting hard.  
 Then the Danish prince, descendant of Ing,  
 handed over both the arms and the horses,  
 urging Beowulf to use them well.  
 And so their leader, the lord and guard  
 of coffer and strongroom, with customary grace  
 bestowed upon Beowulf both sets of gifts.  
 A fair witness can see how well each one behaved.

1050 The chieftain went on to reward the others:  
 each man on the bench who had sailed with Beowulf

*Victory gifts  
presented to Beowulf*

*The other Geats are  
rewarded*

pāra þe mid Bēowulfe brim-lāde tēah,  
on þære medu-bence mǣpðum gesealde,  
yrfe-lāfe, ond þone ænne heht  
golde forgyldan, þone ðe Grendel ær  
māne ācwealde, swā hē hyra mā wolde,  
nefne him wītig God wyrd forstōde  
ond ðæs mannes mōd. Metod eallum wēold  
gumena cynnes, swā hē nū gīt dēð.  
Forþan bið andgit æghwær sēlest,  
ferhðes fore-þanc. Fela sceal gebīdan  
lēofes ond lāpes, sē þe longe hēr  
on ðyssonum win-dagum worolde brūceð.

1060  
1070  
þær wæs sang ond swēg samod ætgædere  
fore Healfdenes hilde-wīsan,  
gomen-wudu grēted, gid oft wrecen,  
ðonne heal-gamen Hrōþgāres scop  
æfter medo-bence mænan scolde:—  
Finnes eaferum, ðā hīe se fær begeat,  
hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga,  
in Frēs-wæle feallan scolde.  
Nē hūru Hildeburh herian þorfte  
eotena trēowe; unsynnum wearð  
beloren lēofum æt þām lind-plegan  
bearnum ond brōðrum; hīe on gebyrd hruron  
gāre wunde; þæt wæs geōmuru ides.

and risked the voyage received a bounty,  
some treasured possession. And compensation,  
a price in gold, was settled for the Geat  
Grendel had cruelly killed earlier—  
as he would have killed more, had not mindful God  
and one man's daring prevented that doom.  
Past and present, God's will prevails.  
Hence, understanding is always best  
and a prudent mind. Whoever remains  
for long here in this earthly life  
will enjoy and endure more than enough.

They sang then and played to please the hero,  
words and music for their warrior prince,  
harp tunes and tales of adventure:  
there were high times on the hall benches  
and the king's poet performed his part  
with the saga of Finn and his sons, unfolding  
the tale of the fierce attack in Friesland  
where Hnaef, king of the Danes, met death.

1070  
*Hildeburh*  
*had little cause*  
*to credit the Jutes:*  
*son and brother,*  
*she lost them both*  
*on the battlefield.*  
*She, bereft*  
*and blameless, they*  
*foredoomed, cut down*  
*and spear-gored. She,*  
*the woman in shock,*  
*waylaid by grief,*

*Another performance  
by the minstrel*

*Hildeburh, a Danish  
princess married to  
the Frisian King  
Finn, loses her son  
(unnamed here) and  
her brother Hnaef in  
a fight at Finn's hall*

1080

Nalles hōlinga Hōces dohtor  
 meotodsceaft bemearn, syþðan morgen cōm,  
 ðā hēo under swegle gesēon meahte  
 morþor-bealo māga, þær hēo ær mæste hēold  
 worolde wynne. Wīg ealle fornam  
 Finnes þegnas, nemne fēaum ānum,  
 þæt hē ne mehte on þæm meðel-stede  
 wīg Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,  
 nē þā wēa-lāfe wīge forþringan,  
 þēodnes ðegne; ac hig him geþingo budon,  
 þæt hīe him oðer flet eal gerýmdon,  
 healle ond hēah-setl, þæt hīe healfre geweald  
 wið eotena bearn āgan mōston,  
 ond æt feoh-gyftum Folcwaldan sunu  
 dōgra gehwylce Dene weorþode,  
 Hengestes hēap hringum wenede  
 efne swā swīðe, sinc-gestrēonum

1090

Hoc's daughter—  
 how could she not  
 lament her fate  
 when morning came  
 and the light broke  
 on her murdered dears?  
 And so farewell  
 delight on earth,  
 war carried away  
 Finn's troop of thanes,  
 all but a few.  
 How then could Finn  
 hold the line  
 or fight on  
 to the end with Hengest,  
 how save  
 the rump of his force  
 from that enemy chief?  
 So a truce was offered  
 as follows: first  
 separate quarters  
 to be cleared for the Danes,  
 hall and throne  
 to be shared with the Frisians.  
 Then, second:  
 every day  
 at the dole-out of gifts  
 Finn, son of Focwald,  
 should honour the Danes,  
 bestow with an even  
 hand to Hengest  
 and Hengest's men  
 the wrought-gold rings,

1080

1090

The Danish attack is bloody but indecisive. Hnaef is killed, Hengest takes charge and makes a truce with Finn and the Frisians

fættan goldes, swā hē Frēsena cyn  
on bēor-sele byldan wolde.  
Ðā hīe getruwedon on twā healfa  
fæste frioðu-wære. Fin Hengeste  
elne unflitme āðum benemde  
þæt hē þā wēa-lāfe weotena dōme  
ārum hēolde, þæt ðær ænig mon  
wordum nē worcum wære ne bræce,  
nē þurh inwit-searo æfre gemænden,  
ðeah hīe hira bēag-gyfan banan folgedon  
ðeoden-lēase, þā him swā geþearfod wæs;  
gyf þonne Frýsna hwylc frēcnen spræce  
ðæs morþor-hetes myndgiend wære,  
þonne hit sweordes ecg syððan scolde.  
    Āð wæs geæfned, ond icge gold  
āhæfen of horde: Here-Scyldinga

1100

1100

bounty to match  
the measure he gave  
his own Frisians—  
to keep morale  
in the beer-hall high.  
Both sides then  
sealed their agreement.  
With oaths to Hengest  
Finn swore  
openly, solemnly,  
that the battle survivors  
would be guaranteed  
honour and status.  
No infringement  
by word or deed,  
no provocation  
would be permitted.  
Their own ring-giver  
after all  
was dead and gone,  
they were leaderless,  
in forced allegiance  
to his murderer.  
So if any Frisian  
stirred up bad blood  
with insinuations  
or taunts about this,  
the blade of the sword  
would arbitrate it.  
A funeral pyre  
was then prepared,  
effulgent gold  
brought out from the hoard.

The Danish  
survivors to be  
quartered and given  
parity of treatment  
with the Frisians  
and their allies, the  
Jutes

The bodies of the  
slain burnt on the  
pyre

1110 betst beado-rinca wæs on bæl gearu.  
 Æt þām āde wæs ēþ-gesýne  
 swāt-fāh syrce, swýn eal-gylden,  
 eofer íren-heard, æþeling manig  
 wundum āwyrded; sume on wæle crungon.  
 Hēt ðā Hildeburh æt Hnæfes āde  
 hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan,  
 bān-fatu bæрман ond on bæl dōn.  
 Earme on eaxle ides gnornode,  
 geōmrode giddum. Gūð-rinc āstāh;  
 1120 wand tō wolcnum wæl-fýra mæst,  
 hlynode for hlāwe; hafelan multon,  
 bēn-geato burston, ðonne blōd ætspranc,  
 lāð-bite līces. Līg ealle forswalg,  
 gæsta gīfrost, þāra ðe þær gūð fornam  
 bēga folces; wæs hira blæd scacen.

The pride and prince  
 of the Shieldings lay  
 1110 awaiting the flame.  
 Everywhere  
 there were blood-plastered  
 coats of mail.  
 The pyre was heaped  
 with boar-shaped helmets  
 forged in gold,  
 with the gashed corpses  
 of well-born Danes—  
 many had fallen.  
 Then Hildeburh  
 ordered her own  
 son's body  
 be burnt with Hnaef's,  
 the flesh on his bones  
 to sputter and blaze  
 beside his uncle's.  
 The woman wailed  
 and sang keens,  
 the warrior went up.  
 1120 Carcass flame  
 swirled and fumed,  
 they stood round the burial  
 mound and howled  
 as heads melted,  
 crusted gashes  
 splattered and ran  
 bloody matter.  
 The glutton element  
 flamed and consumed  
 the dead of both sides.

Gewiton him ðā wīgend wīca nēosian  
 frēondum befeallen, Frȳs-land gesēon,  
 hāmas ond hēa-burh. Hengest ðā gýt  
 wæl-fāgne winter wunode mid Finne  
 eal unhlitme; eard gemunde,  
 1130 þēah þe ne meahte on mere drīfan  
 hringed-stefnan; holm storme wēol,  
 won wið winde; winter yþe belēac  
 īs-gebinde, oþðæt oþer cōm  
 gēar in geardas, swā nū gýt dēð,  
 þā ðe syngāles sēle bewitiað,  
 wuldor-torhtan weder. Ðā wæs winter scacen,  
 fæger foldan bearn; fundode wrecca,  
 gist of geardum; hē tō gyrn-wræce  
 swīðor þōhte þonne tō sǣ-lāde,  
 1140 gif hē torn-gemōt þurhtēon mihte,  
 þæt hē eotena bearn inne gemunde.

Their great days were gone.  
 Warriors scattered  
 to homes and forts  
 all over Friesland,  
 fewer now, feeling  
 loss of friends.  
 Hengest stayed,  
 lived out that whole  
 1130 winter with Finn,  
 homesick and helpless.  
 No ring-whorled prow  
 could up then  
 and away on the sea.  
 Wind and water  
 raged with storms,  
 wave and shingle  
 were shackled in ice  
 until another year  
 appeared in the yard  
 as it does to this day,  
 the seasons constant,  
 the wonder of light  
 coming over us.  
 Then winter was gone,  
 earth's lap grew lovely,  
 longing woke  
 in the cooped-up exile  
 for a voyage home—  
 1140 but more for vengeance,  
 some way of bringing  
 things to a head:  
 his sword arm hankered

*The Danes, homesick  
 and resentful, spend  
 a winter in exile*

*Spring comes*

Swā hē ne forwyrnde worold-rædenne,  
 þonne him Hūnlāfing hilde-lēoman,  
 billa sēlest, on bearm dyde,  
 þæs wāron mid eotenum ecge cūðe.  
 Swylce ferhð-frecan Fin eft begeat  
 sweord-bealo slīðen æt his selfes hām,  
 sipðan grimne gripe Gūðlāf ond Ōslāf  
 æfter sǣ-sīðe sorge mǣndon,  
 1150 ætwiton wēana dǣl; ne meahte wǣfre mōd  
 forhabban in hreþre. Ðā wæs heal roden  
 fēonda fēorum, swilce Fin slægen,  
 cyning on corþre, ond sēo cwēn numen.  
 Scēotend Scyldinga tō scypon feredon  
 eal in-gesteald eorð-cyninges,  
 swylce hīe æt Finnes hām findan meahton  
 sigla, searo-gimma. Hīe on sǣ-lāde  
 drihtlice wīf tō Denum feredon,  
 lǣddon tō lēodum.

to greet the Jutes.  
 So he did not balk  
 once Hunlafing  
 placed on his lap  
 Dazzle-the-Duel,  
 the best sword of all,  
 whose edges Jutes  
 knew only too well.  
 Thus blood was spilled,  
 the gallant Finn  
 slain in his home  
 after Guthlaf and Oslaf  
 back from their voyage  
 made old accusation:  
 the brutal ambush,  
 the fate they had suffered,  
 all blamed on Finn.  
 1150 The wildness in them  
 had to brim over.  
 The hall ran red  
 with blood of enemies.  
 Finn was cut down,  
 the queen brought away  
 and everything  
 the Shieldings could find  
 inside Finn's walls—  
 the Frisian king's  
 gold collars and gemstones—  
 swept off to the ship.  
 Over sea-lanes then  
 back to Daneland  
 the warrior troop  
 bore that lady home.

*Danish warriors  
 spur themselves to  
 renew the feud. Finn  
 is killed, his  
 stronghold looted,  
 his widow,  
 Hildeburh, carried  
 back to Denmark*



1160 Lēoð wæs āsungen,  
 glēo-mannes gyd. Gamen eft āstāh,  
 beorhtode benc-swēg, byrelas sealdon  
 wīn of wunder-fatum. Þā cwōm Wealhþēo forð  
 gān under gyldnum bēage, þær þā gōdan twēgen  
 sǣton suhterge-fæderan; þā gýt wæs hiera sib ætgædere,  
 æghwylc oðrum trýwe. Swylce þær Unferþ þyle  
 æt fōtum sæt frēan Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his ferhþe  
 trēowde,  
 þæt hē hæfde mōd micel, þeah þe hē his mǣgum nāre  
 ār-fæst æt ecga gelācum. Spræc ðā ides Scyldinga:  
 “Onfōh þissum fulle, frēo-drihten mīn,  
 1170 since brytta; þū on sǣlum wes,  
 gold-wine gumena, ond tō Gēatum spræc  
 mildum wordum, swā sceal man dōn;  
 bēo wið Gēatas glæd, geofena gemyndig,  
 nēan ond feorran þū nū hafast.  
 Mē man sægde, þæt þū ðē for sunu wolde  
 here-rinc habban. Heorot is gefǣlsod,  
 bēah-sele beorhta; brūc, þenden þū mōte,  
 manigra mēdo, ond þīnum mǣgum lǣf  
 folc ond rīce, þonne ðū forð scyle,  
 1180 metodsceaft sēon. Ic mīnne can  
 glædne Hrōpulf, þæt hē þā geogoðe wile  
 ārum healdan, gyf þū ær þonne hē,  
 wine Scildinga, worold oflǣtest;  
 wēne ic þæt hē mid gōde gyldan wille  
 uncran eaferan, gif hē þæt eal gemon,  
 hwæt wit tō willan ond tō worð-myndum  
 umbor-wesendum ær ārna gefremedon.”  
 Hwearf þā bī bence, þær hyre byre wæron,

The poem was over,  
 the poet had performed, a pleasant murmur  
 1160 started on the benches, stewards did the rounds  
 with wine in splendid jugs, and Wealhtheow came to sit  
 in her gold crown between two good men,  
 uncle and nephew, each one of whom  
 still trusted the other; and the forthright Unferth,  
 admired by all for his mind and courage  
 although under a cloud for killing his brothers,  
 reclined near the king.

The queen spoke:  
 “Enjoy this drink, my most generous lord;  
 raise up your goblet, entertain the Geats  
 1170 duly and gently, discourse with them,  
 be open-handed, happy and fond.  
 Relish their company, but recollect as well  
 all of the boons that have been bestowed on you.  
 The bright court of Heorot has been cleansed  
 and now the word is that you want to adopt  
 this warrior as a son. So, while you may,  
 bask in your fortune, and then bequeath  
 kingdom and nation to your kith and kin,  
 before your decease. I am certain of Hrothulf.  
 1180 He is noble and will use the young ones well.  
 He will not let you down. Should you die before him,  
 he will treat our children truly and fairly.  
 He will honour, I am sure, our two sons,  
 repay them in kind when he recollects  
 all the good things we gave him once,  
 the favour and respect he found in his childhood.”

She turned then to the bench where her boys sat,  
 Hrethric and Hrothmund, with other nobles' sons,

1190 Hrēðric ond Hrōðmund, ond hæleþa bearn,  
giogod ætgædere; þær se gōða sæt,  
Bēowulf Gēata be þēam gebrōðrum twām.

Him wæs ful boren ond frēond-laþu  
wordum bewægned, ond wunden gold  
ēstum geēawed, earm-rēade twā,  
hrægl ond hringas, heals-bēaga mæst  
þāra þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe.  
Nænigne ic under swegle sēlran hūrde  
hord-māððum hæleþa, syþðan Hāma ætwæg  
tō þēre byrhtan byrig Brōsinga mene,  
1200 sigle ond sinc-fæt; searo-nīðas flēah  
Eormenrices; gecēas ēcne rād.

Pone hring hæfde Higelāc Gēata,  
nefa Swertinges, nūhstan sīðe,  
sīðþan hē under segne sinc ealgode,  
wæl-rēaf werede; hyne wyrd fornam,  
syþðan hē for wlenco wēan āhsode,  
fāhðe tō Frýsum. Hē þā frætwe wæg,  
eorclan-stānas ofer yða ful,  
rīce þēoden; hē under rande gecranc.

1210 Gehwearf þā in Francna fæþm feorh cyninges,  
brēost-gewædu ond se bēah somod;  
wyrsan wīg-frecan wæl rēafeden  
æfter gūð-sceare; Gēata lēode  
hrēa-wīc hēoldon. Heal swēge onfēng.

Wealhðeo mabelode, hēo fore þām werede spræc:  
“Brūc ðisses bēages, Bēowulf lēofa,  
hyse, mid hæle, ond þisses hrægles nēot,

1190 all the youth together; and that good man,  
Beowulf the Geat, sat between the brothers.

The cup was carried to him, kind words  
spoken in welcome and a wealth of wrought gold  
graciously bestowed: two arm bangles,  
a mail-shirt and rings, and the most resplendent  
torque of gold I ever heard tell of  
anywhere on earth or under heaven.  
There was no hoard like it since Hama snatched  
the Brosings' neck-chain and bore it away  
with its gems and settings to his shining fort,  
1200 away from Eormenric's wiles and hatred,  
and thereby ensured his eternal reward.  
Higelac the Geat, grandson of Swerting,  
wore this neck-ring on his last raid;  
at bay under his banner, he defended the booty,  
treasure he had won. Fate swept him away  
because of his proud need to provoke  
a feud with the Frisians. He fell beneath his shield,  
in the same gem-cruste, kingly gear  
he had worn when he crossed the frothing wave-vat.  
1210 So the dead king fell into Frankish hands.  
They took his breast-mail, also his neck-torque,  
and punier warriors plundered the slain  
when the carnage ended; Geat corpses  
covered the field.

Applause filled the hall.  
Then Wealhtheow pronounced in the presence of the  
company:  
“Take delight in this torque, dear Beowulf,  
wear it for luck and wear also this mail

*Gifts presented,  
including a torque:  
Beowulf will present  
it in due course to  
King Hygelac, who  
will die wearing it*

1220 þēod-gestrēona, ond geþēoh tela;  
 cen þec mid cræfte, ond þyssum cnyhtum wes  
 lāra līðe; ic þē þæs lēan geman.  
 Hafast þū gefered, þæt ðē feor ond nēah  
 ealne wīde-ferhþ weras ehtigað,  
 efne swā sīde swā sǣ bebūgeð  
 wind-geard, weallas. Wes, þenden þū lifige,  
 æþeling, ēadig! Ic þē an tela  
 sinc-gestrēona. Bēo þū suna mīnum  
 dǣdum gedēfe, drēam-healdende!  
 Hēr is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrýwe,  
 mōdes milde, man-drihtne hold;  
 1230 þegnas syndon geþwære, þēod eal-gearo,  
 druncne dryht-guman dōð swā ic bidde.”  
 Ēode þā tō setle. Þær wæs symbla cyst,  
 druncon wīn weras; wyrd ne cūþon,  
 geōsceaft grimme, swā hit āgangen wearð  
 eorla manegum, syþðan æfen cwōm,  
 ond him Hrōþgār gewāt tō hofe sīnum,  
 rīce tō ræste. Reced weardode  
 unrīm eorla, swā hīe oft ær dydon;  
 1240 benc-þelu beredon; hit geondbræded wearð  
 beddum ond bolstrum. Bēor-scealca sum  
 fūs ond fæge flet-ræste gebēag.  
 Setton him tō hēafdon hilde-randas,  
 bord-wudu beorhtan. Þær on bence wæs  
 ofer æþelinge yþ-gesēne  
 heaþo-stēapa helm, hringed byrne,  
 þrec-wudu þrymlīc. Wæs þēaw hyra,  
 þæt hīe oft wæron an wīg gearwe,  
 gē æt hām gē on herge, gē gehwæper þāra  
 efne swylce mǣla, swylce hira man-dryhtne

1220 from our people's armoury: may you prosper in them!  
 Be acclaimed for strength, for kindly guidance  
 to these two boys, and your bounty will be sure.  
 You have won renown: you are known to all men  
 far and near, now and forever.  
 Your sway is wide as the wind's home,  
 as the sea around cliffs. And so, my prince,  
 I wish you a lifetime's luck and blessings  
 to enjoy this treasure. Treat my sons  
 with tender care, be strong and kind.  
 Here each comrade is true to the other,  
 loyal to lord, loving in spirit.  
 1230 The thanes have one purpose, the people are ready:  
 having drunk and pledged, the ranks do as I bid.”

She moved then to her place. Men were drinking wine  
 at that rare feast; how could they know fate,  
 the grim shape of things to come,  
 the threat looming over many thanes  
 as night approached and King Hrothgar prepared  
 to retire to his quarters? Retainers in great numbers  
 were posted on guard as so often in the past.  
 Benches were pushed back, bedding gear and bolsters  
 1240 spread across the floor, and one man  
 lay down to his rest, already marked for death.  
 At their heads they placed their polished timber  
 battle-shields; and on the bench above them,  
 each man's kit was kept to hand:  
 a towering war-helmet, webbed mail-shirt  
 and great-shafted spear. It was their habit  
 always and everywhere to be ready for action,  
 at home or in the camp, in whatever case  
 and at whatever time the need arose

*Bedtime in Heorot*

1250 þearf gesælde; wæs sēo þēod tilu.  
 Sigon þā tō slāpe. Sum sāre angeald  
 āfen-ræste, swā him ful oft gelamp  
 siþðan gold-sele Grendel warode,  
 unriht æfnde, oþþæt ende becwōm,  
 swylt æfter synnum. Pæt gesȳne wearþ,  
 wīd-cūþ werum, þætte wrecend þā gýt  
 lifde æfter lāpum, lange þrāge,  
 æfter gūð-ceare. Grendles mōdor,  
 1260 ides, āglāc-wīf yrmþe gemunde,  
 sē þe wæter-egesan wunian scolde,  
 cealde strēamas, siþðan Cain wearð  
 tō ecg-banan āngan brēþer,  
 fæderen-māge; hē þā fāg gewāt,  
 morþre gemearcod, man-drēam flēon,  
 wēsten warode. Panon wōc fela  
 geōsceaft-gāsta; wæs þāra Grendel sum  
 heoro-wearh hetelīc, sē æt Heorote fand  
 wæccendne wer wīges bīdan.  
 Pær him āglāca ætgrāpe wearð;  
 1270 hwæþre hē gemunde mægenes strengē,  
 gim-fæste gife, ðe him God sealde,  
 ond him tō An-waldan āre gelýfde,  
 frōfre ond fultum; ðȳ hē þone fēond oferewōm,  
 gehnægde helle-gāst. Pā hē hēan gewāt,  
 drēame bedæled dēap-wīc sēon,  
 man-cynnes fēond. Ond his mōdor þā gýt  
 gīfre ond galg-mōd gegān wolde  
 sorh-fulne sīð, sunu dēoð wrecan.  
 Cōm þā tō Heorote, ðær Hring-Dene  
 1280 geond þæt sæld swāfun. Pā ðær sōna wearð

1250 to rally round their lord. They were a right people.

They went to sleep. And one paid dearly  
 for his night's ease, as had happened to them often,  
 ever since Grendel occupied the gold-hall,  
 committing evil until the end came,  
 death after his crimes. Then it became clear,  
 obvious to everyone once the fight was over,  
 that an avenger lurked and was still alive,  
 grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,  
 1260 monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.  
 She had been forced down into fearful waters,  
 the cold depths, after Cain had killed  
 his father's son, felled his own  
 brother with a sword. Branded an outlaw,  
 marked by having murdered, he moved into the wilds,  
 shunned company and joy. And from Cain there sprang  
 misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel,  
 the banished and accursed, due to come to grips  
 with that watcher in Heorot waiting to do battle.  
 The monster wrenched and wrestled with him  
 1270 but Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength,  
 the wondrous gifts God had showered on him:  
 He relied for help on the Lord of All,  
 on His care and favour. So he overcame the foe,  
 brought down the hell-brute. Broken and bowed,  
 outcast from all sweetness, the enemy of mankind  
 made for his death-den. But now his mother  
 had sallied forth on a savage journey,  
 grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge.

1280 She came to Heorot. There, inside the hall,  
 Danes lay asleep, earls who would soon endure

*Another threat is  
 lurking in the night*

*Grendel's mother  
 attacks*

edhwyrft eorlum siþðan inne fealh  
Grendles mōdor. Wæs se gryre læssa  
efne swā micle, swā bið mægþa cræft,  
wīg-gryre wīfes, be wæpned-men  
þonne heoru bunden, hamere geþuren,  
sweord swāte fāh swīn ofer helme,  
ecgum dyhttig, andweard scireð.

1290

Ðā wæs on healle heard-ecg togen,  
sweord ofer setlum, sīd-rand manig  
hafen handa fæst; helm ne gemunde,  
byrnan sīde, þā hine se brōga angeat.

Hēo wæs on ofste, wolde üt þanon,  
fēore beorgan, þā hēo onfunden wæs.  
Hraðe hēo æþelinga āne hæfde  
fæste befangen, þā hēo tō fenne gang.  
Sē wæs Hrōþgāre hæleþa lēofost  
on gesīdes hād be sām twēonum,  
rīce rand-wiga, þone ðe hēo on ræste ābrēat,  
blæd-fæstne beorn. Næs Bēowulf ðær,

1300

ac wæs oþer in ær geteohhod  
æfter mǣþðum-gife mærum Gēate.  
Hrēan wearð in Heorote; hēo under heolfre genam  
cūþe folme; cearu wæs genīwod,  
geworden in wīcun. Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til,  
þæt hīe on bā healfa bicgan scoldon  
frēonda fēorum. Ðā wæs frōd cyning,  
hār hilde-rinc, on hrēon mōde,  
syðþan hē aldor-þegn unlyfigendne,  
þone dēorestan dēadne wisse.

a great reversal, once Grendel's mother  
attacked and entered. Her onslaught was less  
only by as much as an amazon warrior's  
strength is less than an armed man's  
when the hefted sword, its hammered edge  
and gleaming blade slathered in blood,  
razes the sturdy boar-ridge off a helmet.  
Then in the hall, hard-honed swords  
were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield  
lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets  
or woven mail when they woke in terror.

1290

The hell-dam was in panic, desperate to get out,  
in mortal terror the moment she was found.  
She had pounced and taken one of the retainers  
in a tight hold, then headed for the fen.  
To Hrothgar, this man was the most beloved  
of the friends he trusted between the two seas.  
She had done away with a great warrior,  
ambushed him at rest.

Beowulf was elsewhere.

1300

Earlier, after the award of the treasure,  
the Geat had been given another lodging.  
There was uproar in Heorot. She had snatched their  
trophy,  
Grendel's bloodied hand. It was a fresh blow  
to the afflicted bawn. The bargain was hard,  
both parties having to pay  
with the lives of friends. And the old lord,  
the grey-haired warrior, was heartsore and weary  
when he heard the news: his highest-placed adviser,  
his dearest companion, was dead and gone.

1310

Hraþe wæs tō būre Bēowulf fetod,  
 sigor-ēadig secg. Samod ær-dæge  
 ēode eorla sum, æþele cempa,  
 self mid gesīðum, þær se snotera bād,  
 hwæpre him Al-walda æfre wille  
 æfter wēa-spelle wyrpe gefremman.  
 Gang ðā æfter flōre fyrd-wyrðe man  
 mid his hand-scale —heal-wudu dynede—  
 þæt hē þone wīsan wordum nægde,  
 frēan Ingwina; frægn gif him wære,  
 æfter nēod-laðe, niht getæse.

1320

Hrōðgār mæpelode, helm Scyldinga:  
 “Ne frīn þū æfter sælum; sorh is genīwod  
 Denigea lēodum. Dēad is Æschere,  
 Yrmenlāfes yldra brōþor,  
 mīn rūn-wita ond mīn ræd-bora,  
 eaxl-gestealla, ðonne wē on orlege  
 hafelan weredon, þonne hniton fēþan,  
 eoferas cnysedan. Swylc scolde eorl wesan,  
 æðeling ær-gōd, swylc Æschere wæs!

1330

Wearð him on Heorote tō hand-banan  
 wæl-gæst wæfre; ic ne wāt hwæder  
 atol æse wlanc eft-sīðas tēah,  
 fülle gefrægnod. Hēo þā fæhðe wræc,  
 þē þū gystran niht Grendel cwealdest  
 þurh hæstne hād heardum clammum,  
 forþan hē tō lange lēode mīne  
 wanode ond wyrde. Hē æt wīge gecrang  
 ealdres scyldig; ond nū oþer cwōm  
 mihtig mǣn-scaða, wolde hyre mæg wrecan,  
 gē feor hafað fæhðe gestæled,

1340

þæs þe þincean mæg þegne monegum,

1310

Beowulf was quickly brought to the chamber:  
 the winner of fights, the arch-warrior,  
 came first-footing in with his fellow troops  
 to where the king in his wisdom waited,  
 still wondering whether Almighty God  
 would ever turn the tide of his misfortunes.  
 So Beowulf entered with his band in attendance  
 and the wooden floor-boards banged and rang  
 as he advanced, hurrying to address  
 the prince of the Ingwines, asking if he'd rested  
 since the urgent summons had come as a surprise.

1320

Then Hrothgar, the Shieldings' helmet, spoke:  
 “Rest? What is rest? Sorrow has returned.  
 Alas for the Danes! Aeschere is dead.  
 He was Yrmenlaf's elder brother  
 and a soul-mate to me, a true mentor,  
 my right-hand man when the ranks clashed  
 and our boar-crests had to take a battering  
 in the line of action. Aeschere was everything  
 the world admires in a wise man and a friend.

1330

Then this roaming killer came in a fury  
 and slaughtered him in Heorot. Where she is hiding,  
 glutting on the corpse and glorying in her escape,  
 I cannot tell; she has taken up the feud  
 because of last night, when you killed Grendel,  
 wrestled and racked him in ruinous combat  
 since for too long he had terrorized us  
 with his depredations. He died in battle,  
 paid with his life; and now this powerful  
 other one arrives, this force for evil  
 driven to avenge her kinsman's death.  
 Or so it seems to thanes in their grief,

1340

*Beowulf is summoned*

*Hrothgar laments the death of his counsellor. He knows Grendel's mother must avenge her son*

sē þe æfter sinc-gyfan on sefan grēoteþ,  
hreþer-bealo hearde; nū sēo hand ligeð,  
sē þe ēow wēl-hwylcra wilna dohte.

“Ic þæt lond-büend, lēode mīne,  
sele-rædende secgan hýrde,  
þæt hīe gesāwon swylce twēgen  
micle mearc-stapan mōras healdan,  
ellor-gāstas; ðæra ððer wæs,  
1350 þæs þe hīe gewislicost gewitan meahton,  
idese onlicnes; ððer earm-sceapan  
on weres wæstmum wræc-lāstas træd,  
næfne hē wæs māra þonne ænig man ððer;  
þone on geār-dagum ‘Grendel’ nemdon  
fold-büende; nō hīe fæder cunnon,  
hwæþer him ænig wæs ær ācenned  
dymra gāsta. Hīe dýgel lond  
warigeað, wulf-hleoþu, windige næssas,  
frēcne fen-gelād, ðær fyr-gen-strēam  
1360 under næssa genipu niþer gewīteð,  
flōd under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon  
mīl-gemearces, þæt se mere standeð  
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas;  
wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.  
Þær mæg nihta gehwæm nīð-wundor sēon,  
fýr on flōde; nō þæs frōd leofað  
gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite.  
Ðēah þe hāð-stapa hundum geswenced,  
heorot hornum trum holt-wudu sēce,  
1370 feorran geflýmmed, ær hē feorh seleð,  
aldor on ðfre, ær hē in wille,  
hafelan hýdan. Nis þæt hēoru stōw;

in the anguish every thane endures  
at the loss of a ring-giver, now that the hand  
that bestowed so richly has been stilled in death.

“I have heard it said by my people in hall,  
counsellors who live in the upland country,  
that they have seen two such creatures  
prowling the moors, huge marauders  
from some other world. One of these things,  
1350 as far as anyone ever can discern,  
looks like a woman; the other, warped  
in the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale  
bigger than any man, an unnatural birth  
called Grendel by country people  
in former days. They are fatherless creatures,  
and their whole ancestry is hidden in a past  
of demons and ghosts. They dwell apart  
among wolves on the hills, on windswept crags  
and treacherous keshes, where cold streams  
1360 pour down the mountain and disappear  
under mist and moorland.

A few miles from here  
a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
above a mere; the overhanging bank  
is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.  
At night there, something uncanny happens:  
the water burns. And the mere bottom  
has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
the hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
1370 will turn to face them with firm-set horns  
and die in the wood rather than dive  
beneath its surface. That is no good place.

*The country people's  
tales about the  
monsters*

*The haunted mere*

ponon yð-geblond up āstigeð  
won tō wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ  
lāð gewidru, oðþæt lyft ðrysmāþ,  
roderas rēotað. Nū is se rād gelang  
eft æt þē ānum. Eard gīt ne const,  
frēcne stōwe, ðær þū findan miht  
fela-sinnigne secg; sēc gif þū dyrre.  
1380 Ic þē þā fāhðe fēo lēanige,  
eald-gestrēonum, swā ic ær dyde,  
wundini golde, gyf þy on weg cymest.”

Beowulf mæpelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:

“Ne sorga, snotor guma! Sēlre bið æghwām  
þæt hē his frēond wrece, þonne hē fela murne.  
Ūre æghwylc sceal ende gebīdan  
worolde lifes; wyrce sē þe mōte  
dōmes ær dēaþe; þæt bið driht-guman  
unlifgendum æfter sēlest.

1390 Ārīs, rīces weard, uton hraþe fēran,  
Grendles māgan gang scēawigan!  
Ic hit þē gehāte: nō hē on helm losaþ,  
nē on foldan fæþm, nē on fyrgen-holt,  
nē on gyfenes grund, gā þær hē wille.  
Ðys dōgor þū geþyld hafa  
wēana gehwylces, swā ic þē wēne tō.”

Åhlēop ðā se gomela, Gode þancode,  
mihtigan Drihtne, þæs se man gespræc.

1400 Þā wæs Hrōðgāre hors gebæted,  
wic wunden-feax; wīsa fengel  
geatolīc gende; gum-fēþa stōp  
lind-hæbbendra. Lāstas wæron  
æfter wald-swaþum wīde gesyne,

When wind blows up and stormy weather  
makes clouds scud and the skies weep,  
out of its depths a dirty surge  
is pitched towards the heavens. Now help depends  
again on you and on you alone.

The gap of danger where the demon waits  
is still unknown to you. Seek it if you dare.

1380 I will compensate you for settling the feud  
as I did the last time with lavish wealth,  
coffers of coiled gold, if you come back.”

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better  
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.  
For every one of us, living in this world  
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
that will be his best and only bulwark.

1390 So arise, my lord, and let us immediately  
set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.

I guarantee you: she will not get away,  
not to dens under ground nor upland groves  
nor the ocean floor. She'll have nowhere to flee to.  
Endure your troubles to-day. Bear up  
and be the man I expect you to be.”

With that the old lord sprang to his feet  
and praised God for Beowulf's pledge.

1400 Then a bit and halter were brought for his horse  
with the plaited mane. The wise king mounted  
the royal saddle and rode out in style  
with a force of shield-bearers. The forest paths  
were marked all over with the monster's tracks,

*Beowulf bolsters  
Hrothgar's courage.  
He proclaims the  
heroic code that  
guides their lives*

*The expedition to  
the mere*



gang ofer grundas, gegnum fōr  
 ofer myrcan mor, mago-þegna bær  
 þone sēlestan sāwol-lēasne,  
 þāra þe mid Hrōðgāre hām eahtode.  
 Oferēode þā æþelinga bearn  
 stēap stān-hliðo, stīge nearwe,  
 1410 enge ān-paðas, uncūð gelād,  
 neowle næssas, nicor-hūsa fela.  
 Hē fēara sum beforan gengde  
 wīsra monna, wong scēawian;  
 oþþæt hē fāringa fyrgen-bēamas  
 ofer hārne stān hleonian funde,  
 wyn-lēasne wudu; wæter under stōd  
 drēorig on gedrēfed. Denum eallum wæs,  
 winum Scyldinga, weorce on mōde  
 tō gepolianne, ðegne monegum,  
 1420 oncȳð eorla gehwām, syðþan Æsches  
 on þām holm-clife hafelan mētton.  
 Flōd blōde wēol — folc tō sægon—  
 hātan heolfre. Horn stundum song  
 fūslīc fyrd-lēoð. Fēþa eal gesæt;  
 gesāwon ðā æfter wætere wyrm-cynnes fela,  
 sellīce sǣ-dracan sund cunnian,  
 swylce on næs-hleoðum nicras licgean,  
 ðā on undern-mǣl oft bewitigað  
 sorh-fulne sīð on segl-rāde,  
 1430 wyrmas ond wil-dēor. Hie on weg hruron  
 bitere ond gebolgne; bearhtm ongēaton,  
 gūð-horn galan. Sumne Gēata lēod  
 of flān-bogan fēores getwǣfde,  
 ȳð-gewinnes, þæt him on aldre stōd  
 here-strǣl hearda; hē on holme wæs

her trail on the ground wherever she had gone  
 across the dark moors, dragging away  
 the body of that thane, Hrothgar's best  
 counsellor and overseer of the country.  
 So the noble prince proceeded undismayed  
 up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths  
 and ways where they were forced into single file,  
 1410 ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.  
 He went in front with a few men,  
 good judges of the lie of the land,  
 and suddenly discovered the dismal wood,  
 mountain trees growing out at an angle  
 above grey stones: the bloodshot water  
 surged underneath. It was a sore blow  
 to all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,  
 a hurt to each and every one  
 1420 of that noble company when they came upon  
 Aeschere's head at the foot of the cliff.  
 Everybody gazed as the hot gore  
 kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn  
 repeated its notes: the whole party  
 sat down to watch. The water was infested  
 with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons  
 and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,  
 serpents and wild things such as those that often  
 surface at dawn to roam the sail-road  
 and doom the voyage. Down they plunged,  
 1430 lashing in anger at the loud call  
 of the battle-bugle. An arrow from the bow  
 of the Geat chief got one of them  
 as he surged to the surface: the seasoned shaft  
 stuck deep in his flank and his freedom in the water

sundes þē sānra, ðē hyne swylt fornam.  
Hraæpe wearð on yðum mid eofer-sprēotum  
heoro-hōcyhtum hearde genearwod,  
nīða genæged ond on næs togen  
1440 wundorlic wæg-bora; weras scēawedon  
gryrelīcne gist.

Gyrede hine Bēowulf  
eorl-gewædum, nalles for ealdre mearn;  
scolde here-byrne hondum gebrōden,  
sīd ond searo-fāh, sund cunnian,  
sēo ðe bān-cofan beorgan cūpe,  
þæt him hilde-grāp hreþre ne mihte,  
eorres inwit-feng aldre gesceþðan;  
ac se hwīta helm hafelan werede,  
sē þe mere-grundas mengan scolde,  
1450 sēcan sund-gebland since geweorðad,  
befongen frēa-wrāsnum, swā hine fyrn-dagum  
worhte wæpna smið, wundrum tēode,  
besette swīn-līcum, þæt hine syðþan nō  
brond nē beado-mēcas bītan ne meahton.  
Næs þæt þonne mætost mægen-fultuma,  
þæt him on ðearfe lāh ðyle Hrōðgāres;  
wæs þæm hæft-mēce Hrunting nama;  
þæt wæs ān foran eald-gestrēona;  
ecg wæs īren, āter-tānum fāh,  
1460 āhyrdd heaþo-swāte; nāfre hit æt hilde ne swāc  
manna ængum, þāra þe hit mid mundum bewand,  
sē ðe gryre-sīðas gegān dorste,  
folc-stede fāra. Næs þæt forma sīð  
þæt hit ellen-weorc æfnan scolde.

Hūru ne gemunde mago Ecglāfes  
eafopes cræftig, þæt hē ær gespræc

got less and less. It was his last swim.  
He was swiftly overwhelmed in the shallows,  
prodded by barbed boar-spears,  
cornered, beaten, pulled up on the bank,  
1440 a strange lake-birth, a loathsome catch  
men gazed at in awe.

Beowulf got ready,  
donned his war-gear, indifferent to death;  
his mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail  
would soon meet with the menace underwater.  
It would keep the bone-cage of his body safe:  
no enemy's clasp could crush him in it,  
no vicious armlock choke his life out.  
To guard his head he had a glittering helmet  
that was due to be muddied on the mere bottom  
1450 and blurred in the upswirl. It was of beaten gold,  
princely headgear hooped and hasped  
by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders  
in days gone by and adorned it with boar-shapes;  
since then it had resisted every sword.  
And another item lent by Unferth  
at that moment of need was of no small importance:  
the brehon handed him a hilted weapon,  
a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.  
The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns  
1460 had been tempered in blood. It had never failed  
the hand of anyone who hefted it in battle,  
anyone who had fought and faced the worst  
in the gap of danger. This was not the first time  
it had been called to perform heroic feats.

When he lent that blade to the better swordsman,  
Unferth, the strong-built son of Ecglaf,

*Beowulf arms for the  
underwater fight*

1470 wīne druncen, þā hē þæs wāpnas onlāh  
 sēlran sweord-frecan; selfa ne dorste  
 under yða gewin aldre genēþan,  
 drihtscype drēogan; þær hē dōme forlēas,  
 ellen-mærðum. Ne wæs þām oðrum swā,  
 syðþan hē hine tō gūðe gegyred hæfde.  
 Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþēowes:  
 “Gefenc nū, se mæra maga Healfdenes,  
 snottra fengel, nū ic eom sīðes fūs,  
 gold-wine gumena, hwæt wit geō spræcon,  
 gif ic æt þearfe þīnre scolde  
 aldre linnan, þæt ðū mē ā wære  
 forð-gewitenum on fæder stæle.  
 1480 Wes þū mund-bora mīnum mago-þegnum,  
 hond-gesellum, gif mec hild nime;  
 swylce þū ðā mādmas, þe þū mē sealdest,  
 Hrōðgār lēofa, Higelāce onsend.  
 Mæg þonne on þām golde ongitan Gēata dryhten,  
 gesēon sunu Hrædles, þonne hē on þæt sinc starað,  
 þæt ic gum-cystum gōdne funde  
 bēaga bryttan, brēac þonne mōste.  
 Ond þū Unferð læt ealde lāfe,  
 wrætlic wæg-sweord, wīd-cūðne man  
 1490 heard-ecg habban; ic mē mid Hruntinge  
 dōm gewyrce, oþðe mec dēað nimeð.”  
 Æfter þām wordum Weder-Gēata lēod  
 efste mid elne, nalas andsware  
 bīdan wolde; brim-wylm onfēng  
 hilde-rince. Ðā wæs hwīl dægēs,  
 ær hē þone grund-wong ongytan mehte.

1470 could hardly have remembered the ranting speech  
 he had made in his cups. He was not man enough  
 to face the turmoil of a fight under water  
 and the risk to his life. So there he lost  
 fame and repute. It was different for the other  
 rigged out in his gear, ready to do battle.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
 “Wisest of kings, now that I have come  
 to the point of action, I ask you to recall  
 what we said earlier: that you, son of Halfdane  
 and gold-friend to retainers, that you, if I should fall  
 and suffer death while serving your cause,  
 would act like a father to me afterwards.  
 1480 If this combat kills me, take care  
 of my young company, my comrades in arms.  
 And be sure also, my beloved Hrothgar,  
 to send Hygelac the treasures I received.  
 Let the lord of the Geats gaze on that gold,  
 let Hrethel’s son take note of it and see  
 that I found a ring-giver of rare magnificence  
 and enjoyed the good of his generosity.  
 And Unferth is to have what I inherited:  
 to that far-famed man I bequeath my own  
 sharp-honed, wave-sheened wonderblade.  
 1490 With Hrunting I shall gain glory or die.”

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats  
 was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:  
 without more ado, he dived into the heaving  
 depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day  
 before he could see the solid bottom.

*Beowulf takes his  
leave*

1500 Sōna þæt onfunde, sē ðe flōða begong  
 heoro-gīfre behēold hund missēra,  
 grim ond grædig, þæt þær gumena sum  
 æl-wihta eard ufan cunnode.  
 Grāp þā tōgēanes; gūð-rinc gefēng  
 atolan clommum; nō þy ær in gescōd  
 hālan līce; hring ūtan ymb-bearh,  
 þæt hē þone fyrð-hom ðurhfōn ne mihte,  
 locene leoðo-syrca lāþan fingrum.  
 Bær þā sēo brim-wylf, þā hēo tō botme cōm,  
 hringa þengel tō hofe sīnum,  
 swā hē ne mihte, nō hē þæs mōdig wæs,  
 wæpna gewealdan; ac hine wundra þæs fela  
 1510 swencte on sunde, sǣ-dēor monig  
 hilde-tūxum here-syrca bræc,  
 ēhton āglæcan. Ðā se eorl ongeat,  
 þæt hē in nīð-sele nāt-hwylcum wæs,  
 þær him nænig wæter wihte ne sceþede,  
 nē him for hrōf-sele hrīnan ne mehte  
 fǣr-gripe flōdes: fȳr-lēoht geseah,  
 blācne lēoman beorhte scīnan.

1520 Ongeat þā se gōða grund-wyrgenne,  
 mere-wīf mihtig; mægen-ræs forgeaf  
 hilde-bille, hond sweng ne oftēah,  
 þæt hire on hafelan hring-mæl āgōl  
 grædig gūð-lēoð. Ðā se gist onfand,  
 þæt se beado-lēoma bītan nolde,  
 aldre sceþðan, ac sēo ecg geswāc  
 ðēodne æt þearfe; ðolode ær fela  
 hond-gemōta, helm oft gescær,  
 fǣges fyrð-hrægl; ðā wæs forma sīð  
 dēorum mādme, þæt his dōm ālæg.

1500 Quickly the one who haunted those waters,  
 who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds  
 for a hundred seasons, sensed a human  
 observing her outlandish lair from above.  
 So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him  
 in her brutal grip; but his body, for all that,  
 remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail  
 saved him on the outside. Her savage talons  
 failed to rip the web of his warshirt.  
 Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish swimmer  
 carried the ring-mailed prince to her court  
 so that for all his courage he could never use  
 the weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde  
 1510 came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts  
 who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail  
 in a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man  
 could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole  
 and yet the water did not work against him  
 because the hall-roofing held off  
 the force of the current; then he saw firelight,  
 a gleam and flare-up, a glimmer of brightness.

1520 The hero observed that swamp-thing from hell,  
 the tarn-hag in all her terrible strength,  
 then heaved his war-sword and swung his arm:  
 the decorated blade came down ringing  
 and singing on her head. But he soon found  
 his battle-torch extinguished: the shining blade  
 refused to bite. It spared her and failed  
 the man in his need. It had gone through many  
 hand-to-hand fights, had hewed the armour  
 and helmets of the doomed, but here at last  
 the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.

*Beowulf is captured  
by Grendel's mother*

*His sword fails to do  
damage*

1530 Eft wæs ān-ræd, nalas elnes læt,  
 mārða gemyndig mæg Hylāces.  
 Wearp ðā wunden-mæl wrættum gebunden  
 yrre ðretta, þæt hit on eorðan læg,  
 stīð ond styl-ecg; strenge getruwode,  
 mund-gripe mægenes. Swā sceal man dōn,  
 þonne hē æt gūðe gegān þenceð  
 longsumne lof; nā ymb his lif cearað.  
 Gefēng þā be eaxle —nalas for fāhðe mearn—  
 Gūð-Gēata lēod Grendles mōdor;  
 brægd þā beadwe heard, þā hē gebolgen wæs,  
 1540 feorh-geñiðlan, þæt hēo on flet gebēah.  
 Hēo him eft hraþe andlēan forgeald  
 grimman grāpum, ond him tōgēanes fēng.  
 Oferwearp þā wērig-mōd wigena strengest,  
 fēþe-cempa, þæt hē on fülle wearð.  
 Ofsæt þā þone sele-gyst ond hyre seax getēah,  
 brād, brūn-ecg; wolde hire bearn wrecan,  
 āngan eaferan. Him on eaxle læg  
 brēost-net brōden; þæt gebearh fēore,  
 wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstōd.  
 1550 Hæfde ðā forsīðod sunu Ecgþēowes  
 under gynne grund, Gēata cempa,  
 nemne him heaðo-byrne helpe gefremede,  
 here-net hearde, ond hālig God  
 gewēold wīg-sigor, wītig Drihten,  
 rodera Rædend, hit on ryht gescēd  
 yðelice, syþðan hē eft āstōd.  
 Geseah ðā on searwum sige-ēadig bil,  
 eald-sweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig,  
 wigena weorð-mynd; þæt wæs wāpnā cyst,  
 1560 būton hit wæs mære ðonne ānig mon oðer

1530 Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about  
 his name and fame: he never lost heart.  
 Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away.  
 The keen, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel  
 was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely  
 on the might of his arm. So must a man do  
 who intends to gain enduring glory  
 in a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought.  
 Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight  
 with Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder  
 and laid about him in a battle frenzy:  
 1540 he pitched his killer opponent to the floor  
 but she rose quickly and retaliated,  
 grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.  
 The sure-footed fighter felt daunted,  
 the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.  
 So she pounced upon him and pulled out  
 a broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge  
 her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail  
 on Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,  
 turned the edge and tip of the blade.  
 1550 The son of Ecgtheow would have surely perished  
 and the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth  
 had the strong links and locks of his war-gear  
 not helped to save him: holy God  
 decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,  
 the Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance  
 once Beowulf got back up on his feet.  
 Then he saw a blade that boded well,  
 a sword in her armoury, an ancient heirloom  
 from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,  
 one that any warrior would envy,  
 1560

*He fights back with  
his bare hands*

*Beowulf discovers a  
mighty sword and  
slays his opponent*

tō beadu-lāce ætberan meahte,  
gōd ond geatolic, gīganta geweorc.  
Hē gefēng þā fetel-hilt, freca Scyldinga,  
hrēoh ond heoro-grim, hring-mæl gebrægd  
aldres orwēna, yrringa slōh,  
þæt hire wið halse heard grāpode,  
bān-hringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwōd  
fægne flæsc-homan; hēo on flet gecrong,  
sweord wæs swātig, secg weorce gefeh.

1570 Lixte se lēoma, lēoht inne stōd,  
efne swā of hefene hādre scīneð  
rodores candel. Hē æfter recede wlāt;  
hwearf þā be wealle, wāpen hafenade  
heard be hiltum Higelāces ðegn,  
yrre ond ān-rād. Næs sēo ecg fracod  
hilde-rince, ac hē hraþe wolde  
Grendle forgyldan gūð-rāsa fela,  
ðāra þe hē geworhte tō West-Denum  
oftor micle ðonne on ænne sīð  
1580 þonne hē Hrōðgāres heorð-genēatas  
slōh on sweofote, slāpende fræt  
folces Denigea fýf-týne men,  
ond oðer swylc ūt offerede,  
lāðlicu lāc. Hē him þæs lēan forgeald,  
rēþe cempa, tō ðæs þe hē on ræste geseah  
gūð-wērigne Grendel licgan,  
aldor-lēasne, swā him ær gescōd  
hild æt Heorote. Hrā wīde sprong,  
syþðan hē æfter dēaðe drepe þrōwade,  
1590 heoro-sweg heardne, ond hine þā hēafde becearf.  
Sōna þæt gesāwon snottre ceorlas,

but so huge and heavy of itself  
only Beowulf could wield it in a battle.  
So the Shieldings' hero, hard-pressed and enraged,  
took a firm hold of the hilt and swung  
the blade in an arc, a resolute blow  
that bit deep into her neck-bone  
and severed it entirely, toppling the doomed  
house of her flesh; she fell to the floor.  
The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was elated.

1570 A light appeared and the place brightened  
the way the sky does when heaven's candle  
is shining clearly. He inspected the vault:  
with sword held high, its hilt raised  
to guard and threaten, Hygelac's thane  
scouted by the wall in Grendel's wake.  
Now the weapon was to prove its worth.  
The warrior determined to take revenge  
for every gross act Grendel had committed—  
and not only for that one occasion  
1580 when he'd come to slaughter the sleeping troops,  
fifteen of Hrothgar's house-guards  
surprised on their benches and ruthlessly devoured,  
and as many again carried away,  
a brutal plunder. Beowulf in his fury  
now settled that score: he saw the monster  
in his resting place, war-weary and wrecked,  
a lifeless corpse, a casualty  
of the battle in Heorot. The body gaped  
at the stroke dealt to it after death:  
1590 Beowulf cut the corpse's head off.

*He proceeds to  
behead Grendel's  
corpse*

Immediately the counsellors keeping a lookout

1600 þā ðe mid Hrōðgāre on holm wliton,  
þæt wæs yð-geblond eal gemenged,  
brim blōde fāh. Blonden-feaxe  
gomele ymb gōdne ongeador spræcon  
þæt hig þæs æðelinges eft ne wēndon,  
þæt hē sige-hrēðig sēcean cōme  
mārne þēoden; þā ðæs monige gewearð  
þæt hine sēo brim-wylf ābroten hæfde.  
Ðā cōm nōn dæges. Næs ofgēafon  
hwate Scyldingas; gewāt him hām þonon  
gold-wine gumena; gistas sētan  
mōdes sēoce, ond on mere staredon;  
wīston ond ne wēndon, þæt hīe heora wine-drihten  
selfne gesāwon.

1610 Ðā þæt sweord ongan  
æfter heapo-swāte hilde-gicelum,  
wīg-bil wanian. Þæt wæs wundra sum,  
þæt hit eal gemealt īse gelīcost,  
ðonne forstes bend Fæder onlæteð,  
onwinded wæl-rāpas, sē gewæld hafað  
sæla ond mæla; þæt is sōð Metod.  
Ne nōm hē in þæm wīcum, Weder-Gēata lēod,  
māðm-æhta mā, þēh hē þær monige geseah,  
būton þone hafelan ond þā hilt somod,  
since fāge; sweord ær gemealt,  
forbarn brōden-mæl; wæs þæt blōd tō þæs hāt,  
ættren ellor-gæst, sē þær inne swealt.  
Sōna wæs on sunde, sē þe ær æt sæcce gebād  
1620 wīg-hryre wrāðra, wæter up þurhdeāf;  
wæron yð-gebland eal gefælsod,  
ēacne eardas, þā se ellor-gæst

with Hrothgar, watching the lake water,  
saw a heave-up and surge of waves  
and blood in the backwash. They bowed grey heads,  
spoke in their sage, experienced way  
about the good warrior, how they never again  
expected to see that prince returning  
in triumph to their king. It was clear to many  
that the wolf of the deep had destroyed him forever.

1600 The ninth hour of the day arrived.  
The brave Shieldings abandoned the cliff-top  
and the king went home; but sick at heart,  
staring at the mere, the strangers held on.  
They wished, without hope, to behold their lord,  
Beowulf himself.  
Meanwhile, the sword  
began to wilt into gory icicles,  
to slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,  
the way it all melted as ice melts  
when the Father eases the fetters off the frost  
1610 and unravels the water-ropes. He who wields power  
over time and tide: He is the true Lord.

The Geat captain saw treasure in abundance  
but carried no spoils from those quarters  
except for the head and the inlaid hilt  
embossed with jewels; its blade had melted  
and the scrollwork on it burnt, so scalding was the blood  
of the poisonous fiend who had perished there.  
Then away he swam, the one who had survived  
the fall of his enemies, flailing to the surface.  
1620 The wide water, the waves and pools  
were no longer infested once the wandering fiend

*Forebodings of those  
on the shore*

*The sword blade  
melts*

*Beowulf returns  
with the sword's hilt  
and Grendel's head*

offlēt lif-dagas ond þās lænan gesceaft.

Cōm þā tō lande lid-manna helm  
swīð-mōd swymman, sǣ-lāce gefeah,  
mægen-byrþenne þāra þe hē him mid hæfde.

Ēodon him þā tōgēanes, Gode þancodon,  
ðrȳðlic þegna hēap, þēodnes gefēgon,  
þæs þe hī hyne gesundne gesēon mōston.

1630 Dā wæs of þām hrōran helm ond byrne  
lungre ālȳsed. Lagu drūsade,  
wæter under wolcnum, wæl-drēore fāg.

Fērdon forð þonon fēþe-lāstum,  
ferhþum fægne, fold-weg mæton,  
cūþe strāte; cyning-balde men

from þām holm-clife hafelan bæron  
earfoðlice heora æghwæþrum  
fela-mōdigra. Fēower scoldon

on þām wæl-stenge weorcum geferian  
tō þām gold-sele Grendles hēafod,

1640 oþðæt semninga tō sele cōmon  
frome, fyrd-hwate fēower-tȳne

Gēata gongan; gum-dryhten mid  
mōdig on gemonge meodo-wongas træd.

Dā cōm in gān ealdor ðegna,  
dǣd-cēne mon dōme gewurþad,

hæle hilde-dēor, Hrōðgār grētan.

Þā wæs be feaxe on flet boren

Grendles hēafod, þær guman druncon,  
egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid;

1650 wlite-sēon wrætlic weras on sǣwon.

Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþēowes:

let go of her life and this unreliable world.

The seafarers' leader made for land,  
resolutely swimming, delighted with his prize,  
the mighty load he was lugging to the surface.

His thanes advanced in a troop to meet him,  
thanking God and taking great delight  
in seeing their prince back safe and sound.

1630 Quickly the hero's helmet and mail-shirt  
were loosed and unlaced. The lake settled,  
clouds darkened above the bloodshot depths.

With high hearts they headed away  
along footpaths and trails through the fields,  
roads that they knew, each of them wrestling  
with the head they were carrying from the lakeside cliff,  
men kingly in their courage and capable  
of difficult work. It was a task for four  
to hoist Grendel's head on a spear  
and bear it under strain to the bright hall.

1640 But soon enough they neared the place,  
fourteen Geats in fine fettle,  
striding across the outlying ground  
in a delighted throng around their leader.

In he came then, the thane's commander,  
the arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:  
his courage was proven, his glory was secure.

Grendel's head was hauled by the hair,  
dragged across the floor where the people were drinking,  
a horror for both queen and company to behold.

1650 They stared in awe. It was an astonishing sight.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

*He displays  
Grendel's head  
in Heorot*



1660 "Hwæt, wē þē þās sǣ-lāc, sunu Healfdenes,  
 lēod Scyldinga, lustum brōhton,  
 fīres tō tǣcne, þe þū hēr tō lōcast.  
 Ic þæt unsōfte ealdre gedīgde,  
 wigge under wātere, weorc genēþde  
 earfoðlice; ætrihte wæs  
 gūð getwāfed, nymðe mec God scylde.  
 Ne meahte ic æt hilde mid Hruntinge  
 wiht gewyrca, þēah þæt wāpen duge;  
 ac mē geūðe ylða Waldend  
 þæt ic on wāge geseah wlitig hangian  
 eald-sweord ēacen — oftost wīsoðe  
 winigea lēasum— þæt ic ðy wāpne gebræd.  
 Ofslōh ðā æt þære sǣcce, þā mē sǣl āgeald,  
 hūses hyrdas. Þā þæt hilde-bil  
 forbarn, brogden-mæl, swā þæt blōd gesprang,  
 hātost heaþo-swāta. Ic þæt hilt þanan  
 fēondum ætferede, fyren-dāða wræc,  
 1670 dēað-cwealm Denigea, swā hit gedēfe wæs.  
 Ic hit þē þonne gehāte, þæt þū on Heorote mōst  
 sorh-lēas swefan mid þīnra secga gedryht,  
 ond þegna gehwylc þīnra lēoda,  
 duguðe ond iogoþe, þæt hū him ondrædan ne þearft,  
 þēoden Scyldinga, on þā healfe,  
 aldor-bealu eorlum, swā þū ær dydest."  
 Ðā wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince,  
 hārum hild-fruman on hand gyfen,  
 enta ær-geweorc; hit on æht gehwearf  
 1680 æfter dēofla hryre Denigea frēan,  
 wundor-smiþa geweorc; ond þā þās worold ofgeaf  
 grom-heort guma, Godes andsaca,  
 morðres scyldig, ond his mōdor ēac;

"So, son of Halfdane, prince of the Shieldings,  
 we are glad to bring this booty from the lake.  
 It is a token of triumph and we tender it to you.  
 I barely survived the battle under water.  
 It was hard-fought, a desperate affair  
 that could have gone badly; if God had not helped me,  
 the outcome would have been quick and fatal.  
 Although Hrunting is hard-edged,  
 1660 I could never bring it to bear in battle.  
 But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold—  
 for He often helps the unbefriended—  
 an ancient sword shining on the wall,  
 a weapon made for giants, there for the wielding.  
 Then my moment came in the combat and I struck  
 the dwellers in that den. Next thing the damascened  
 sword blade melted; it bloated and it burned  
 in their rushing blood. I have wrested the hilt  
 from the enemies' hand, avenged the evil  
 done to the Danes; it is what was due.  
 1670 And this I pledge, O prince of the Shieldings:  
 you can sleep secure with your company of troops  
 in Heorot Hall. Never need you fear  
 for a single thane of your sept or nation,  
 young warriors or old, that laying waste of life  
 that you and your people endured of yore."

Then the gold hilt was handed over  
 to the old lord, a relic from long ago  
 for the venerable ruler. That rare smithwork  
 1680 was passed on to the prince of the Danes  
 when those devils perished; once death removed  
 that murdering, guilt-steeped, God-cursed fiend,  
 eliminating his unholy life

*A brief account  
of the fight*

*Beowulf presents the  
sword-hilt to  
Hrothgar*

on geweald gehwearf worold-cyninga  
ðæm sēlestan be sām twēonum,  
ðāra þe on Sceden-igge sceattas dælde.

1690 Hrōðgār maðelode, hylt scēawode,  
ealde lāfe. On ðæm wæs or writen  
fyrn-gewinnes, syðþan flōd ofslōh,  
gifen gēotende, gīganta cyn;  
frēcne gefērdon; þæt wæs fremde þeod  
ēcean Dryhtne; him þæs ende-lēan  
þurh wāteres wylm Waldend sealde.  
Swā wæs on ðæm scennum scīran goldes  
þurh rūn-stafas rihte gemearcod,  
geseted ond gesæd, hwām þæt sweord geworht,  
īrena cyst, ærest wære,  
wreopen-hilt ond wrym-fāh. Ðā se wīsa spræc,  
1700 sunu Healfdenes —swīgedon ealle—:  
“Þæt lā mæg secgan, sē þe sōð ond riht  
fremeð on folce, feor eal gemon,  
eald ēðel-weard, þæt ðes eorl wære  
geboren betera! Blæd is āræred  
geond wīd-wegas, wine mīn Bēowulf,  
ðīn ofer þeoda gehwylce. Eal þū hit gepyldum healdest,  
mægen mid mōdes snyttrum. Ic þē sceal mīne gelæstan  
frēode, swā wit furðum spræcon. Ðū scealt tō frōfre  
weorþan  
eal lang-twīdig lēodum þīnum  
hæleðum tō helpe.

1710 Ne wearð Heremōd swā  
eaforum Ecgwelan, Ār-Scyldingum;  
ne gewēox hē him tō willan, ac tō wæl-fealle  
ond tō dēað-cwalum Deniga lēodum.

and his mother's as well, it was willed to that king  
who of all the lavish gift-lords of the north  
was the best regarded between the two seas.

1690 Hrothgar spoke; he examined the hilt,  
that relic of old times. It was engraved all over  
and showed how war first came into the world  
and the flood destroyed the tribe of giants.  
They suffered a terrible severance from the Lord;  
the Almighty made the waters rise,  
drowned them in the deluge for retribution.  
In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards  
there were rune-markings correctly incised,  
stating and recording for whom the sword  
had been first made and ornamented  
with its scrollworked hilt. Then everyone hushed  
as the son of Halfdane spoke this wisdom.  
1700 “A protector of his people, pledged to uphold  
truth and justice and to respect tradition,  
is entitled to affirm that this man  
was born to distinction. Beowulf, my friend,  
your fame has gone far and wide,  
you are known everywhere. In all things you are even-  
tempered,  
prudent and resolute. So I stand firm by the promise of  
friendship  
we exchanged before. Forever you will be  
your people's mainstay and your own warriors'  
helping hand.

1710 Heremod was different,  
the way he behaved to Ecgwala's sons.  
His rise in the world brought little joy  
to the Danish people, only death and destruction.

*Hrothgar's address  
to Beowulf*

*He contrasts  
Beowulf with King  
Heremod*

Brēat bolgen-mōd bēod-genēatas,  
eaxl-gesteallan, oþþæt hē āna hwearf,  
māre, þēoden, mon-drēamum from,  
ðēah þe hine mihtig God mægenes wynnun,  
eafeþum stēpte, ofer ealle men  
forð gefremede. Hwæþere him on ferhþe grēow  
brēost-hord blōd-rēow; nallas bēagas geaf  
1720 Denum æfter dōme. Drēam-lēas gebād,  
þæt hē þæs gewinnes weorc þrōwade,  
lēod-bealo longsum. Ðū þē lær be þon,  
gum-cyste ongit! Ic þis gid be þē  
āwræc wintrum frōd.

Wundor is tō secganne,

hū mihtig God manna cynne  
þurh sīdne sefan snyttru bryttað,  
eard ond eorlscipe; hē āh ealra geweald.  
Hwīlum hē on lufan læteð hworfan  
monnes mōd-geþonc māran cynnes,  
1730 seleð him on ēþle eorþan wyne  
tō healdanne, hlēo-burh wera;  
gedēð him swā gewealdene worolde dālas,  
sīde rīce, þæt hē his selfa ne mæg  
for his unsnyttrum ende geþencean.  
Wunað hē on wiste, nō hine wiht dweleð  
ādī nē ylde, nē him inwit-sorh  
on sefan sweorceð, nē gesacu oþhwær  
ecg-hete ēoweð, ac him eal worold  
wendeð on willan. Hē þæt wyrse ne con,  
1740 oðþæt him on innan ofer-hygda dæl  
weaxeð ond wrīdað, þonne se weard swefeð,  
sāwele hyrde; bið se slæp tō fæst,  
bisgum begunden; bona swīðe nēah,

He vented his rage on men he caroused with,  
killed his own comrades, a pariah king  
who cut himself off from his own kind,  
even though Almighty God had made him  
eminent and powerful and marked him from the start  
for a happy life. But a change happened,  
he grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings  
to honour the Danes. He suffered in the end  
for having plagued his people for so long:  
his life lost happiness.

So learn from this  
and understand true values. I who tell you  
have wintered into wisdom.

It is a great wonder  
how Almighty God in His magnificence  
favours our race with rank and scope  
and the gift of wisdom; His sway is wide.  
Sometimes He allows the mind of a man  
of distinguished birth to follow its bent,  
1730 grants him fulfilment and felicity on earth  
and forts to command in his own country.  
He permits him to lord it in many lands  
until the man in his unthinkingness  
forgets that it will ever end for him.  
He indulges his desires; illness and old age  
mean nothing to him; his mind is untroubled  
by envy or malice or the thought of enemies  
with their hate-honed swords. The whole world  
conforms to his will, he is kept from the worst  
1740 until an element of overweening  
enters him and takes hold  
while the soul's guard, its sentry, drowses,  
grown too distracted. A killer stalks him,

*Hrothgar's discourse  
on the dangers of  
power*

1750 sē þe of flān-bogan fyrenum scēoteð.  
 Ponne bið on hrepre under helm drepen  
 biteran stræle— him bebeorgan ne con—  
 wōm wundor-bebodum wergan gāstes.  
 Þinceð him tō lýtēl þæt hē tō lange hēold;  
 gýtsað grom-hýdig, nallas on gylp seleð  
 fætte bēagas; ond hē þā forð-gesceaft  
 forgyteð ond forgýmeð, þæs þe him ær God sealde,  
 wuldres Waldend, weorð-mynda dæl.  
 Hit on ende-stæf eft gelimpeð,  
 þæt se lic-homa læne gedreoseð,  
 fæge gefealleð; fēhð oþer tō,  
 sē þe unmunlice mādmas dælep  
 eorles ær-gestrēon, egesan ne gýmeð.  
 Bebeorh þē ðone bealo-nīð, Bēowulf lēofa,  
 1760 secg betsta, ond þē þæt sēlre gecēos,  
 ēce rādas; ofer-hýda ne gým,  
 mære cempa! Nū is þines mæignes blæd  
 āne hwīle; eft sōna bið  
 þæt þec ādl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð,  
 oððe fýres feng oððe flōdes wylm  
 oððe gripe mēces oððe gāres fliht  
 oððe atol ylðo, oððe ēagena bearhtm  
 forsited ond forsworced; semninga bið,  
 þæt ðec, dryht-guma, dēað oferswýðeð.  
 1770 “Swā ic Hring-Dena hund missēra  
 wēold under wolcnum, ond hig wigge belēac  
 manigum mægþa geond þysne middan-geard,  
 æscum ond ecgum, þæt ic mē ænigne  
 under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde.  
 Hwæt mē þæs on ēþle edwenden cwōm,

1750 an archer who draws a deadly bow.  
 And then the man is hit in the heart,  
 the arrow flies beneath his defences,  
 the devious promptings of the demon start.  
 His old possessions seem paltry to him now.  
 He covets and resents; dishonours custom  
 and bestows no gold; and because of good things  
 that the Heavenly Powers gave him in the past  
 he ignores the shape of things to come.  
 Then finally the end arrives  
 when the body he was lent collapses and falls  
 prey to its death; ancestral possessions  
 and the goods he hoarded are inherited by another  
 who lets them go with a liberal hand.

1760 “O flower of warriors, beware of that trap.  
 Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part,  
 eternal rewards. Do not give way to pride.  
 For a brief while your strength is in bloom  
 but it fades quickly; and soon there will follow  
 illness or the sword to lay you low,  
 or a sudden fire or surge of water  
 or jabbing blade or javelin from the air  
 or repellent age. Your piercing eye  
 will dim and darken; and death will arrive,  
 dear warrior, to sweep you away.

1770 “Just so I ruled the Ring-Danes’ country  
 for fifty years, defended them in wartime  
 with spear and sword against constant assaults  
 by many tribes: I came to believe  
 my enemies had faded from the face of the earth.  
 Still, what happened was a hard reversal

*Beowulf is exhorted to be mindful of the fragility of life*

*No life is immune to danger: Hrothgar’s experience proves it*

1780 gyrn æfter gomene, seopðan Grendel wearð,  
 eald-gewinna, ingenga mīn;  
 ic þære sōcne singāles wæg  
 mōd-ceare micle. Þæs sig Metode þanc,  
 ēcean Dryhtne, þæs ðe ic on aldre gebād,  
 þæt ic on þone hafelan heoro-drēorigne  
 ofer eald gewin ēagum starige!  
 Gā nū tō setle, symbel-wynne drēoh,  
 wīg-geweorþad; unc sceal worn fela  
 māþma gemænra, siþðan morgen bið.”  
 Gēat wæs glæd-mōd, gēong sōna tō,  
 setles nēosan, swā se snottra heht.  
 Þā wæs eft swā ær ellen-rōfum,  
 flet-sittendum fægere gereorded  
 1790 nīowan stefne. Niht-helm geswearc  
 deorc ofer dryht-gumum. Duguð eal ārās;  
 wolde blonden-feax beddes nēosan,  
 gamela Scylding. Gēat unigmetes wēl,  
 rōfne rand-wigan, restan lyste.  
 Sōna him sele-þegn sīðes wērgum,  
 feorran-cundum forð wīsade,  
 sē for andrysum ealle beweotede  
 þegnes þearfe, swylce þy dōgore  
 heaþo-līðende habban scoldon.  
 1800 Reste hine þā rūm-heort; reced hlīuade  
 gēap ond gold-fāh; gæst inne swæf,  
 oþþæt hrefn blaca heofones wynne  
 blīð-heort bodode. Ðā cōm beorht scacan  
 scīma æfter sceadwe. Scapan ōnetton,  
 wæron æþelingas eft tō lēodum

1780 from bliss to grief. Grendel struck  
 after lying in wait. He laid waste to the land  
 and from that moment my mind was in dread  
 of his depredations. So I praise God  
 in His heavenly glory that I lived to behold  
 this head dripping blood and that after such harrowing  
 I can look upon it in triumph at last.  
 Take your place, then, with pride and pleasure  
 and move to the feast. To-morrow morning  
 our treasure will be shared and showered upon you.”

1790 The Geat was elated and gladly obeyed  
 the old man’s bidding; he sat on the bench.  
 And soon all was restored, the same as before.  
 Happiness came back, the hall was thronged,  
 and a banquet set forth; black night fell  
 and covered them in darkness.

Then the company rose  
 for the old campaigner: the grey-haired prince  
 was ready for bed. And a need for rest  
 came over the brave shield-bearing Geat.  
 He was a weary seafarer, far from home,  
 so immediately a house-guard guided him out,  
 one whose office entailed looking after  
 whatever a thane on the road in those days  
 might need or require. It was noble courtesy.

1800 That great heart rested. The hall towered,  
 gold-shingled and gabled, and the guest slept in it  
 until the black raven with raucous glee  
 announced heaven’s joy, and a hurry of brightness  
 overran the shadows. Warriors rose quickly,  
 impatient to be off: their own country

*A feast. The warriors rest*

fūse tō farenne; wolde feor þanon  
 cuma collen-ferhð cēoles nēosan.  
 Heht þā se hearda Hrunting beran  
 sunu Ecglāfes, heht his sweord niman,  
 lēoflic īren; sægde him þæs lēanes þanc,  
 1810 cwæð, hē þone gūð-wine gōdne tealde,  
 wīg-cræftigne, nales wordum lōg  
 mēces ecge: þæt wæs mōdig secg.  
 Ond þā sīð-frome, searwum gearwe  
 wīgend wæron; ēode weorð Denum  
 æþeling tō yppan, þær se oþer wæs,  
 hæle hilde-dēor Hrōðgār grētte.  
 Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþēowes:  
 “Nū wē sǣ-līðend secgan wyllað,  
 feorran cumene, þæt wē fundiaþ  
 1820 Higelāc sēcan. Wæron hēr tela,  
 willum bewenede; þū ūs wēl dohtest.  
 Gif ic þonne on eorþan ōwihte mæg  
 þīnre mōd-lufan māran tilian,  
 gumena dryhten, ðonne ic gýt dyde,  
 gūð-geweorca, ic bēo gearo sōna.  
 Gif ic þæt gefricge ofer flōða begang,  
 þæt þec ymb-sittend egesan þýwað,  
 swā þec hetende hwīlum dydon,  
 ic ðē þūsenda þegna bringe,  
 1830 hæleþa tō helpe. Ic on Higelāc wāt,  
 Gēata dryhten, þēah ðe hē geong sý,  
 folces hyrde, þæt hē mec fremman wile  
 wordum ond weorcum, þæt ic þē wēl herige  
 ond þē tō gēoce gār-holt bere,  
 mægenes fultum, þær ðē bið manna þearf.  
 Gif him þonne Hreþric to hofum Geata

was beckoning the nobles; and the bold voyager  
 longed to be aboard his distant boat.  
 Then that stalwart fighter ordered Hrunting  
 to be brought to Unferth, and bade Unferth  
 take the sword and thanked him for lending it.  
 He said he had found it a friend in battle  
 1810 and a powerful help; he put no blame  
 on the blade's cutting edge. He was a considerate man.

And there the warriors stood in their war-gear,  
 eager to go, while their honoured lord  
 approached the platform where the other sat.  
 The undaunted hero addressed Hrothgar.  
 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
 “Now we who crossed the wide sea  
 have to inform you that we feel a desire  
 1820 to return to Hygelac. Here we have been welcomed  
 and thoroughly entertained. You have treated us well.  
 If there is any favour on earth I can perform  
 beyond deeds of arms I have done already,  
 anything that would merit your affections more,  
 I shall act, my lord, with alacrity.  
 If ever I hear from across the ocean  
 that people on your borders are threatening battle  
 as attackers have done from time to time,  
 I shall land with a thousand thanes at my back  
 1830 to help your cause. Hygelac may be young  
 to rule a nation, but this much I know  
 about the king of the Geats: he will come to my aid  
 and want to support me by word and action  
 in your hour of need, when honour dictates  
 that I raise a hedge of spears around you.  
 Then if Hrethric should think about travelling

*Beowulf and his  
 band prepare to  
 depart*

geþinged, þeodnes bearn, hē mæg þær fela  
 frēonda findan; feor-cyþðe beoð  
 sēlran gesōhte þām þe him selfa dēah.”  
 1840 Hrōðgār maþelode him on andsware:  
 “þe þā word-cwydas wigtig Drihten  
 on sefan sende; ne hȳrde ic snotorlicor  
 on swā geongum feore guman þingian.  
 Þū eart mægenes strang ond on mōde frōd,  
 wīs word-cwida. Wēn ic talige,  
 gif þæt geganged, þæt ðe gār nymed,  
 hild heoru-grimme Hrēþles eaferan,  
 ādl oþðe īren ealdor ðinne,  
 folces hyrde, ond þū þīn feorh hafast,  
 1850 þæt þe Sǣ-Gēatas sēlran næbben  
 tō gecēosenne cyning ænigne,  
 hord-weard hǣleþa, gyf þū healdan wylt  
 māga rīce. Mē þīn mōd-sefa  
 līcað leng swā wēl, lēofa Bēowulf.  
 Hafast þū gefēred þæt þām folcum sceal,  
 Gēata lēodum ond Gār-Denum,  
 sib gemāne ond sacu restan,  
 inwit-nīþas, þe hīe ær drugon,  
 wesan, þenden ic wealde wīdan rīces,  
 1860 māþmas gemāne, manig oþerne  
 gōdum gegrēttan ofer ganotes bæð;  
 sceal hring-naca ofer heafu bringan  
 lāc ond luf-tācen. Ic þā lēode wāt  
 gē wið fēond gē wið frēond fæste geworhte,  
 æghwæs untæle ealde wīsan.”  
 Ðā gīt him eorla hlēo inne gesealde,  
 mago Healfdenes māþmas twelfe,

as a king's son to the court of the Geats,  
 he will find many friends. Foreign places  
 yield more to one who is himself worth meeting.”

1840 Hrothgar spoke and answered him:  
 “The Lord in His wisdom sent you those words  
 and they came from the heart. I have never heard  
 so young a man make truer observations.  
 You are strong in body and mature in mind,  
 impressive in speech. If it should come to pass  
 that Hrethel's descendant dies beneath a spear,  
 if deadly battle or the sword blade or disease  
 fells the prince who guards your people  
 and you are still alive, then I firmly believe  
 1850 the seafaring Geats won't find a man  
 worthier of acclaim as their king and defender  
 than you, if only you would undertake  
 the lordship of your homeland. My liking for you  
 deepens with time, dear Beowulf.  
 What you have done is to draw two peoples,  
 the Geat nation and us neighbouring Danes,  
 into shared peace and a pact of friendship  
 in spite of hatreds we have harboured in the past.  
 For as long as I rule this far-flung land  
 1860 treasures will change hands and each side will treat  
 the other with gifts; across the gannet's bath,  
 over the broad sea, whorled prows will bring  
 presents and tokens. I know your people  
 are beyond reproach in every respect,  
 steadfast in the old way with friend or foe.”

Then the earls' defender furnished the hero  
 with twelve treasures and told him to set out,

*Hrothgar declares  
 that Beowulf is fit to  
 be king of the Geats*

*Gifts presented,  
 farewells taken*

1870 hēt hine mid þām lācum lēode swāse  
 sēcean on gesyntum, snūde eft cuman.  
 Gecyste þā cyning æpelum gōd,  
 þēoden Scyldinga ðegn betstan  
 ond be healse genam; hruron him tēaras,  
 blonden-feaxum. Him wæs bēga wēn,  
 ealdum, infrōdum, ōpres swīðor,  
 þæt hīe seoððan nā gesēon mōston,  
 mōdige on meþle. Wæs him se man tō þon lēof,  
 þæt hē þone brēost-wylm forberan ne mehte;  
 ac him on hreþre hyge-bendum fæst  
 1880 æfter dēorum men dyrne langað  
 beorn wið blōde. Him Bēowulf þanan,  
 gūð-rinc gold-wlanc, græs-moldan træd,  
 since hrēmig. Sæ-genga bād  
 āgend-frēan, sē þe on ancre rād.  
 Þā wæs on gange gifu Hrōðgāres  
 oft geæhted. Þæt wæs ān cyning,  
 æghwæs orleahtre, oþþæt hine yldo benam  
 mægenes wynnum sē þe oft mangeum scōd.  
 Cwōm þā tō flōde fela-mōdigra  
 hæg-stealdra hēap; hring-net bāron,  
 1890 locene leoðo-syrca. Land-weard onfand  
 eft-sīð eorla, swā he ær dyde;  
 nō hē mid hearme of hliðes nosan  
 gæstas grētte, ac him tōgēanes rād;  
 cwæð þæt wil-cuman Wedera lēodum  
 scaþan scīr-hame tō scipe fōron.  
 Þā wæs on sande sē-gēap naca  
 hladen here-wādum, hringed-stefna  
 mēarum ond mādum; mæst hlīfade

1870 sail with those gifts safely home  
 to the people he loved, but to return promptly.  
 And so the good and grey-haired Dane,  
 that high-born king, kissed Beowulf  
 and embraced his neck, then broke down  
 in sudden tears. Two forebodings  
 disturbed him in his wisdom, but one was stronger:  
 nevermore would they meet each other  
 face to face. And such was his affection  
 that he could not help being overcome:  
 his fondness for the man was so deep-founded,  
 it warmed his heart and wound the heartstrings  
 1880 tight in his breast.

The embrace ended  
 and Beowulf, glorious in his gold regalia,  
 stepped the green earth. Straining at anchor  
 and ready for boarding, his boat awaited him.  
 So they went on their journey, and Hrothgar's generosity  
 was praised repeatedly. He was a peerless king  
 until old age sapped his strength and did him  
 mortal harm, as it has done so many.

1890 Down to the waves then, dressed in the web  
 of their chain-mail and warshirts the young men marched  
 in high spirits. The coast-guard spied them,  
 thanes setting forth, the same as before.  
 His salute this time from the top of the cliff  
 was far from unmannerly; he galloped to meet them  
 and as they took ship in their shining gear,  
 he said how welcome they would be in Geatland.  
 Then the broad hull was beached on the sand  
 to be cargoed with treasure, horses and war-gear.  
 The curved prow motioned; the mast stood high

*The Geats march  
back to the shore*



ofer Hrōðgāres hord-gestrēonum.

1900 Hē þāem bāt-wearde bunden golde  
swurd gesealde, þæt hē syðþan wæs  
on meodu-bence mǣpme þý weorþra,  
yrfe-lāfe. Gewāt him on naca,  
drēfan dēop wæter, Dena land ofgeaf.  
Pā wæs be mæste mere-hrægla sum,  
segl sǣle fæst; sund-wudu þunede;  
nō þær wēg-flotan wind ofer yðum  
sīðes getwǣfde. Sǣ-genga fōr,  
flēat fāmig-heals forð ofer yðe,  
1910 bunden-stefna ofer brim-strēamas,  
þæt hīe Gēata clifu ongitan meahon,  
cūþe næssas; cēol up geþrang  
lyft-geswenced, on lande stōd.

Hraþe wæs æt holme byð-weard geara,  
sē þe ær lange tīd lēofra manna  
fūs æt faroðe feor wlatode.

Sælde tō sande sīd-fæþme scip  
oncer-bendum fæst, þý læs hym yþa ðrym  
wudu wynsuman forwrecan meahon.

1920 Hēt þā up beran æþelinga gestrēon,  
frætwe ond fæt-gold; næs him feor þanon  
tō gesēcanne sinces bryttan,  
Higelāc Hreþling, þær æt hām wunað  
selfa mid gesīðum sǣ-wealle nēah.

Bold wæs betlic, brego-rōf cyning,  
hēah on healle, Hygd swīðe geong,

above Hrothgar's riches in the loaded hold.

1900 The guard who had watched the boat was given  
a sword with gold fittings and in future days  
that present would make him a respected man  
at his place on the mead-bench.

Then the keel plunged  
and shook in the sea; and they sailed from Denmark.

Right away the mast was rigged with its sea-shawl;  
sail-ropes were tightened, timbers drummed  
and stiff winds kept the wave-crosser  
skimming ahead; as she heaved forward,  
her foamy neck was fleet and buoyant,  
1910 a lapped prow loping over currents,  
until finally the Geats caught sight of coastline  
and familiar cliffs. The keel reared up,  
wind lifted it home, it hit on the land.

The harbour guard came hurrying out  
to the rolling water: he had watched the offing  
long and hard, on the lookout for those friends.  
With the anchor cables, he moored their craft  
right where it had beached, in case a backwash  
might catch the hull and carry it away.

1920 Then he ordered the prince's treasure-trove  
to be carried ashore. It was a short step  
from there to where Hrethel's son and heir,  
Higelac the gold-giver, makes his home  
on a secure cliff, in the company of retainers.

The building was magnificent, the king majestic,  
ensconced in his hall; and although Hygd, his queen,

*They sail from  
Denmark*

*They arrive at  
Higelac's stronghold*

1930 wīs, wēl-þungen, þēah ðe wintra lýt  
 under burh-locan gebiden hæbbe,  
 Hæreþes dohtor; næs hīo hnāh swā þēah,  
 1930 nē tō gnēað gifa Gēata lēodum  
 māþm-gestrēona; Mōðþrýðo wæg  
 fremu folces cwēn, firen' ondrysne.  
 Nænig þæt dorste dēor genēþan  
 swæsra gesīða, nefne sin-frēa,  
 þæt hire an dæges ēagum starede;  
 ac him wæl-bende weotode tealde,  
 hand-gewriþene; hraþe seopðan wæs  
 æfter mund-gripe mēce geþinged,  
 þæt hit sceāden-mæl scýran mōste,  
 1940 cwealm-bealu cýðan. Ne bið swylc cwēnlic þēaw  
 idese tō efnanne, þēah ðe hīo ænlicu sý,  
 þætte freoðu-webbe fēores onsæce  
 æfter lige-torne lēofne mannan.  
 Hūru þæt onhōhsnode Hemminges mæg.  
 Ealo-drincende oðer sædan,  
 þæt hīo lēod-bealewa læs gefremede,  
 inwit-nīða, syððan ārest wearð  
 gyfen gold-hroden geongum cempan,  
 æðelum dīore, syððan hīo Offan flet  
 1950 ofer fealone flōd be fæder lāre  
 sīde gesōhte. Ðær hīo syððan well  
 in gum-stōle, gōde mære,  
 lif-gesceafta lifigende brēac,  
 hīold hēah-lufan wið hæleþa brego,  
 ealles mon-cynnes mīne gefræge  
 þone sēlestan bī sām twēonum,  
 eormen-cynnes. Forðām Offa wæs  
 geofum ond gūðum, gār-cēne man

1930 was young, a few short years at court,  
 her mind was thoughtful and her manners sure.  
 Haereth's daughter behaved generously  
 and stinted nothing when she distributed  
 bounty to the Geats.

Great Queen Modthryth  
 perpetrated terrible wrongs.  
 If any retainer ever made bold  
 to look her in the face, if an eye not her lord's  
 stared at her directly during daylight,  
 the outcome was sealed: he was kept bound  
 in hand-tightened shackles, racked, tortured  
 until doom was pronounced—death by the sword,  
 slash of blade, blood-gush and death qualms  
 1940 in an evil display. Even a queen  
 outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that.  
 A queen should weave peace, not punish the innocent  
 with loss of life for imagined insults.  
 But Hemming's kinsman put a halt to her ways  
 and drinkers round the table had another tale:  
 she was less of a bane to people's lives,  
 less cruel-minded, after she was married  
 to the brave Offa, a bride arrayed  
 in her gold finery, given away  
 1950 by a caring father, ferried to her young prince  
 over dim seas. In days to come  
 she would grace the throne and grow famous  
 for her good deeds and conduct of life,  
 her high devotion to the hero king  
 who was the best king, it has been said,  
 between the two seas or anywhere else  
 on the face of the earth. Offa was honoured  
 far and wide for his generous ways,

*Queen Hygd  
 introduced. The  
 story of Queen  
 Modthryth, Hygd's  
 opposite, is told by  
 the poet*

1960 wīde geweorðod; wīsdōme hēold  
ēðel sīnne. Þonon Eōmēr wōc  
hæleðum tō helpe, Hemminges mæg,  
nefa Gārmundes, nīða cræftig.

Gewāt him ðā se hearda mid his hond-scole  
sylf æfter sande sǣ-wong tredan,  
wīde waroðas; woruld-candel scān,  
sigel sūðan fūs. Hī sīð drugon,  
elne geēodon, tō ðæs ðe eorla hlēo,  
bonan Ongenþēoes burgum in innan,  
geongne gūð-cyning gōdne gefrūnon  
1970 hringas dǣlan. Higelāce wæs  
sīð Bēowulfes snūde gecyðed,  
þæt ðær on wordig wīgendra hlēo,  
lind-gestealla lifigende cwōm,  
heaðo-lāces hāl tō hofe gongan.  
Hraðe wæs gerȳmed, swā se rīca bebēad,  
fēðe-gestum flet innanweard.

Gesæt þā wið sylfne, sē ðā sæcce genæs,  
mæg wið mæge, syððan man-dryhten  
þurh hlēoðor-cwyde holdne gegrētte  
1980 mēaglum wordum. Meodu-scencum  
hwearf geond þæt heal-reced Hæreðes dohtor,  
lufode ðā lēode, līð-wæge bær  
Hæðnum tō handa. Higelāc ongan  
sīnne geseldan in sele þām hēan  
fægre fricgean; hyne fyrwet bræc,  
hwylce Sǣ-Gēata sīðas wæron:

“Hū lomp ēow on lāde, lēofa Bīowulf,  
þā ðū fāringa feorr gehogodest

1960 his fighting spirit and his far-seeing  
defence of his homeland; from him there sprang Eomer,  
Garmund's grandson, kinsman of Hemming,  
his warriors' mainstay and master of the field.

1970 Heroic Beowulf and his band of men  
crossed the wide strand, striding along  
the sandy foreshore; the sun shone,  
the world's candle warmed them from the south  
as they hastened to where, as they had heard,  
the young king, Ongentheow's killer  
and his people's protector, was dispensing rings  
inside his bawn. Beowulf's return  
1970 was reported to Hygelac as soon as possible,  
news that the captain was now in the enclosure,  
his battle-brother back from the fray  
alive and well, walking to the hall.  
Room was quickly made, on the king's orders,  
and the troops filed across the cleared floor.

1980 After Hygelac had offered greetings  
to his loyal thane in lofty speech,  
he and his kinsman, that hale survivor,  
sat face to face. Haereth's daughter  
moved about with the mead-jug in her hand,  
taking care of the company, filling the cups  
that warriors held out. Then Hygelac began  
to put courteous questions to his old comrade  
in the high hall. He hankered to know  
every tale the Sea-Geats had to tell.

“How did you fare on your foreign voyage,  
dear Beowulf, when you abruptly decided

*Beowulf and his  
troop are welcomed  
in Hygelac's hall*

*Hygelac questions  
Beowulf*

1990

sæcce sēcean ofer sealt wæter,  
 hilde tō Hiorote? Ac ðū Hrōðgāre  
 wīd-cūðne wēan wihte gebēttest,  
 mǣrum ðeodne? Ic ðæs mōd-ceare  
 sorh-wylmum sēað, sīðe ne truwode  
 lēofes mannes. Ic ðē lange bæd,  
 þæt ðū þone wæl-gæst wihte ne grētte,  
 lēte Sūð-Dene sylfe geweorðan  
 gūðe wið Grendel. Gode ic þanc secge,  
 þæs ðe ic ðē gesundne gesēon mōste.”

2000

Bīowulf maðelode, bearn Ecgðīoes:  
 “Þæt is undyrne, dryhten Higelāc,  
 mǣru gemēting monegum fīra,  
 hwylc orleg-hwīl uncer Grendles  
 wearð on ðām wange, þær hē worna fela  
 Sige-Scyldingum sorge gefremede,  
 yrmðe tō aldre; ic ðæt eall gewræc,  
 swā begylpan ne þearf Grendeles māga  
 ænig ofer eorðan ūht-hlem þone,  
 sē ðe lengest leofað lāðan cynnes,  
 fācne bifongen. Ic ðær furðum cwōm

2010

tō ðām hring-sele Hrōðgār grētan;  
 sōna mē se mǣra mago Healfdenes,  
 syððan hē mōd-sefan mīnne cūðe,  
 wið his sylfes sunu setl getǣhte.  
 Weorod wæs on wyne: ne seah ic wīdan feorh  
 under heofones hwealf heal-sittendra  
 medu-drēam māran. Hwīlum mǣru cwēn,  
 friðu-sibb folca, flet eall geonhdwearf,  
 bādde byre geonge; oft hīo bēah-wriðan  
 secge sealde, ær hīe tō setle gēong;

1990

to sail away across the salt water  
 and fight at Heorot? Did you help Hrothgar  
 much in the end? Could you ease the prince  
 of his well-known troubles? Your undertaking  
 cast my spirits down, I dreaded the outcome  
 of your expedition and pleaded with you  
 long and hard to leave the killer be,  
 let the South-Danes settle their own  
 blood-feud with Grendel. So God be thanked  
 I am granted this sight of you, safe and sound.”

2000

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
 “What happened, Lord Hygelac, is hardly a secret  
 any more among men in this world—  
 myself and Grendel coming to grips  
 on the very spot where he visited destruction  
 on the Victory-Shieldings and violated  
 life and limb, losses I avenged  
 so no earthly offspring of Grendel’s  
 need ever boast of that bout before dawn,  
 no matter how long the last of his evil  
 family survives.

2010

When I first landed  
 I hastened to the ring-hall and saluted Hrothgar.  
 Once he discovered why I had come  
 the son of Halfdane sent me immediately  
 to sit with his own sons on the bench.  
 It was a happy gathering. In my whole life  
 I have never seen mead enjoyed more  
 in any hall on earth. Sometimes the queen  
 herself appeared, peace-pledge between nations,  
 to hearten the young ones and hand out  
 a torque to a warrior, then take her place.

*Beowulf tells what  
 happened in the land  
 of the Danes*

2020

hwīlum for duguðe dohtor Hrōðgāres  
 eorlum on ende ealu-wāge bær,  
 þā ic Frēaware flet-sittende  
 nemnan hýrde, þær hīo nægled-sinc  
 hæleðum sealde. Sīo gehāten is  
 geong, gold-hroden, gladum suna Frōdan;  
 hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga,  
 rīces hyrde, ond þæt ræd talað  
 þæt hē mid ðy wīfe wæl-fāhða dæl,  
 sæcca gesette. Oft seldan hwær

2030

æfter lēod-hryre lýtle hwīle  
 bon-gār būgeð, þeah sēo brýd duge!

“Mæg þæs þonne ofþyncan ðeodne Heaðbeardna  
 ond þegna gehwām þāra lēoda,  
 þonne hē mid fāmnan on flett gāð  
 dryht-bearn Dena, duguða biwenede.

On him gladiað gomelra lāfe,  
 heard ond hring-mæl Heaðbeardna gestrēon,  
 þenden hīe ðam wāpnūm wealdan mōston,  
 oððæt hīe forlæddan tō ðām lind-plegan  
 swāse gesīðas ond hyra sylfra feorh.

2040

Þonne cwið æt bēore, sē þe bēah gesyhð,  
 eald æsc-wiga, sē ðe eall geman  
 gār-cwealm gumena —him bið grim sefa—  
 onginneð geōmor-mōd geongum cempan  
 þurh hreðra gehygd, higes cunnian,  
 wīg-bealu weccan, ond þæt word ācwyð:

“ ‘Meaht ðū, mīn wine, mēce gecnāwan,  
 þone þīn fæder tō gefeohte bær  
 under here-grīman hindeman sīðe,  
 dýre īren, þær hyne Dene slōgon,

2050

2020

Sometimes Hrothgar's daughter distributed  
 ale to older ranks, in order on the benches:  
 I heard the company call her Freawaru  
 as she made her rounds, presenting men  
 with the gem-studded bowl, young bride-to-be  
 to the gracious Ingeld, in her gold-trimmed attire.  
 The friend of the Shieldings favours her betrothal:  
 the guardian of the kingdom sees good in it  
 and hopes this woman will heal old wounds  
 and grievous feuds.

2030

But generally the spear  
 is prompt to retaliate when a prince is killed,  
 no matter how admirable the bride may be.

2040

“Think how the Heathobards will be bound to feel,  
 their lord, Ingeld, and his loyal thanes,  
 when he walks in with that woman to the feast:  
 Danes are at the table, being entertained,  
 honoured guests in glittering regalia,  
 burnished ring-mail that was their hosts' birthright,  
 looted when the Heathobards could no longer wield  
 their weapons in the shield-clash, when they went down  
 with their beloved comrades and forfeited their lives.  
 Then an old spearman will speak while they are drinking,  
 having glimpsed some heirloom that brings alive  
 memories of the massacre; his mood will darken  
 and heart-stricken, in the stress of his emotion,  
 he will begin to test a young man's temper  
 and stir up trouble, starting like this:  
 ‘Now, my friend, don't you recognize  
 your father's sword, his favourite weapon,  
 the one he wore when he went out in his war-mask  
 to face the Danes on that final day?

2050

*He foresees the grim  
 consequence of a  
 proposed marriage*

*When the Danes  
 appear at Freawaru's  
 wedding, their hosts,  
 the Heathobards,  
 will be stirred to  
 avenge an old defeat*

wēoldon wæl-stōwe, syððan Wiðergyld læg,  
 æfter hæleþa hryre, hwate Scyldungas?  
 Nū hēr þāra banena byre nāt-hwylces  
 frætsum hrēmig on flet gæð,  
 morðres gylpeð ond þone mādþum byreð,  
 þone þe ðū mid rihte rædan sceoldest!  
 Manað swa ond myndgað mæla gehwylce  
 sārum wordum, oððæt sæl cymeð,  
 þæt se fāmnan þegn fore fæder dædum  
 2060 æfter billes bite blōd-fāg swefeð,  
 ealdres scyldig; him se oðer þonan  
 losað lifigende, con him land gearu.  
 Þonne biðð ābrocene on bā healfe  
 āð-sweorð eorla; syððan Ingelde  
 weallað wæl-nīðas ond him wif-lufan  
 æfter ceap-wælmum cōlran weorðað.  
 Þy ic Heaðobeardna hyldo ne telge,  
 dryht-sibbe dæl Denum unfæcne,  
 frēondscipe fæstne.

Ic sceal forð sprecan,  
 2070 gēn ymbe Grendel, þæt ðū gearu cunne,  
 sinces brytta, tō hwan syððan wearð  
 hond-ræs hæleða. Syððan heofones gim  
 glād ofer grundas, gæst yrre cwōm,  
 eatol æfen-grom, ūser nēosan,  
 ðær wē gesunde sæl weardodon.  
 Þær wæs Hondsciō hild onsæge,  
 feorh-bealu fægum; hē fyrrest læg,  
 gyrded cempa; him Grendel wearð,  
 2080 mærum magu-þegne, tō mūd-bonan,  
 lēofes mannes līc eall forswealg.  
 Nō ðy ær ut ðā gēn īdel-hende

After Wethergeld died and his men were doomed  
 the Shieldings quickly claimed the field,  
 and now here's a son of one or other  
 of those same killers coming through our hall  
 overbearing us, mouthing boasts,  
 and rigged in armour that by right is yours.  
 And so he keeps on, recalling and accusing,  
 working things up with bitter words  
 until one of the lady's retainers lies  
 2060 splattered in blood, split open  
 on his father's account. The killer knows  
 the lie of the land and escapes with his life.  
 Then on both sides the oath-bound lords  
 will break the peace, a passionate hate  
 will build up in Ingeld and love for his bride  
 will falter in him as the feud rankles.  
 I therefore suspect the good faith of the Heathobards,  
 the truth of their friendship and the trustworthiness  
 of their alliance with the Danes.

But now, my lord,  
 2070 I shall carry on with my account of Grendel,  
 the whole story of everything that happened  
 in the hand-to-hand fight.

After heaven's gem  
 had gone mildly to earth, that maddened spirit,  
 the terror of those twilights, came to attack us  
 where we stood guard, still safe inside the hall.  
 There deadly violence came down on Handscio  
 and he fell as fate ordained, the first to perish,  
 rigged out for the combat. A comrade from our ranks  
 had come to grief in Grendel's maw:  
 2080 he ate up the entire body.  
 There was blood on his teeth, he was bloated and furious,

*The tale of the fight  
 with Grendel  
 resumed*

bona blōdig-tōð bealewa gemyndig,  
 of ðām gold-sele gongan wolde,  
 ac hē mægnes rōf mīn costode,  
 grāpode gearo-folm. Glōf hangode  
 sīd ond syllīc, searo-bendum fæst;  
 sīo wæs orðoncum eall gegyrwed,  
 dēofles cræftum ond dracan fellum.  
 Hē mec þær on innan unsynnigne,  
 2090 dīor dād-fruma, gedōn wolde  
 manigra sumne; hyt ne mihte swā,  
 syððan ic on yrre upp-riht āstōd.  
 Tō lang ys tō recenne, hū ic ðām lēod-sceaðan  
 yfla gehwylces ondlēan forgeald,  
 þær ic, þēoden mīn, þīne lēode  
 weorðode weorcum. Hē on weg losade,  
 lýtle hwīle lif-wynna brēac;  
 hwæpre him sīo swīðre swaðe weardade  
 hand on Hiorde, ond hē hēan ðonan,  
 2100 mōdes geōmor mere-grund gefēoll.  
 “Mē þone wæl-rās wine Scildunga  
 fāttan golde fela lēanode,  
 manegum mādum, syððan mergen cōm  
 ond wē tō symble geseten hæfdon.  
 Þær wæs gidd ond glēo; gomela Scilding,  
 fela fricgende, feorran rehte;  
 hwīlum hilde-dēor hearpan wynne,  
 gomen-wudu grētte, hwīlum gyd āwræc  
 sōð ond sārlic, hwīlum syllīc spell  
 2110 rehte æfter rihte rūm-heort cyning;  
 hwīlum eft ongan eldo gebunden  
 gomel gūð-wiga gioguðe cwīðan,

all roused up, yet still unready  
 to leave the hall empty-handed;  
 renowned for his might, he matched himself against me,  
 wildly reaching. He had this roomy pouch,  
 a strange accoutrement, intricately strung  
 and hung at the ready, a rare patchwork  
 of devilishly fitted dragon-skins.  
 I had done him no wrong, yet the raging demon  
 wanted to cram me and many another  
 2090 into this bag—but it was not to be  
 once I got to my feet in a blind fury.  
 It would take too long to tell how I repaid  
 the terror of the land for every life he took  
 and so won credit for you, my king,  
 and for all your people. And although he got away  
 to enjoy life’s sweetness for a while longer,  
 his right hand stayed behind him in Heorot,  
 evidence of his miserable overthrow  
 as he dived into murk on the mere bottom.

“I got lavish rewards from the lord of the Danes  
 for my part in the battle, beaten gold  
 and much else, once morning came  
 and we took our places at the banquet table.  
 There was singing and excitement: an old reciter,  
 a carrier of stories, recalled the early days.  
 At times some hero made the timbered harp  
 tremble with sweetness, or related true  
 and tragic happenings; at times the king  
 gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale,  
 2110 or a battle-scarred veteran, bowed with age,  
 would begin to remember the martial deeds

*Beowulf recalls the  
feast in Heorot*

hilde-strengo; hreðer inne wēoll,  
þonne hē wintrum frōd worn gemunde.

“Swā wē þær inne andlangne dæg  
nīode nāman, oððæt niht becwōm  
oðer tō yldum. Þā wæs eft hraðe  
gearo gyrn-wræce Grendeles mōdor,  
sīðode sorh-full; sunu dēað fornam,  
2120 wīg-hete Wedra. Wif unhyre  
hyre bearn gewræc, beorn ācwealde  
ellenlice; þær wæs Æschere,  
frōdan fyrr-witan, feorh ūðgenge.  
Nōðer hī hine ne mōston, syððan mergen cwōm,  
dēað-wērigne, Denia lēode  
bronde forbærnan, nē on bæl hladan  
lēofne mannan; hīo þæt līc ætbær  
fēondes fæðmum under firgen-strēam.  
2130 Þæt wæs Hrōðgāre hrēowa tornost,  
þāra þe lēod-fruman lange begēate.  
Þā se ðēoden mec ðīne līfe  
healsode hrēoh-mōd, þæt ic on holma geþring  
eorlscipe efnde, ealdre genēðde,  
mārðo fremede; hē mē mēde gehēt.  
Ic ðā ðæs wælnes, þē is wīde cūð,  
grimne gryrelīcne grund-hyrde fond.  
Þær unc hwīle wæs hand gemāne;  
holm heolfre wēoll, ond ic hēafde becearf  
2140 in ðām gūð-sele Grendeles mōdor  
ēacnum ecgum. Unsōfte þonan  
feorh oðferede; næs ic fæge þā gýt;  
ac mē eorla hlēo eft gesealde  
māðma menigeo, maga Healfdenes.

of his youth and prime and be overcome  
as the past welled up in his wintry heart.

“We were happy there the whole day long  
and enjoyed our time until another night  
descended upon us. Then suddenly  
the vehement mother avenged her son  
and wreaked destruction. Death had robbed her,  
2120 Geats had slain Grendel, so his ghastly dam  
struck back and with bare-faced defiance  
laid a man low. Thus life departed  
from the sage Aeschere, an elder wise in counsel.  
But afterwards, on the morning following,  
the Danes could not burn the dead body  
nor lay the remains of the man they loved  
on his funeral pyre. She had fled with the corpse  
and taken refuge beneath torrents on the mountain.  
It was a hard blow for Hrothgar to bear,  
2130 harder than any he had undergone before.  
And so the heartsore king beseeched me  
in your royal name to take my chances  
underwater, to win glory  
and prove my worth. He promised me rewards.  
Hence, as is well known, I went to my encounter  
with the terror-monger at the bottom of the tarn.  
For a while it was hand-to-hand between us,  
then blood went curling along the currents  
and I beheaded Grendel’s mother in the hall  
2140 with a mighty sword. I barely managed  
to escape with my life; my time had not yet come.  
But Halfdane’s heir, the shelter of those earls,  
again endowed me with gifts in abundance.

*He tells about  
Grendel's mother*



2150

“Swā se ðeod-kyning þeawum lyfde;  
nealles ic ðām lēanum forloren hæfde,  
mæignes mēde, ac hē mē māðmas geaf,  
sunu Healfdenes, on mīnne sylfes dōm;  
ðā ic ðē, beorn-cyning, bringan wylle,  
ēstum geýwan. Gēn is eall æt ðē  
lissa gelong; ic lýt hafo  
hēafod-māga, nefne Hygelāc ðec!”

Hēt ðā in beran eafor, hēafod-segn,  
heaðo-stēapne helm, hāre byrnan,  
gūð-sweord geatolic, gyd æfter wræc:

“Mē ðis hilde-sceorp Hrōðgār sealde,  
snotra fengel; sume worde hēt,  
þæt ic his ærest ðē ēst gesægde:  
cwæð þæt hyt hæfde Hiorogār cyning,  
lēod Scyldunga, lange hwīle.

2160

Nō ðy ær suna sīnum syllan wolde,  
hwatum Heorowearde, þēah hē him hold wære,  
brēost-gewædu. Brūc ealles well!”

Hyrde ic, þæt þām frætwum fēower mēaras,  
lungre, gelīce lāst weardode,  
æppel-fealuwe; hē him ēst getēah  
mēara ond māðma. Swā sceal mæg dōn,  
nealles inwit-net oðrum bregdon  
dyrnum cræfte, dēað rēnian  
hond-gesteallan. Hygelāce wæs,  
nīða heardum, nefa swyðe hold  
ond gehwæðer oðrum hrōpra gemyndig.

2170

Hyrde ic þæt hē ðone heals-bēah Hygde gesealde,

2150

“Thus the king acted with due custom.  
I was paid and recompensed completely,  
given full measure and the freedom to choose  
from Hrothgar’s treasures by Hrothgar himself.  
These, King Hygelac, I am happy to present  
to you as gifts. It is still upon your grace  
that all favour depends. I have few kinsmen  
who are close, my king, except for your kind self.”  
Then he ordered the boar-framed standard to be brought,  
the battle-topping helmet, the mail-shirt grey as hoar-frost  
and the precious war-sword; and proceeded with his  
speech.

2160

“When Hrothgar presented this war-gear to me  
he instructed me, my lord, to give you some account  
of why it signifies his special favour.  
He said it had belonged to his older brother,  
King Heorogar, who had long kept it,  
but that Heorogar had never bequeathed it  
to his son Heorowearde, that worthy scion,  
loyal as he was.

Enjoy it well.”

2170

I heard four horses were handed over next.  
Beowulf bestowed four bay steeds  
to go with the armour, swift gallopers,  
all alike. So ought a kinsman act,  
instead of plotting and planning in secret  
to bring people to grief, or conspiring to arrange  
the death of comrades. The warrior king  
was uncle to Beowulf and honoured by his nephew:  
each was concerned for the other’s good.

I heard he presented Hygd with a gorget,

*Beowulf presents  
Hygelac with the  
treasures he has won*

wrætlicne wundur-māððum, ðone þe him Wealhðeo  
geaf,

ðeodnes dohtor, þrīo wicg somod  
swancor ond sadol-beorht; hyre syððan wæs  
æfter bēah-ðege breost geweorðod.

Swā bealdode bearn Ecgðēowes,  
guma gūðum cūð, gōdum dædum,  
drēah æfter dōme, nealles druncne slōg  
2180 heorð-genēatas; næs him hrēoh sefa,  
ac hē man-cynnes mæste cræfte,  
gin-fæstan gife, þe him God sealde,  
hēold hilde-dēor. Hēan wæs lange,  
swā hyne Gēata bearn gōdne ne tealdon,  
nē hyne on medo-bence micles wyrðne  
drihten Wedera gedōn wolde;  
swyðe wēndon, þæt hē slēac wære,  
æðeling unfrom. Edwenden cwōm  
tīr-ēadigum menn torna gehwylces.

2190 Hēt ðā eorla hlēo in gefetian,  
heaðo-rōf cyning, Hrēðles lāfe,  
golde gegyrede; næs mid Gēatum ðā  
sinc-māðpum sēlra on sweordes hād;  
þæt hē on Bīowulfes bearm ālegde,  
ond him gesealde seofan þūsendo,  
bold ond brego-stōl. Him wæs bām samod  
on ðām lēodscipe lond gecynde,  
eard, ēdel-riht, oðrum swīðor,  
sīde rīce, þām ðær sēlra wæs.

2200 Eft þæt geīode ufaran dōgrum  
hilde-hlæmmum, syððan Hygelāc læg  
ond Heardrēde hilde-mēceas

the priceless torque that the prince's daughter,  
Wealththeow, had given him; and three horses,  
supple creatures, brilliantly saddled.  
The bright necklace would be luminous on Hygd's breast.

2180 Thus Beowulf bore himself with valour;  
he was formidable in battle yet behaved with honour  
and took no advantage; never cut down  
a comrade who was drunk, kept his temper  
and, warrior that he was, watched and controlled  
his God-sent strength and his outstanding  
natural powers. He had been poorly regarded  
for a long time, was taken by the Geats  
for less than he was worth: and their lord too  
had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.  
They firmly believed that he lacked force,  
that the prince was a weakling; but presently  
every affront to his deserving was reversed.

2190 The battle-famed king, bulwark of his earls,  
ordered a gold-chased heirloom of Hrethel's  
to be brought in; it was the best example  
of a gem-studded sword in the Geat treasury.  
This he laid on Beowulf's lap  
and then rewarded him with land as well,  
seven thousand hides, and a hall and a throne.  
Both owned land by birth in that country,  
ancestral grounds; but the greater right  
and sway were inherited by the higher born.

2200 A lot was to happen in later days  
in the fury of battle. Hygelac fell  
and the shelter of Heardred's shield proved useless

*Beowulf's exemplary  
life is extolled*

*Hygelac presents  
Beowulf with a  
sword and great  
tracts of land*

*Time passes.  
Beowulf rules the  
Geats for fifty years*



swā h̄y on geār-dagum gumena nāt-hwylc,  
 eormen-lāfe æþelan cynnes,  
 þanc-hycgende þær gehȳdde,  
 dēore māðmas. Ealle h̄ie dēað fornam  
 ærran mælum, ond se ān ðā gēn  
 lēoda duguðe, sē ðær lengest hwearf,  
 weard wine-geðmor, wēnde þæs ylcan  
 2240 þæt hē l̄ytel fæc long-gestrēona  
 brūcan mōste. Beorh eall-gearo  
 wunode on wonge wæter-ȳðum nēah,  
 nīwe be næsse, nearo-cræftum fæst.  
 Þær on innan bær eorl-gestrēona  
 hringa hyrde hord-wyrðne dæl,  
 fættan goldes, fēa worda cwæð:  
 “Heald þū nū, hrūse, nū hæleð ne mōstan,  
 eorla æhte! Hwæt hyt ær on ðe  
 2250 gōde begēaton. Gūð-dēað fornam,  
 feorh-bealo frēcne, f̄yra gehwylcne  
 lēoda mīnra, þāra ðe þis lif ofgeaf,  
 gesāwon sele-drēam; nāh, hwā sweord wege  
 oððe feormie fæted wæge,  
 drync-fæt dēore; duguð ellor scōc.  
 Sceal se hearda helm, hyrsted golde  
 fætum befallen; feormynd swefað,  
 þā ðe beado-grīman b̄ywan sceoldon;  
 gē swylce sēo here-pād, s̄io æt hilde gebād  
 ofer borda gebræc bite īrena,  
 2260 broснаð æfter beorne; ne mæg byrnan hring  
 æfter wīg-fruman wīde fēran  
 hæleðum be healfē. Næs hearpan wyn,  
 gomen glēo-bēames, nē gōd hafoc  
 geond sæl swingeð, nē se swifta mearh

because long ago, with deliberate care,  
 somebody now forgotten  
 had buried the riches of a high-born race  
 in this ancient cache. Death had come  
 and taken them all in times gone by  
 and the only one left to tell their tale,  
 the last of their line, could look forward to nothing  
 but the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his joy  
 in the treasure would be brief.

A newly constructed  
 barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland  
 close to the waves, its entryway secured.  
 Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried  
 all the goods and golden ware  
 worth preserving. His words were few:  
 “Now, earth, hold what earls once held  
 and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first  
 by honourable men. My own people  
 2250 have been ruined in war; one by one  
 they went down to death, looked their last  
 on sweet life in the hall. I am left with nobody  
 to bear a sword or burnish plated goblets,  
 put a sheen on the cup. The companies have departed.  
 The hard helmet, hasped with gold,  
 will be stripped of its hoops; and the helmet-shiner  
 who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps;  
 the coat of mail that came through all fights,  
 through shield-collapse and cut of sword,  
 2260 decays with the warrior. Nor may webbed mail  
 range far and wide on the warlord’s back  
 beside his mustered troops. No trembling harp,  
 no tuned timber, no tumbling hawk  
 swerving through the hall, no swift horse

*Long ago, a hoard  
 was hidden in the  
 earth-house by the  
 last survivor of a  
 forgotten race*

burh-stede bēateð. Bealo-cwealm hafað  
fela feorh-cynna forð onsended!”

2270 Swā giōmor-mōd gιοhðo mǣnde,  
ān æfter eallum, unblīde hwearf,  
dægес ond nihtes, oððæt dēaðes wylm  
hrān æt heortan. Hord-wynne fond  
eald ūht-sceaða opene standan,  
sē ðe byrnende biorgas sēceð,  
nacod nīð-draca, nihtes flēogeð  
fyre befangen; hyne fold-būend  
swiðe ondrædað. Hē gesēcean sceall  
hord on hrūsan, þær hē hǣðen gold  
warað wintrum frōd; ne byð him wihte ðy sēl.

2280 Swā se ðēod-sceaða þrēo hund wintra  
hēold on hrūsan hord-ærna sum  
ēacen-cræftig, oððæt hyne ān ābealch  
mon on mōde; man-dryhtne bær  
fæted wāge, frioðo-wære bæd  
hlāford sīnne. Ðā wæs hord rāsod,  
onboren bēaga hord, bēne gefiðad  
fēasceaftum men. Frēa scēawode  
fīra fyrm-geweorc forman sīðe.

2290 Þā se wurm onwōc, wrōht wæs genīwad;  
stonc ðā æfter stāne, stearc-heort onfand  
fēondes fōt-lāst; hē tō forð gestōp  
dyrman cræfte, dracan hēafde nēah.  
Swā mæg unfæge ēaðe gedīgan  
wēan ond wræc-sīð, sē ðe Waldendes  
hylðo gehealdeþ. Hord-weard sōhte  
georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,

pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter  
have emptied the earth of entire peoples.”  
And so he mourned as he moved about the world,  
deserted and alone, lamenting his unhappiness  
day and night, until death’s flood  
brimmed up in his heart.

2270 Then an old harrower of the dark  
happened to find the hoard open,  
the burning one who hunts out barrows,  
the slick-skinned dragon, threatening the night sky  
with streamers of fire. People on the farms  
are in dread of him. He is driven to hunt out  
hoards under ground, to guard heathen gold  
through age-long vigils, though to little avail.  
For three centuries, this scourge of the people  
had stood guard on that stoutly protected  
underground treasury, until the intruder  
unleashed its fury; he hurried to his lord  
with the gold-plated cup and made his plea  
to be reinstated. Then the vault was rifled,  
the ring-hoard robbed, and the wretched man  
had his request granted. His master gazed  
on that find from the past for the first time.

2280 When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again.  
He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger  
when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen  
too close to his dreaming head.  
So may a man not marked by fate  
easily escape exile and woe  
by the grace of God.

2290 The hoard-guardian  
scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted

*The dragon nests in  
the barrow and  
guards the gold*

*The dragon in  
turmoil*

2300 þone þe him on sweofote sære getēode;  
 hāt ond hrēoh-mōd hlāw oft ymbe-hwearf,  
 ealne ūtanweardne; nē ðær ænig mon  
 on þære wēstenne; hwæðre wīges gefeh,  
 beaduwe weorces; hwīlum on beorh æthwearf,  
 sinc-fæt sōhte; hē þæt sōna onfand,  
 ðæt hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod,  
 hēah-gestrēona. Hord-weard onbād  
 earfoðlice, oððæt æfen cwōm.  
 Wæs ðā gebolgen beorges hyrde,  
 wolde se lāða līge forgyldan  
 drinc-fæt dýre. Ðā wæs dæg sceacen  
 wyrme on willan; nō on wealle læng  
 bīdan wolde, ac mid bæle fōr,  
 2310 fýre gefýsed. Wæs se fruma egeslic  
 lēodum on lande, swā hyt lungre wearð  
 on hyra sinc-gifan sære geendod.  
 Ðā se gæst ongan glēdum spīwan,  
 beorht hofu bærnan; bryne-lēoma stōd  
 eldum on andan; nō ðær āht cwices  
 lāð lyft-floga lāfan wolde.  
 Wæs þæs wyrmes wīg wīde gesýne,  
 nearo-fāges nīð nēan ond feorran,  
 hū se gūð-sceaða Geata lēode  
 hatode ond hýnde. Hord eft gescēat  
 2320 dryht-sele dymne ær dægges hwīle.  
 Hæfde land-wara līge befangen,  
 bæle ond bronde; beorges getruwode,  
 wīges ond wealles; him sēo wēn gelēah.  
 Ðā wæs Bīowulfe brōga gecýðed  
 snūde tō sōðe, þæt his sylfes hām,

2300 for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep.  
 Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling  
 the outside of the mound. No man appeared  
 in that desert waste, but he worked himself up  
 by imagining battle; then back in he'd go  
 in search of the cup, only to discover  
 signs that someone had stumbled upon  
 the golden treasures. So the guardian of the mound,  
 the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming  
 with fierce impatience; his pent-up fury  
 at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back  
 and lash out in flames. Then, to his delight,  
 the day waned and he could wait no longer  
 behind the wall, but hurtled forth  
 in a fiery blaze. The first to suffer  
 2310 were the people on the land, but before long  
 it was their treasure-giver who would come to grief.

The dragon began to belch out flames  
 and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow  
 that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger  
 would leave nothing alive in his wake.  
 Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.  
 Far and near, the Geat nation  
 bore the brunt of his brutal assaults  
 and virulent hate. Then back to the hoard  
 he would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den.  
 He had swung the land, swathed it in flame,  
 in fire and burning, and now he felt secure  
 in the vaults of his barrow; but his trust was unavailing.

Then Beowulf was given bad news,  
 a hard truth: his own home,

*The dragon wreaks  
havoc on the Geats*

*Beowulf's ominous  
feelings about the  
dragon*

2330 bolda sēlest, bryne-wylmum mealt,  
gif-stōl Gēata. Pæt ðām gōdan wæs  
hrēow on hreðre, hyge-sorga mǣst.  
Wēnde se wīsa, pæt hē Wealdende  
ofer ealde riht, ēcean Dryhtne,  
bitre gebulge; brēost innan wēoll  
pēostrum geþoncum, swā him geþywe ne wæs.

Hæfde līg-draca lēoda fæsten,  
ēa-lond ūtan, eorð-weard ðone  
glēdum forgrunden; him ðæs gūð-kyning,  
Wedera þīoden, wræce leornode.  
Heht him þā gewyrcean wīgendra hlēo  
eall-īrenne, eorla dryhten,  
wīg-bord wrætlic; wisse hē gearwe,  
2340 pæt him holt-wudu helþan ne meahte,  
lind wið līge. Sceolde lān-daga  
æþeling ær-gōd ende gebīdan,  
worulde līfes, ond se wyrm somod,  
pēah ðe hord-welan hēolde lange.

Oferhogode ðā hringa fengel,  
pæt hē þone wīd-flogan weorode gesōhte,  
sīdan herge; nō hē him þā sæcce ondrēd,  
nē him þæs wyrmes wīg for wiht dyde,  
eafod ond ellen, forðon hē ær fela  
2350 nearo nēðende nīða gedīgde,  
hilde-hlemma, syððan hē Hrōðgāres,  
sigor-ēadig secg, sele fǣlsode  
ond æt gūðe forgrāp Grendeles mægum  
lāðan cynnes.

Nō pæt læsest wæs  
hond-gemōta, þær mon Hygelāc slōh,  
syððan Gēata cyning gūðe ræsum,

2330 the best of buildings, had been burnt to a cinder,  
the throne-room of the Geats. It threw the hero  
into deep anguish and darkened his mood:  
the wise man thought he must have thwarted  
ancient ordinance of the eternal Lord,  
broken His commandment. His mind was in turmoil,  
unaccustomed anxiety and gloom  
confused his brain; the fire-dragon  
had rased the coastal region and reduced  
forts and earthworks to dust and ashes,  
so the war-king planned and plotted his revenge.  
The warriors' protector, prince of the hall-troop,  
ordered a marvellous all-iron shield  
from his smithy works. He well knew  
2340 that linden boards would let him down  
and timber burn. After many trials,  
he was destined to face the end of his days  
in this mortal world; as was the dragon,  
for all his long leasehold on the treasure.

Yet the prince of the rings was too proud  
to line up with a large army  
against the sky-plague. He had scant regard  
for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all  
of its courage or strength, for he had kept going  
often in the past, through perils and ordeals  
2350 of every sort, after he had purged  
Hrothgar's hall, triumphed in Heorot  
and beaten Grendel. He outgrappled the monster  
and his evil kin.

One of his cruellest  
hand-to-hand encounters had happened  
when Hygelac, king of the Geats, was killed

*Beowulf's pride and  
prowess sustain him*

2360 frēa-wine folca Frēs-londum on,  
 Hrēðles eafora hiora-dryncum swealt,  
 bille gebēaten. Ponan Bīowulf cōm  
 sylfes cræfte, sund-nytte drēah;  
 hæfde him on earme āna þrītig  
 hilde-geatwa, þā hē tō holme stāg.  
 Nealles Hetware hrēmge þorfton  
 fēðe-wīges, þē him foran ongēan  
 linde bāron; lýt eft becwōm  
 fram þām hild-frecan hāmes nīosan.  
 Oferswam ðā sioleða bigong sunu Ecgðēowes,  
 earm ān-haga eft tō lēodum;  
 2370 þær him Hygd gebēad hord ond rīce,  
 bēagas ond brego-stōl; bearne ne truwode,  
 þæt hē wið æl-fylcum ēpel-stōlas  
 healdan cūðe, ðā wæs Hygelāc dēad.  
 Nō ðy ær fēasceaftē findan meahton  
 æt ðām æðelinge ænige ðinga,  
 þæt hē Heardrēde hlāford wære,  
 oððe þone cynedōm cīosan wolde.  
 Hwæðre hē hine on folce frēond-lārum hēold,  
 ēstum mid āre, oððæt hē yldra wearð,  
 Weder-Gēatum wēold. Hyne wrāc-mæcgas  
 2380 ofer sǣ sōhtan, suna Öhteres;  
 hæfdon hý forhealden helm Scylfinga,  
 þone sēlestan sǣ-cyninga,  
 þāra ðe in Swīo-rīce sinc brytnade,  
 mārne þēoden. Him þæt tō mearce wearð;  
 hē þær for feorme feorh-wunde hlēat,  
 sweordes swengum, sunu Hygelāces;  
 ond him eft gewāt Ongendīoes bearn

2360 in Friesland: the people's friend and lord,  
 Hrethel's son, slaked a sword blade's  
 thirst for blood. But Beowulf's prodigious  
 gifts as a swimmer guaranteed his safety:  
 he arrived at the shore, shouldering thirty  
 battle-dresses, the booty he had won.  
 There was little for the Hetware to be happy about  
 as they shielded their faces and fighting on the ground  
 began in earnest. With Beowulf against them,  
 few could hope to return home.

2370 Across the wide sea, desolate and alone,  
 the son of Ecgtheow swam back to his people.  
 There Hygd offered him throne and authority  
 as lord of the ring-hoard: with Hygelac dead,  
 she had no belief in her son's ability  
 to defend their homeland against foreign invaders.  
 Yet there was no way the weakened nation  
 could get Beowulf to give in and agree  
 to be elevated over Heardred as his lord  
 or to undertake the office of kingship.  
 But he did provide support for the prince,  
 honoured and minded him until he matured  
 as the ruler of Geatland.

2380 Then over sea-roads  
 exiles arrived, sons of Ohthere.  
 They had rebelled against the best of all  
 the sea-kings in Sweden, the one who held sway  
 in the Shylfing nation, their renowned prince,  
 lord of the mead-hall. That marked the end  
 for Hygelac's son: his hospitality  
 was mortally rewarded with wounds from a sword.  
 Heardred lay slaughtered and Onela returned

*A flashback:  
 Hygelac's death,  
 Beowulf's rearguard  
 action and escape  
 across the sea*

*Beowulf acts as  
 counsellor to  
 Hygelac's heir,  
 Heardred*

*Heardred is  
 implicated in  
 Swedish feuds and  
 slain*



2390

hāmes nīosan, syððan Heardrēd læg,  
lēt ðone brego-stōl Bīowulf healdan,  
Gēatum wealdan; þæt wæs gōd cyning.

Sē ðæs lēod-hryres lēan gemunde  
uferan dōgrum, Eādgilse wearð,  
fēascaftum frēond; folce gestēpte  
ofer sǣ sīde sunu Ōhteres,  
wigum ond wǣpnum; hē gewræc syððan  
cealdum cear-sīðum, cyning ealdre binēat.

2400

Swā hē nīða gehwane genesen hæfde,  
slīðra geslyhta, sunu Ecgðīowes,  
ellen-weorca, oð ðone āne dæg,  
þē hē wið þām wyrme gewegan sceolde.  
Gewāt þā twelfa sum, torne gebolgen,  
dryhten Gēata dracan scēawian.

2410

Hæfde þā gefrūnen, hwanan sīo fǣhð ārās,  
bealo-nīð biorna; him tō bearne cwōm  
māðpum-fæt mære þurh ðæs meldan hond.  
Sē wæs on ðām ðrēate þrēottēoða secg,  
sē ðæs orleges or onstealde,  
hæft hyge-giōmor, sceolde hēan ðonon  
wong wīsian. Hē ofer willan gīong,  
tō ðæs ðe hē eorð-sele āne wisse,  
hlǣw under hrūsan holm-wylme nēh,  
yð-gewinne, sē wæs innan full  
wrætta ond wīra. Weard unhīore,  
gearo gūð-freca gold-māðmas hēold,  
eald under eorðan; næs þæt yðe cēap  
tō gegangenne gumena ænigum.

Gesæt ðā on næsse nīð-heard cyning

2390

to the land of Sweden, leaving Beowulf  
to ascend the throne, to sit in majesty  
and rule over the Geats. He was a good king.

In days to come, he contrived to avenge  
the fall of his prince; he befriended Eadgils  
when Eadgils was friendless, aiding his cause  
with weapons and warriors over the wide sea,  
sending him men. The feud was settled  
on a comfortless campaign when he killed Onela.

2400

And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived  
every extreme, excelling himself  
in daring and in danger, until the day arrived  
when he had to come face to face with the dragon.

2410

The lord of the Geats took eleven comrades  
and went in a rage to reconnoitre.  
By then he had discovered the cause of the affliction  
being visited on the people. The precious cup  
had come to him from the hand of the finder,  
the one who had started all this strife  
and was now added as a thirteenth to their number.  
They press-ganged and compelled this poor creature  
to be their guide. Against his will  
he led them to the earth-vault he alone knew,  
an underground barrow near the sea-billows  
and heaving waves, heaped inside  
with exquisite metalwork. The one who stood guard  
was dangerous and watchful, warden of that trove  
buried under earth: no easy bargain  
would be made in that place by any man.

The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.

*Beowulf inherits the  
kingship, settles the  
feuding*

*The day of  
reckoning: Beowulf  
and his troop  
reconnoitre*

2420 penden hælo ābēad heorð-genēatum,  
 gold-wine Gēata. Him wæs geōmor sefa,  
 wæfre ond wæl-fūs, wyrd ungemete nēah,  
 sē ðone gomelan grētan sceolde,  
 sēcean sāwle hord, sundur gedālan  
 lif wið līce; nō þon lange wæs  
 feorh æþelinges flāsce bewunden.  
 Bīowulf maþelade, bearn Ecgðēowes:  
 “Fela ic on giogoðe gūð-rāsa genæs,  
 orleg-hwīla; ic þæt eall gemon.  
 Ic wæs syfan-wintre, þā mec sinca baldor,  
 frēa-wine folca æt mīnum fæder genam.  
 2430 Hēold mec ond hæfde Hrēdel cyning,  
 geaf mē sinc ond symbel, sibbe gemunde;  
 næs ic him tō life lādra ōwihte  
 beorn in burgum þonne his bearna hwylc,  
 Herebeald ond Hæðcyn, oððe Hygelac mīn.  
 Wæs þām yldestan ungedēfelīce  
 māges dādum morþor-bed strēd,  
 syððan hyne Hæðcyn of horn-bogan,  
 his frēa-wine flāne geswencte,  
 2440 miste mercelses ond his māg ofscēt,  
 brōðor oðerne, blōdigan gāre.  
 Þæt wæs feoh-lēas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,  
 hreðre hyge-mēðe; sceolde hwæðre swā þēah  
 æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan.  
 “Swā bið geōmorlic gomelum ceorle  
 tō gebīdanne, þæt his byre rīde  
 giong on galgan. Þonne hē gyd wrece,  
 sārigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað  
 hrefne tō hrōðre ond hē him helpe ne mæg,  
 eald ond infrōd, ænige gefremman.

2420 He wished good luck to the Geats who had shared  
 his hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,  
 unsettled yet ready, sensing his death.  
 His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain:  
 it would soon claim his coffered soul,  
 part life from limb. Before long  
 the prince’s spirit would spin free from his body.

*Beowulf’s  
forebodings*

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
 “Many a skirmish I survived when I was young  
 and many times of war: I remember them well.  
 At seven, I was fostered out by my father,  
 left in the charge of my people’s lord.  
 2430 King Hrethel kept me and took care of me,  
 was open-handed, behaved like a kinsman.  
 While I was his ward, he treated me no worse  
 as a wean about the place than one of his own boys,  
 Herebeald and Haethcyn, or my own Hygelac.  
 For the eldest, Herebeald, an unexpected  
 deathbed was laid out, through a brother’s doing,  
 when Haethcyn bent his horn-tipped bow  
 and loosed the arrow that destroyed his life.  
 He shot wide and buried a shaft  
 2440 in the flesh and blood of his own brother.  
 That offence was beyond redress, a wrongfooting  
 of the heart’s affections; for who could avenge  
 the prince’s life or pay his death-price?  
 It was like the misery felt by an old man  
 who has lived to see his son’s body  
 swing on the gallows. He begins to keen  
 and weep for his boy, watching the raven  
 gloat where he hangs: he can be of no help.  
 The wisdom of age is worthless to him.

*He recalls his early  
days as a ward at  
King Hrethel’s court*

*An accidental killing  
and its sad  
consequences for  
Hrethel*

*Hrethel’s loss  
reflected in “The  
Father’s Lament”*

2450 Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce  
 eaforan ellor-sīð; oðres ne gýmeð  
 tō gebīdanne burgum in innan  
 yrfe-weardas, þonne se ān hafað  
 þurh dēaðes nýd dāda gefondad.  
 Gesyhð sorh- Cearig on his suna bŭre  
 wīn-sele wēstne, wind-gereste,  
 rēote berofene; rīdend swefað,  
 hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan swēg,  
 gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iū wæron.  
 2460 “Gewīteð þonne on sealman, sorh-lēoð gæleð,  
 ān æfter ānum; þūhte him eall tō rūm,  
 wongas ond wīc-stede. Swā Wedra helm  
 æfter Herebealde heortan sorge  
 weallinde wæg; wihte ne meahte  
 on ðām feorh-bonan fāghðe gebētan;  
 nō ðy ær hē þone heaðo-rinc hatian ne meahte  
 lāðum dāðum, þēah him lēof ne wæs.  
 Hē ðā mid þære sorhge, sīo þe him sære belamp,  
 gum-drēam ofgeaf, Godes lēoht gecēas;  
 2470 eaferum lāfde, swā dēð ēadig mon,  
 lond ond lēod-byrig, þā hē of līfe gewāt.  
 “Þā wæs synn ond sacu Swēona ond Gēata;  
 ofer wīd wæter wrōht gemæne,  
 here-nīð hearda, syððan Hrēðel swealt,  
 oððe him Ongendēowes eaferan wæran  
 frome, fyrd-hwate; frēode ne woldon  
 ofer heafo healdan, ac ymb Hrēosna-beorh  
 eatolne inwit-scear oft gefremedon.  
 Þæt mæg-wine mīne gewræcan,  
 2480 fāhðe ond fyrene, swā hyt gefræge wæs,

2450 Morning after morning, he wakes to remember  
 that his child is gone; he has no interest  
 in living on until another heir  
 is born in the hall, now that his first-born  
 has entered death's dominion forever.  
 He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling,  
 the banquet hall bereft of all delight,  
 the windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are sleeping,  
 the warriors under ground; what was is no more.  
 No tunes from the harp, no cheer raised in the yard.  
 2460 Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed  
 and sings a lament; everything seems too large,  
 the steadings and the fields.

Such was the feeling  
 of loss endured by the lord of the Geats  
 after Herebeald's death. He was helplessly placed  
 to set to rights the wrong committed,  
 could not punish the killer in accordance with the law  
 of the blood-feud, although he felt no love for him.  
 Heartsore, wearied, he turned away  
 from life's joys, chose God's light  
 2470 and departed, leaving buildings and lands  
 to his sons, as a man of substance will.

“Then over the wide sea Swedes and Geats  
 battled and feuded and fought without quarter.  
 Hostilities broke out when Hrethel died.  
 Ongentheow's sons were unrelenting,  
 refusing to make peace, campaigning violently  
 from coast to coast, constantly setting up  
 terrible ambushes around Hreasnahill.  
 My own kith and kin avenged  
 2480 these evil events, as everybody knows,

*Beowulf continues  
 his account of wars  
 between the Geats  
 and the Swedes*

pēah ðe oðer his ealdre gebohte,  
heardan cēape; Hæðcynne wearð,  
Gēata dryhtne, gūð onsæge.

Pā ic on morgne gefrægn mæg oðerne  
billes ecgum on bonan stælan,  
þær Ongenþēow Eofores nīosað;  
gūð-helm tōglād, gomela Scylfing  
hrēas heoro-blāc; hond gemunde  
fāhðo genōge, feorh-sweg ne oftēah.

2490 "Ic him þā māðmas, þe hē mē sealde,  
geald æt gūðe, swā mē gifeðe wæs,  
lēohtan sweorde; hē mē lond forgeaf,  
eard, ēðel-wyn. Næs him ænig þearf,  
þæt hē tō Gifðum oððe tō Gār-Denum  
oððe in Swīo-ricē sēcean þurfe  
wyrsan wīg-frecan, weorðe gecýpan.  
Symle ic him on fēðan beforan wolde,  
āna on orde, ond swā tō aldre sceall  
2500 sæcce fremman, þenden þis sword þolað,  
þæt mec ær ond sīð oft gelæste,  
syððan ic for dugeðum Dæghrefne wearð  
tō hand-bonan, Hūga cempan.  
Nalles hē ðā frætwe Frēs-cyninge,  
brēost-weorðunge bringan mōste,  
ac in campe gecrong cumbles hyrde,  
æþeling on elne; ne wæs ecg bona,  
ac him hilde-grāp heortan wylmas,  
bān-hūs gebræc. Nū sceall billes ecg,  
hond ond heard sword ymb hord wīgan."

2510 Bēowulf maðelode, bēot-wordum spræc  
nīehstan sīðe: "Ic genēðde fela

but the price was high: one of them paid  
with his life. Haethcyn, lord of the Geats,  
met his fate there and fell in the battle.  
Then, as I have heard, Hygelac's sword  
was raised in the morning against Ongentheow,  
his brother's killer. When Eofor cleft  
the old Swede's helmet, halved it open,  
he fell, death-pale: his feud-calloused hand  
could not stave off the fatal stroke.

2490 "The treasures that Hygelac lavished on me  
I paid for when I fought, as fortune allowed me,  
with my glittering sword. He gave me land  
and the security land brings, so he had no call  
to go looking for some lesser champion,  
some mercenary from among the Gifthas  
or the Spear-Danes or the men of Sweden.  
I marched ahead of him, always there  
at the front of the line; and I shall fight like that  
for as long as I live, as long as this sword  
2500 shall last, which has stood me in good stead  
late and soon, ever since I killed  
Dayraven the Frank in front of the two armies.  
He brought back no looted breastplate  
to the Frisian king, but fell in battle,  
their standard-bearer, high-born and brave.  
No sword blade sent him to his death,  
my bare hands stilled his heartbeats  
and wrecked the bone-house. Now blade and hand,  
sword and sword-stroke, will assay the hoard."

2510 Beowulf spoke, made a formal boast  
for the last time: "I risked my life

*The Swedish king,  
Ongentheow, dies at  
the hands of Eofor,  
one of Hygelac's  
thanes*

*Beowulf recalls his  
proud days in  
Hygelac's retinue*

*Beowulf's last boast*

gūða on geogoðe; gýt ic wylle,  
frōd folces weard, fāhðe sēcan,  
mārðu fremman, gif mec se mán-sceaða  
of eorð-sele üt gesēceð!”

2520 Gegrētte ðā gumena gehwylcne,  
hwate helm-berend hindeman sīðe,  
swāse gesīðas: “Nolde ic sweord beran,  
wāpen tō wyrme, gif ic wiste hū  
wið ðām āglācean elles meahte  
gylpe wiðgrīpan, swā ic giō wið Grendle dyde;  
ac ic ðær heaðu-fýres hātes wēne,  
oreðes ond attres; forðon ic mē on hafu  
bord ond byrnan. Nelle ic beorges weard  
oferflēon fōtes trem, ac unc furður sceal  
weorðan æt wealle, swā unc wyrd getēoð  
Metod manna gehwæs. Ic eom on mōde from,  
þæt ic wið þone gūð-flogan gylp ofersitte.  
2530 Gebīde gē on beorge, byrnum werede,  
secgas on searwum, hwæðer sēl mæge  
æfter wæl-rāse wunde gedýgan  
uncer twēga. Nis þæt ēower sīð,  
nē gemet mannes, nefne mīn ānes  
þæt hē wið āglācean eofodo dæle,  
eorlscype efne. Ic mid elne sceall  
gold gegangan, oððe gūð nimeð,  
feorh-bealu frēcne, frēan ēowerne!”

2540 Ārās ðā bī ronde rōf ōretta,  
heard under helme, hioro-sercean bær  
under stān-cleofu, strengo getruwode  
ānes mannes; ne bið swylc earges sīð!

often when I was young. Now I am old,  
but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight  
for the glory of winning, if the evil one will only  
abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open.”

2520 Then he addressed each dear companion  
one final time, those fighters in their helmets,  
resolute and high-born: “I would rather not  
use a weapon if I knew another way  
to grapple with the dragon and make good my boast  
as I did against Grendel in days gone by.  
But I shall be meeting molten venom  
in the fire he breathes, so I go forth  
in mail-shirt and shield. I won’t shift a foot  
when I meet the cave-guard: what occurs on the wall  
between the two of us will turn out as fate,  
overseer of men, decides. I am resolved.  
I scorn further words against this sky-borne foe.

2530 “Men at arms, remain here on the barrow,  
safe in your armour, to see which one of us  
is better in the end at bearing wounds  
in a deadly fray. This fight is not yours,  
nor is it up to any man except me  
to measure his strength against the monster  
or to prove his worth. I shall win the gold  
by my courage, or else mortal combat,  
doom of battle, will bear your lord away.”

2540 Then he drew himself up beside his shield.  
The fabled warrior in his warshirt and helmet  
trusted in his own strength entirely  
and went under the crag. No coward path.

Geseah ðā be wealle, sē ðe worna fela,  
 gum-cystum gōd, gūða gedīgde,  
 hilde-hlemma, þonne hnitān fēðan,  
 stondan stān-bogan, strēam ut þonan  
 breccan of beorge; wæs þære burnan wælm  
 heaðo-fýrum hāt; ne meahte horde nēah  
 unbyrnende ænige hwīle  
 dēop gedýgan for dracan lēge.  
 2550 Lēt ðā of brēostum, ðā hē gebolgen wæs,  
 Weder-Gēata lēod word ut faran,  
 stearc-heort styrmdē; stefn in becōm  
 heaðo-torht hlynnan under hārne stān.  
 Hete wæs onhrēred, hord-weard oncnīow  
 mannes reorde; næs ðær māra fyrst  
 frēode tō friclan. From ærest cwōm  
 oruð āglæcean ut of stāne,  
 hāt hilde-swāt; hrūse dynede.  
 2560 Biorn under beorge bord-rand onswāf  
 wið ðām gryre-gieste, Gēata dryhten;  
 ðā wæs hring-bogan heorte gefýsed  
 sæcce tō sēceanne. Sweord ær gebræd  
 gōd gūð-cyning, gomele lāfe,  
 ecgum ungleaw; āghwæðrum wæs  
 bealo-hycgendra brōga fram oðrum.  
 Stīð-mōd gestōd wið stēapne rond  
 winia bealdor, ðā se wyrm gebēah  
 snūde tōsomne; hē on searwum bād.  
 2570 Gewāt ðā byrnende gebogen scrīðan,  
 tō gescipe scyndan. Scyld wēl gebearg  
 līfe ond līce læssan hwīle  
 mærum þēodne þonne his myne sōhte;  
 ðær hē þý fyrste forman dōgore  
 wealdan mōste, swā him wyrd ne gescrāf

Hard by the rock-face that hale veteran,  
 a good man who had gone repeatedly  
 into combat and danger and come through,  
 saw a stone arch and a gushing stream  
 that burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting  
 a deadly heat. It would be hard to survive  
 unscathed near the hoard, to hold firm  
 against the dragon in those flaming depths.  
 2550 Then he gave a shout. The lord of the Geats  
 unburdened his breast and broke out  
 in a storm of anger. Under grey stone  
 his voice challenged and resounded clearly.  
 Hate was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized  
 a human voice, the time was over  
 for peace and parleying. Pouring forth  
 in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster  
 burst from the rock. There was a rumble under ground.  
 2560 Down there in the barrow, Beowulf the warrior  
 lifted his shield: the outlandish thing  
 writhed and convulsed and viciously  
 turned on the king, whose keen-edged sword,  
 an heirloom inherited by ancient right,  
 was already in his hand. Roused to a fury,  
 each antagonist struck terror in the other.  
 Unyielding, the lord of his people loomed  
 by his tall shield, sure of his ground,  
 while the serpent looped and unleashed itself.  
 Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing  
 2570 and racing towards its fate. Yet his shield defended  
 the renowned leader's life and limb  
 for a shorter time than he meant it to:  
 that final day was the first time  
 when Beowulf fought and fate denied him

hrēð æt hilde. Hond up ābræd  
 Gēata dryhten, gryre-fāhne slōh  
 incoḡ-lāfe, þæt sīo ecg gewāc,  
 brūn on bāne, bāt unswīðor  
 þonne his ðīod-cyning þearfe hæfde,  
 2580 bysigum gebāded. Þā wæs beorges weard  
 æfter heaðu-swenge on hrēoum mōde,  
 wearp wæl-fyre, wīde sprungon  
 hilde-lēoman. Hrēð-sigora ne gealp  
 gold-wine Gēata; gūð-bill geswāc,  
 nacod æt nīðe, swā hyt nō sceolde,  
 īren ær-gōd. Ne wæs þæt ēðe sīð,  
 þæt se mæra maga Ecgðēowes  
 grund-wong þone ofgyfan wolde;  
 sceolde ofer willan wīc eardian  
 2590 elles hwergen, swā sceal æghwylc mon  
 ālātan lān-dagas. Næs ðā long tō ðon,  
 þæt ða āglācean h̄y eft gemētton.  
 Hyrte hyne hord-weard — hreðer æðme wēoll—  
 nīwan stefne; nearo ðrōwode,  
 fyre befongen, sē ðe ær folce wēold.  
 Nealles him on hēape hand-gesteallan,  
 æðelinga bearn ymbe gestōdon  
 hilde-cystum, ac h̄y on holt bugon,  
 ealdre burḡan. Hiora in ānum wēoll  
 2600 sefa wið sorgum. Sibb æfre ne mæg  
 wiht onwendan þām ðe wēl þenceð.  
 Wīglāf wæs hāten, Wēoxstānes sunu,  
 lēoflīc lind-wiga, lēod Scylfinga,  
 mæg Ælfheres; geseah his mon-dryhten

glory in battle. So the king of the Geats  
 raised his hand and struck hard  
 at the enamelled scales, but scarcely cut through:  
 the blade flashed and slashed yet the blow  
 was far less powerful than the hard-pressed king  
 2580 had need of at that moment. The mound-keeper  
 went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames:  
 when he felt the stroke, battle-fire  
 billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled  
 of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,  
 infallible before that day,  
 failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have.  
 For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing  
 to have to give ground like that and go  
 unwillingly to inhabit another home  
 2590 in a place beyond; so every man must yield  
 the leasehold of his days.

Before long  
 the fierce contenders clashed again.  
 The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up  
 and got a new wind; he who had once ruled  
 was furlled in fire and had to face the worst.  
 No help or backing was to be had then  
 from his high-born comrades; that hand-picked troop  
 broke ranks and ran for their lives  
 to the safety of the wood. But within one heart  
 2600 sorrow welled up: in a man of worth  
 the claims of kinship cannot be denied.

His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,  
 a well-regarded Shylfing warrior  
 related to Aelfhere. When he saw his lord

*Beowulf's sword  
 fails him*

*All but one of  
 Beowulf's band  
 withdraw to safety*

*Wiglaf stands by his  
 lord*

under here-grīman hāt þrōwian.  
 Gemunde ðā ðā āre þē hē him ær forgeaf,  
 wīc-stede weligne Wægmunðinga,  
 folc-rihta gehwylc, swā his fæder āhte;  
 ne mihte ðā forhabban, hond rond gefēng,  
 2610 geolwe linde; gomel swyrd getēah,  
 þæt wæs mid eldum Eanmundes lāf,  
 suna Ōhteres. Þām æt sæcce wearð,  
 wræccan wine-lēasum, Wēohstān bana  
 mēces ecgum, ond his mægum ætbær  
 brūn-fāgne helm, hringde byrnan,  
 eald-sweord etonisc. Þæt him Onela forgeaf,  
 his gædelinges gūð-gewædu,  
 fyrd-searo fūslic; nō ymbe ðā fēhðe spræc,  
 þēah ðe hē his brōðor bearn ābredwade.  
 2620 Hē frætwe gehēold fela missēra,  
 bill ond byrnan, oððæt his byre mihte  
 eorlscipe efnan swā his ær-fæder;  
 geaf him ðā mid Gēatum gūð-gewæda  
 æghwæs unrīm, þā hē of ealdre gewāt,  
 frōd on forð-weg. Þā wæs forma sīð  
 geongan cempan, þæt hē gūðe ræs  
 mid his frēo-dryhtne fremman sceolde.  
 Ne gemealt him se mōd-sefa, nē his mæges lāf  
 gewāc æt wīge. Þæt se wurm onfand,  
 2630 syððan hīe tōgædre gegān hæfdon.  
 Wīglāf maðelode, word-rihta fela  
 sægde gesīðum —him wæs sefa geōmor.  
 “Ic ðæt mæl geman, þær wē medu þēgun,  
 þonne wē gehēton ūssum hlāforde

tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet,  
 he remembered the bountiful gifts bestowed on him,  
 how well he lived among the Waegmundings,  
 the freehold he inherited from his father before him.  
 He could not hold back: one hand brandished  
 2610 the yellow-timbered shield, the other drew his sword—  
 an ancient blade that was said to have belonged  
 to Eanmund, the son of Ohthere, the one  
 Weohstan had slain when he was an exile without friends.  
 He carried the arms to the victim’s kinfolk,  
 the burnished helmet, the webbed chain-mail  
 and that relic of the giants. But Onela returned  
 the weapons to him, rewarded Weohstan  
 with Eanmund’s war-gear. He ignored the blood-feud,  
 the fact that Eanmund was his brother’s son.

2620 Weohstan kept that war-gear for a lifetime,  
 the sword and the mail-shirt, until it was the son’s turn  
 to follow his father and perform his part.  
 Then, in old age, at the end of his days  
 among the Weather-Geats, he bequeathed to Wiglaf  
 innumerable weapons.

And now the youth  
 was to enter the line of battle with his lord,  
 his first time to be tested as a fighter.  
 His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade  
 would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered  
 2630 as soon as they came together in the combat.

Sad at heart, addressing his companions,  
 Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:  
 “I remember that time when mead was flowing,  
 how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,

*The deeds of  
 Wiglaf’s father,  
 Weohstan, recalled*

*Wiglaf’s speech to  
 the shirkers*



in bīor-sele, ðe ūs ðās bēagas geaf,  
 þæt wē him ðā gūð-getāwa gyldan woldon,  
 gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,  
 helmas ond heard sweord. Ðē hē ūsic on herge gecēas  
 tō ðyssum sīð-fate sylfes willum,  
 2640 onmunde ūsic mǣrða, ond mē þās mǣðmas geaf,  
 þē hē ūsic gār-wīgend gōde tealde,  
 hwate helm-berend, þēah ðe hlāford ūs  
 þis ellen-weorc āna āðōhte  
 tō gefremmanne, folces hyrde,  
 forðām hē manna mǣst mǣrða gefremede,  
 dǣda dollīcra. Nū is sē dæg cumen  
 þæt ūre man-dryhten mægenes behōfað,  
 gōdra gūð-rinca; wutun gongan tō,  
 helpan hild-fruman, þenden hyt sý,  
 2650 glēd-egesa grim! God wāt on mec,  
 þæt mē is micle lēofre, þæt mīnne līc-haman  
 mid mīnne gold-gyfan glēd fæðmie.  
 Ne þynced mē gerysne, þæt wē rondas beren  
 eft tō earde, nemne wē æror mægen  
 fāne gefyllan, feorh ealgian  
 Wedra ðēodnes. Ic wāt geare,  
 þæt nāron eald-gewyrht, þæt hē āna scyle  
 Gēata duguðe gnorn þrōwian,  
 gesīgan æt sæcce; ūrum sceal sweord ond helm,  
 2660 byrne ond beadu-scrūd bām gemǣne.”  
 Wōð þā þurh þone wæl-rēc, wīg-heafolan bær  
 frēan on fultum, fēa worda cwæð:  
 “Lēofa Bīowulf, lǣst eall tela,  
 swā ðū on geoguð-fēore geāra gecwæde,  
 þæt ðū ne ālǣte be ðē lifigendum  
 dōm gedrēosan; scealt nū dǣdum rōf,  
 æðeling ān-hýdig, ealle mægene

promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,  
 make good the gift of the war-gear,  
 those swords and helmets, as and when  
 his need required it. He picked us out  
 from the army deliberately, honoured us and judged us  
 fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts—  
 2640 and all because he considered us the best  
 of his arms-bearing thanes. And now, although  
 he wanted this challenge to be one he'd face  
 by himself alone—the shepherd of our land,  
 a man unequalled in the quest for glory  
 and a name for daring—now the day has come  
 when this lord we serve needs sound men  
 to give him their support. Let us go to him,  
 help our leader through the hot flame  
 2650 and dread of the fire. As God is my witness,  
 I would rather my body were robed in the same  
 burning blaze as my gold-giver's body  
 than go back home bearing arms.  
 That is unthinkable, unless we have first  
 slain the foe and defended the life  
 of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I well know  
 the things he has done for us deserve better.  
 Should he alone be left exposed  
 to fall in battle? We must bond together,  
 2660 shield and helmet, mail-shirt and sword.”  
 Then he waded the dangerous reek and went  
 under arms to his lord, saying only:  
 “Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything  
 you said you would when you were still young  
 and vowed you would never let your name and fame  
 be dimmed while you lived. Your deeds are famous,  
 so stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now

*Wiglaf goes to  
 Beowulf's aid*

feorh ealgian; ic ðē ful-læstu!”

2670      Æfter ðām wordum    wyrn yrre cwōm,  
atol inwit-gæst,    ððre sīðe,  
fȳr-wylmum fāh,    fionda nīosian,  
lāðra manna;    līg ȳðum fōr,  
born bord wið rond;    byrne ne meahte  
geongum gār-wigan    gēoƿce gefremman;  
ac se maga geonga    under his mægaz scyld  
elne geēode,    þā his āgen wæs  
glēdum forgrunden.    Ðā gēn gūð-cyning  
mārða gemunde,    mægen-strengo slōh  
hilde-bille,    þæt hyt on heafolan stōd  
2680    nīþe genȳded;    Nægling forbærst,  
geswāc æt sæcƿe    sweord Bīowulfes,  
gomol ond græg-mæl.    Him þæt gifeðe ne wæs,  
þæt him irenna    ecge mihton  
helpan æt hilde;    wæs sīo hond tō strong,  
sē ðe mēca gehwane,    mīne gefræge,  
swenge ofersōhte,    þonne hē tō sæcƿe bær  
wæpen wundum heard;    næs him wihte ðē sēl.

2690      Ðā wæs þēod-sceaða    þriddan sīðe,  
frēcne fȳr-draca    fāhða gemyndig,  
ræsde on ðone rōfan,    þā him rūm āgeald:  
hāt ond heaðo-grim,    heals ealne ymbfēng  
biteran bānum;    hē geblōdegod wearð  
sāwul-drīore;    swāt ȳðum wēoll.

    Ðā ic æt þearfe gefrægn    þēod-cyninges  
andlongne eorl    ellen cȳðan,  
cræft ond cēnðu,    swā him gecynde wæs.

with the whole of your strength. I shall stand by you.”

2670      After those words, a wildness rose  
in the dragon again and drove it to attack,  
heaving up fire, hunting for enemies,  
the humans it loathed. Flames lapped the shield,  
charred it to the boss, and the body armour  
on the young warrior was useless to him.  
But Wiglaf did well under the wide rim  
Beowulf shared with him once his own had shattered  
in sparks and ashes.

    Inspired again  
by the thought of glory, the war-king threw  
his whole strength behind a sword-stroke  
2680    and connected with the skull. And Naegling snapped.  
Beowulf’s ancient iron-grey sword  
let him down in the fight. It was never his fortune  
to be helped in combat by the cutting edge  
of weapons made of iron. When he wielded a sword,  
no matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade  
his hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt  
(I have heard) would ruin it. He could reap no advantage.

2690      Then the bane of that people, the fire-breathing dragon,  
was mad to attack for a third time.  
When a chance came, he caught the hero  
in a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs  
into his neck. Beowulf’s body  
ran wet with his life-blood: it came welling out.

    Next thing, they say, the noble son of Weohstan  
saw the king in danger at his side  
and displayed his inborn bravery and strength.

*The dragon attacks  
again*

*Another setback*

*The dragon’s third  
onslaught. He draws  
blood*

*Wiglaf gets past the  
flames and strikes*



eorðan wynne; ðā wæs eall sceacen  
 dōgor-gerīmes, dēað ungemete nēah:—  
 “Nū ic suna mīnum syllan wolde  
 2730 gūð-gewædu, þær mē gifeðe swā  
 ænig yrfe-weard æfter wurde,  
 līce gelenge. Ic ðās lēode hēold  
 fīftig wintra; næs se folc-cyning,  
 ymbe-sittendra ænig ðāra,  
 þe mec gūð-winum grētan dorste,  
 egesan ðēon. Ic on earde bād  
 mæl-gesceafta, hēold mīn tela,  
 ne sōhte searo-nīðas, nē mē swōr fela  
 2740 āða on unriht. Ic ðæs ealles mæg,  
 feorh-bennum sēoc, gefēan habban;  
 forðām mē wītan ne ðearf Waldend fīra  
 morðor-bealo māga, þonne mīn sceaceð  
 lif of līce. Nū ðū lungre geong  
 hord scēawian under hārne stān,  
 Wīglāf lēofa, nū se wŷrm ligeð,  
 swefeð sāre wund, since berēafod.  
 Bīo nū on ofoste, þæt ic ær-welan,  
 gold-æht ongite, gearo scēawige  
 2750 swegle searo-gimmas, þæt ic ðŷ sēft mæge  
 æfter mādðum-welan mīn ālætan,  
 lif ond lēodscipe, þone ic longe hēold.”  
 Ðā ic snūde gefrægn sunu Wīhstānes  
 æfter word-cwydum wundum dryhtne  
 hŷran heaðo-sīocum, hring-net beran,  
 brogdne beadu-sercean under beorges hrōf.  
 Geseah ðā sige-hrēðig, þā hē bī sesse gēong,  
 mago-þegn mōdig mādðum-sigla fealo,

had been lived out to the end: his allotted time  
 was drawing to a close, death was very near.

“Now is the time when I would have wanted  
 2730 to bestow this armour on my own son,  
 had it been my fortune to have fathered an heir  
 and live on in his flesh. For fifty years  
 I ruled this nation. No king  
 of any neighbouring clan would dare  
 face me with troops, none had the power  
 to intimidate me. I took what came,  
 cared for and stood by things in my keeping,  
 never fomented quarrels, never  
 swore to a lie. All this consoles me,  
 2740 doomed as I am and sickening for death;  
 because of my right ways, the Ruler of mankind  
 need never blame me when the breath leaves my body  
 for murder of kinsmen. Go now quickly,  
 dearest Wiglaf, under the grey stone  
 where the dragon is laid out, lost to his treasure;  
 hurry to feast your eyes on the hoard.  
 Away you go: I want to examine  
 that ancient gold, gaze my fill  
 on those garnered jewels; my going will be easier  
 2750 for having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-go  
 of the life and lordship I have long maintained.”

And so, I have heard, the son of Weohstan  
 quickly obeyed the command of his languishing  
 war-weary lord; he went in his chain-mail  
 under the rock-piled roof of the barrow,  
 exulting in his triumph, and saw beyond the seat  
 a treasure-trove of astonishing richness,

*He thinks back on  
 his life*

*He bids Wiglaf to  
 inspect the hoard  
 and return with a  
 portion of the  
 treasure*

*Wiglaf enters the  
 dragon's barrow*

gold glitnian grunde getenge,  
 wundur on wealle, ond þæs wyrmes denn,  
 2760 ealdes ūht-flogan, orcas stondan,  
 fyrn-manna fatu, feormend-lēase,  
 hyrstum behrorene. Ðær wæs helm monig,  
 eald ond ōmig, earm-bēaga fela,  
 searwum gesæled. Sinc ēaþe mæg,  
 gold on grunde, gum-cynnes gehwone  
 oferhīgian; hýde sē ðe wylle!  
 Swylce hē siomian geseah segn eall-gylden  
 hēah ofer horde, hond-wundra mǣst,  
 gelocen leoðo-cræftum; of ðām lēoma stōd,  
 2770 þæt hē þone grund-wong ongitan meahte,  
 wræte giondwlītan. Næs ðæs wyrmes þær  
 onsýn ænig, ac hyne ecg fornam.  
 Ðā ic on hlāwe gefrægn hord rēafian,  
 eald enta geweorc āne mannan,  
 him on bearm hladon bunan ond discas  
 sylfes dōme; segn ēac genōm,  
 bēacna beorhtost. Bill ær gescōd  
 —ecg wæs iren— eald-hlāfordes  
 þām ðāra mǣðma mund-bora wæs  
 2780 longe hwīle, līg-egesan wæg  
 hātne for horde, hioro-weallende  
 middel-nihtum, oðþæt hē morðre swealt.  
 Ār wæs on ofoste, eft-sīðes geom,  
 frætsum gefyrðred; hyne fyrwet bræc,  
 hwæðer collen-ferð cwicne gemette  
 in ðām wong-stede Wedra þeoden  
 ellen-sīocne, þær hē hine ær forlēt.

wall-hangings that were a wonder to behold,  
 glittering gold spread across the ground,  
 2760 the old dawn-scorching serpent's den  
 packed with goblets and vessels from the past,  
 tarnished and corroding. Rusty helmets  
 all eaten away. Armbands everywhere,  
 artfully wrought. How easily treasure  
 buried in the ground, gold hidden  
 however skilfully, can escape from any man!

And he saw too a standard, entirely of gold,  
 hanging high over the hoard,  
 a masterpiece of filigree; it glowed with light  
 2770 so he could make out the ground at his feet  
 and inspect the valuables. Of the dragon there was no  
 remaining sign: the sword had despatched him.  
 Then, the story goes, a certain man  
 plundered the hoard in that immemorial howe,  
 filled his arms with flagons and plates,  
 anything he wanted; and took the standard also,  
 most brilliant of banners.

Already the blade  
 of the old king's sharp killing-sword  
 had done its worst: the one who had for long  
 2780 minded the hoard, hovering over gold,  
 unleashing fire, surging forth  
 midnight after midnight, had been mown down.

Wiglaf went quickly, keen to get back,  
 excited by the treasure. Anxiety weighed  
 on his brave heart—he was hoping he would find  
 the leader of the Geats alive where he had left him  
 helpless, earlier, on the open ground.

*He returns with  
treasure*

2790 Hē ðā mid þām mǎðmum mǎerne þīoden,  
dryhten sīnne drīorigne fand,  
ealdres æt ende; hē hine eft ongon  
wæteres weorpan, oðþæt wordes ord  
brēost-hord þurhbræc. Þā se beorn gespræc,  
gomel on gιοhðe: —gold scēawode—

“Ic ðāra frætwa Frēan ealles ðanc,  
Wuldur-cyninge, wordum secge,  
ēcum Dryhtne, þe ic hēr on starie,  
þæs ðe ic mōste mīnum lēodum  
æ̅r swylt-dæge swylc gestrȳnan.  
2800 Nū ic on mǎðma hord mīne bebohte  
frōde feorh-lege, fremmað gēna  
lēoda þearfe! Ne mæg ic hēr leng wesan.  
Hātað heaðo-mǎere hlǣw gewyrcean,  
beorhtne æfter bǣle æt brimes nosan;  
sē scel tō gemyndum mīnum lēodum  
hēah hlīfian on Hrones-næsse,  
þæt hit sǣ-līðend syððan hātan  
Bīowulfes biorh, ðā ðe brentingas  
ofer flōða genipu feorran drīfað.”

2810 Dyde him of healse hring gyldenne  
þīoden þrīst-hȳdig, þegne gesealde,  
geongum gār-wigan, gold-fāhne helm,  
bēah ond byrnan, hēt hyne brūcan well:  
“Þū eart ende-lāf ūsses cynnes,  
Wǣgmundinga; ealle wyrd forspēon  
mīne mǎgas tō meodsceaftē,  
eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal.”

Þæt wæs þām gomelan gingæste word

2790 So he came to the place, carrying the treasure,  
and found his lord bleeding profusely,  
his life at an end; again he began  
to swab his body. The beginnings of an utterance  
broke out from the king's breast-cage.  
The old lord gazed sadly at the gold.

2800 “To the everlasting Lord of All,  
to the King of Glory, I give thanks  
that I behold this treasure here in front of me,  
that I have been allowed to leave my people  
so well endowed on the day I die.  
Now that I have bartered my last breath  
to own this fortune, it is up to you  
to look after their needs. I can hold out no longer.  
Order my troop to construct a barrow  
on a headland on the coast, after my pyre has cooled.  
It will loom on the horizon at Hronesness  
and be a reminder among my people—  
so that in coming times crews under sail  
will call it Beowulf's Barrow, as they steer  
ships across the wide and shrouded waters.”

2810 Then the king in his great-heartedness unclasped  
the collar of gold from his neck and gave it  
to the young thane, telling him to use  
it and the warshirt and the gilded helmet well.

“You are the last of us, the only one left  
of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us away,  
sent my whole brave high-born clan  
to their final doom. Now I must follow them.”  
That was the warrior's last word.

*Beowulf gives thanks  
and orders the  
construction of a  
barrow to  
commemorate him*

*Beowulf's last words*

2820 brēost-gehygdum, ær hē bæl cure,  
hāte heaðo-wylmas; him of hwæðre gewāt  
sāwol sēcean sōð-fæstra dōm.

2830 Ðā wæs gegongen guman unfrōdum  
earfoðlice, þæt hē on eorðan geseah  
þone lēofestan līfes æt ende,  
blēate gebæran. Bona swylce læg,  
egeslic eorð-draca, ealdre berēafod,  
bealwe gebæded. Bēah-hordum leng  
wyrm wōh-bogen wealdan ne mōste,  
ac hine irenna ecga fornāmon,  
hearde, heaðo-scearde, homera lāfe,  
2840 þæt se wīd-floga wundum stille  
hrēas on hrūsan hord-ærne nēah.  
Nalles æfter lyfte lācende hwearf  
middel-nihtum, mād̄m-æhta wlonc  
ansyn ywde; ac hē eorðan gefēoll  
for ðæs hild-fruman hond-geweorce.  
Hūru þæt on lande lýt manna ðāh,  
mægen-āgendra, mīne gefræge,  
þēah ðe hē dāda gehwæs dystig wære,  
þæt hē wið attor-sceaðan oreðe geræsde,  
2840 oððe hring-sele hondum styrede,  
gif hē wæccende weard onfunde  
būon on beorge. Bīowulfe wearð  
dryht-mād̄ma dæl dēaðe forgolden;  
hæfde æghwæðer ende gefēred  
lāenan līfes.

Næs ðā lang tō ðon,

2820 He had no more to confide. The furious heat  
of the pyre would assail him. His soul fled from his breast  
to its destined place among the steadfast ones.

2830 It was hard then on the young hero,  
having to watch the one he held so dear  
there on the ground, going through  
his death agony. The dragon from underearth,  
his nightmarish destroyer, lay destroyed as well,  
utterly without life. No longer would his snakefolds  
ply themselves to safeguard hidden gold.  
Hard-edged blades, hammered out  
and keenly filed, had finished him  
2830 so that the sky-roamer lay there rigid,  
brought low beside the treasure-lodge.

2840 Never again would he glitter and glide  
and show himself off in midnight air,  
exulting in his riches: he fell to earth  
through the battle-strength in Beowulf's arm.  
There were few, indeed, as far as I have heard,  
big and brave as they may have been,  
few who would have held out if they had had to face  
the outpourings of that poison-breather  
or gone foraging on the ring-hall floor  
and found the deep barrow-dweller  
on guard and awake.

The treasure had been won,  
bought and paid for by Beowulf's death.  
Both had reached the end of the road  
through the life they had been lent.

Before long

*The dragon too has  
been destroyed*

þæt ðā hild-latan holt ofgēfan,  
 tȳdre trēow-logan, tȳne ætsomne,  
 ðā ne dorston ær dareðum lācan  
 on hyra man-dryhtnes miclan þearfe;  
 2850 ac hȳ scamiende scyldas bāeran,  
 gūð-gewædu, þær se gomela læg;  
 wlitan on Wīlāf. Hē gewērgad sæt,  
 fēðe-cempa, frēan eaxlum nēah;  
 wehte hyne wætre, him wiht ne spēow.  
 Ne meahte hē on eorðan, ðēah hē ūðe wēl,  
 on ðām frum-gāre feorh gehealdan,  
 nē ðæs Wealdendes wiht oncirran.  
 Wolde dōm Godes dædum rædan  
 gumena gehwylcum, swā hē nū gēn dēð.

2860 Þā wæs æt ðām geongan grim andswaru  
 ēð-begēte þām ðe ær his elne forlēas.  
 Wīglāf maðelode, Wēohstānes sunu,  
 sēc sārīg-ferð — seah on unlēofe — :  
 “Þæt lā mæg secgan, sē ðe wyle sōð specan,  
 þæt se mon-dryhten, sē ēow ðā māðmas geaf,  
 ēored-geatwe, þe gē þær on standað,  
 þonne hē on ealu-bence oft gesealde  
 heal-sittendum helm ond byrnan,  
 þēoden his þegnum, swylce hē þryðlicost  
 2870 ōwer feor oððe nēah findan meahte,  
 þæt hē gēnunga gūð-gewædu  
 wrāðe forwurpe, ðā hyne wīg beget.  
 Nealles folc-cyning fyrd-gesteallum  
 gylpan þorfte; hwæðre him God ūðe,  
 sigora Waldend, þæt hē hyne sylfne gewræc,  
 āna mid ecge, þā him wæs elnes þearf.

the battle-dodgers abandoned the wood,  
 the ones who had let down their lord earlier,  
 the tail-turners, ten of them together.  
 When he needed them most, they had made off.  
 2850 Now they were ashamed and came behind shields,  
 in their battle-outfits, to where the old man lay.  
 They watched Wiglaf, sitting worn out,  
 a comrade shoulder to shoulder with his lord,  
 trying in vain to bring him round with water.  
 Much as he wanted to, there was no way  
 he could preserve his lord's life on earth  
 or alter in the least the Almighty's will.  
 What God judged right would rule what happened  
 to every man, as it does to this day.

2860 Then a stern rebuke was bound to come  
 from the young warrior to the ones who had been  
 cowards.  
 Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke  
 disdainfully and in disappointment:  
 “Anyone ready to admit the truth  
 will surely realize that the lord of men  
 who showered you with gifts and gave you the armour  
 you are standing in—when he would distribute  
 helmets and mail-shirts to men on the mead-benches,  
 a prince treating his thanes in hall  
 2870 to the best he could find, far or near—  
 was throwing weapons uselessly away.  
 It would be a sad waste when the war broke out.  
 Beowulf had little cause to brag  
 about his armed guard; yet God who ordains  
 who wins or loses allowed him to strike  
 with his own blade when bravery was needed.

*The battle-dodgers  
come back*

*Wiglaf rebukes them*



Ic him lif-wraðe, lýtyle meahte  
 ætgifan æt gūðe, ond ongan swā þeah  
 ofer mīn gemet māges helpan.  
 2880 Symle wæs þy sāmra, þonne ic sweorde drep  
 ferhð-geniðlan, fyr unswiðor  
 wēoll of gewitte. Wergendra tō lýt  
 þrong ymbe þeoden, þā hyne sīo þrāg becwōm.  
 Nū sceal sinc-þego ond swyrd-gifu,  
 eall ēðel-wyn ēowrum cynne,  
 lufen ālicgean; lond-rihtes mōt  
 þære māg-burge monna āghwylc  
 īdel hweorfan, syððan æðelingas  
 feorran gefricgean flēam ēowerne,  
 2890 dōm-lēasan dæd. Dēað bið sellā  
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwīt-līf!”  
 Heht ðā þæt heaðo-weorc tō hagan biōdan  
 up ofer ecg-clif, þær þæt eorl-weorod  
 morgen-longne dæg mōd-giōmor sæt,  
 bord-hæbbende, bēga on wēnum,  
 ende-dōgores ond eft-cymes  
 lēofes monnes. Lýt swīgode  
 nīwra spella, sē ðe næs gerād,  
 ac hē sōðlice sægde ofer ealle:  
 2900 “Nū is wil-geofa Wedra lēoda,  
 dryhten Gēata dēað-bedde fæst,  
 wunað wæl-reste wyrmes dædum:  
 him on efn ligeð ealdor-gewinna  
 siex-bennum sēoc; sweorde ne meahte  
 on ðām āglæcean ænige þinga  
 wunde gewyrcean. Wīglāf siteð  
 ofer Bīowulfe, byre Wīnstānes,

There was little I could do to protect his life  
 in the heat of the fray, yet I found new strength  
 welling up when I went to help him.  
 2880 Then my sword connected and the deadly assaults  
 of our foe grew weaker, the fire coursed  
 less strongly from his head. But when the worst happened  
 too few rallied around the prince.

“So it is goodbye now to all you know and love  
 on your home ground, the open-handedness,  
 the giving of war-swords. Every one of you  
 with freeholds of land, our whole nation,  
 will be dispossessed, once princes from beyond  
 get tidings of how you turned and fled  
 2890 and disgraced yourselves. A warrior will sooner  
 die than live a life of shame.”

Then he ordered the outcome of the fight to be reported  
 to those camped on the ridge, that crowd of retainers  
 who had sat all morning, sad at heart,  
 shield-bearers wondering about  
 the man they loved: would this day be his last  
 or would he return? He told the truth  
 and did not balk, the rider who bore  
 news to the cliff-top. He addressed them all:  
 2900 “Now the people’s pride and love,  
 the lord of the Geats, is laid on his deathbed,  
 brought down by the dragon’s attack.  
 Beside him lies the bane of his life,  
 dead from knife-wounds. There was no way  
 Beowulf could manage to get the better  
 of the monster with his sword. Wiglaf sits  
 at Beowulf’s side, the son of Weohstan,

*He predicts that  
 enemies will now  
 attack the Geats*

*A messenger tells the  
 people that Beowulf  
 is dead*

2910 eorl ofer ððrum unlifigendum,  
 healdeð hige-mæðum hēafod-wearde,  
 lēofes ond lādes. Nū ys lēodum wēn  
 orleg-hwīle, syððan underne  
 Froncum ond Frýsum fyll cyninges  
 wīde weorðeð. Wæs sīo wrōht scepen  
 heard wið Hūgas, syððan Higelāc cwōm  
 faran flot-herge on Frēsna land,  
 þær hyne Hetware hilde genægdon,  
 elne geēodon mid ofer-mægene,  
 þæt se byrn-wīga būgan sceolde,  
 2920 fēoll on fēðan; nalles frætwe geaf  
 ealdor dugode. Ūs wæs ā syððan  
 Merewīoingas milts ungyfeðe.  
 “Nē ic te Swēo-ðēode sibbe oððe trēowe  
 wihte ne wēne; ac wæs wīde cūð,  
 þætte Ongenðīo ealdre besnyðede  
 Hæðcen Hrēþling wið Hrefna-wudu,  
 þā for onmēðlan ærest gesohton  
 Gēata lēode Gūð-Scilfingas.  
 Sōna him se frōda fæder Ōhtheres,  
 eald ond eges-full ondslyht āgeaf,  
 2930 ābrēot brim-wīsan, brýd āheorde,  
 gomela iō-mēowlan golde berofene,  
 Onelan mōdor ond Ōhtheres;  
 ond ðā folgode feorh-genīðlan,  
 oððæt hī oðēodon earfoðlice  
 in Hrefnes-holt hlāford-lēase.  
 Besæt ðā sin-herge sweorda lāfe  
 wundum wērge; wēan oft gehēt  
 earmre teohhe ondlonge niht,

2910 the living warrior watching by the dead,  
 keeping weary vigil, holding a wake  
 for the loved and the loathed.  
 Now war is looming  
 over our nation, soon it will be known  
 to Franks and Frisians, far and wide,  
 that the king is gone. Hostility has been great  
 among the Franks since Hygelac sailed forth  
 at the head of a war-fleet into Friesland:  
 there the Hetware harried and attacked  
 and overwhelmed him with great odds.  
 The leader in his war-gear was laid low,  
 2920 fell amongst followers; that lord did not favour  
 his company with spoils. The Merovingian king  
 has been an enemy to us ever since.  
 “Nor do I expect peace or pact-keeping  
 of any sort from the Swedes. Remember:  
 at Ravenswood, Ongentheow  
 slaughtered Haethcyn, Hrethel’s son,  
 when the Geat people in their arrogance  
 first attacked the fierce Shylfings.  
 The return blow was quickly struck  
 by Ohthere’s father. Old and terrible,  
 2930 he felled the sea-king and saved his own  
 aged wife, the mother of Onela  
 and of Ohthere, bereft of her gold rings.  
 Then he kept hard on the heels of the foe  
 and drove them, leaderless, lucky to get away,  
 in a desperate rout into Ravenswood.  
 His army surrounded the weary remnant  
 where they nursed their wounds; all through the night  
 he howled threats at those huddled survivors,

*He foresees wars  
with the Franks and  
the Frisians*

*The Swedes too will  
strike to avenge the  
slaughter of  
Ongentheow*

*Ongentheow’s last  
engagement at  
Ravenswood: he  
cornered a Geatish  
force*

2940 cwæð hē on mergenne mēces ecgum  
gētan wolde, sum' on galg-trēowum  
fuglum tō gamene. Frōfor eft gelamp  
sārig-mōdum somod ær-dæge,  
syððan hīe Hygelāces horn ond bȳman,  
gealdor ongēaton, þā se gōda cōm  
lēoda dugoðe on lāst faran.  
“Wæs sīo swāt-swaðu Swēona ond Gēata,  
wæl-rās weora wīde gesȳne,  
hū ðā folc mid him fāhðe tōwehton.  
Gewāt him ðā se gōda mid his gædelingum,  
2950 frōd fela-geōmor fæsten sēcean,  
eorl Ongenþīo ufor oncirde;  
hæfde Higelāces hilde gefrūnen,  
wlonces wīg-cræft; wiðres ne truwode,  
þæt hē sǣ-mannum onsacan mihte,  
heaðo-līðendum, hord forstandan,  
bearn ond brȳde; bēah eft þonan  
eald under eorð-weall. Þā wæs æht boden  
Swēona lēodum, segn Higelāces  
freoðo-wong þone forð oferēodon,  
2960 syððan Hrēðlingas tō hagan þrungon.  
Þær wearð Ongenðīow ecgum sweorda,  
blonden-fexa on bid wrecen,  
þæt se þēod-cyning ðafian sceolde  
Eafores āne dōm. Hyne yrringa  
Wulf Wonrēding wǣrne geræhte,  
þæt him for swenge swāt ædrum sprong  
forð under fexe. Næs hē forht swā ðēh,  
gomela Scilfing, ac forgeald hraðe  
wyrsan wrixle wæl-hlem þone,  
2970 syððan ðēod-cyning þyder oncirde.

2940 promised to axe their bodies open  
when dawn broke, dangle them from gallows  
to feed the birds. But at first light  
when their spirits were lowest, relief arrived.  
They heard the sound of Hygelac's horn,  
his trumpet calling as he came to find them,  
the hero in pursuit, at hand with troops.

“The bloody swathe that Swedes and Geats  
cut through each other was everywhere.  
No one could miss their murderous feuding.  
Then the old man made his move,  
2950 pulled back, barred his people in:  
Ongentheow withdrew to higher ground.  
Hygelac's pride and prowess as a fighter  
were known to the earl; he had no confidence  
that he could hold out against that horde of seamen,  
defend wife and the ones he loved  
from the shock of the attack. He retreated for shelter  
behind the earthwall. Then Hygelac swooped  
on the Swedes at bay, his banners swarmed  
into their refuge, his Geat forces  
2960 drove forward to destroy the camp.  
There in his grey hairs, Ongentheow  
was cornered, ringed around with swords.  
And it came to pass that the king's fate  
was in Eofor's hands, and in his alone.  
Wulf, son of Wonred, went for him in anger,  
split him open so that blood came spurting  
from under his hair. The old hero  
still did not flinch, but parried fast,  
hit back with a harder stroke:  
2970 the king turned and took him on.

*Hygelac relieved the  
besieged Geats*

*Ongentheow  
withdrew*

*The Swedish king  
fought for his life.  
He survived a blow  
from Wulf, hit back,  
but was killed by  
Wulf's brother, Eofor*

2980

Ne meahte se snella sunu Wonrēdes  
 ealdum ceorle ondslyht giofan,  
 ac hē him on hēafde helm ær gescer,  
 þæt hē blōde fāh būgan sceolde,  
 fēoll on foldan; næs hē fæge þā gīt,  
 ac hē hyne gewyrpte, þēah ðe him wund hrine.  
 Lēt se hearda Higelāces þegn  
 brādne mēce, þā his brōðor læg,  
 eald-sweord eotonisc, entiscne helm  
 breccan ofer bord-weal; ðā gebēah cyning,  
 folces hyrde, wæs in feorh dropen.  
 Ðā wæron monige, þe his mæg wriðon,  
 ricone ārærdon, ðā him gerȳmed wearð,  
 þæt hīe wæl-stōwe wealdan mōston.  
 Penden rēafode rinc oðerne,  
 nam on Ongendōio īren-byrnan,  
 heard swyrd hilted ond his helm somod;  
 hāres hyrste Higelāce bær.  
 Hē ðām frætsum fēng ond him fægre gehēt  
 lēana mid lēodum, ond gelāste swā;  
 geald þone gūð-ræs Gēata dryhten,  
 Hrēðles eafora, þā hē tō hām becōm,  
 Iofore ond Wulfe mid ofer-māðmum;  
 sealde hiora gehwæðrum hund þūsenda  
 landes ond locenra bēaga — ne ðorfte him ðā lēan  
 oðwītan  
 mon on middan-gearde— syððan hīe ðā mārða  
 geslōgon;  
 ond ðā Iofore forgeaf āngan dohtor,  
 hām-weorðunge, hylde tō wedde.  
 “Þæt ys sīo fāhðo ond se fēondscipe,  
 wæl-nīð wera, ðæs ðe ic wēn hafo,

3000

2980

Then Wonred's son, the brave Wulf,  
 could land no blow against the aged lord.  
 Ongentheow divided his helmet  
 so that he buckled and bowed his bloodied head  
 and dropped to the ground. But his doom held off.  
 Though he was cut deep, he recovered again.

2990

“With his brother down, the undaunted Eofor,  
 Hygelac's thane, hefted his sword  
 and smashed murderously at the massive helmet  
 past the lifted shield. And the king collapsed,  
 The shepherd of people was sheared of life.

3000

“Many then hurried to help Wulf,  
 bandaged and lifted him, now that they were left  
 masters of the blood-soaked battleground.  
 One warrior stripped the other,  
 looted Ongentheow's iron mail-coat,  
 his hard sword-hilt, his helmet too,  
 and carried the graith to King Hygelac;  
 he accepted the prize, promised fairly  
 that reward would come, and kept his word.  
 For their bravery in action, when they arrived home  
 Eofor and Wulf were overloaded  
 by Hrethel's son, Hygelac the Geat,  
 with gifts of land and linked rings  
 that were worth a fortune. They had won glory,  
 so there was no gainsaying his generosity.  
 And he gave Eofor his only daughter  
 to bide at home with him, an honour and a bond.

“So this bad blood between us and the Swedes,  
 this vicious feud, I am convinced,

*The victorious Geats  
returned home*

þē ūs sēceað tō Swēona lēoda,  
syððan hīe gefricgeað frēan ūserne  
ealdor-lēasne, þone ðe ær gehēold  
wið hettendum hord ond rīce  
æfter hæleða hryre, hwate Scildingas,  
folc-rēd fremede oððe furður gēn  
eorlscipe efnde.

Nū is ofost betost,  
þæt wē þēod-cyning þær scēawian  
ond þone gebringan, þe ūs bēagas geaf,  
3010 on ād-fære. Ne scel ānes hwæt  
meltan mid þām mōdigan, ac þær is mādma hord,  
gold unrīme, grimme gecēapod;  
ond nū æt sīðestan sylfes fēore  
bēagas gebohte: þā sceall brond fretan,  
ælad þeccean, nalles eorl wegan  
mādðum tō gemyndum, nē mægð scýne  
habban on healse hring-weorðunge,  
ac sceal geōmor-mōd, golde berēafod,  
oft, nalles æne, elland tredan,  
3020 nū se here-wīsa hleahtor ālegde,  
gamen ond glēo-drēam. Forðon sceall gār wesan  
monig morgen-ceald mundum bewunden,  
hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan swēg  
wīgend wecccean, ac se wonna hrefn  
fūs ofer fægum fela reordian,  
earne secgan, hū him æt æte spēow,  
þenden hē wið wulf wæl rēafode.”

Swā se secg hwata secgende wæs  
lāðra spella; hē ne lēag fela  
3030 wyrda nē worda. Weorod eall ārās,

is bound to revive; they will cross our borders  
and attack in force when they find out  
that Beowulf is dead. In days gone by  
when our warriors fell and we were undefended  
he kept our coffers and our kingdom safe.  
He worked for the people, but as well as that  
he behaved like a hero.

We must hurry now  
to take a last look at the king  
and launch him, lord and lavisher of rings,  
3010 on the funeral road. His royal pyre  
will melt no small amount of gold:  
heaped there in a hoard, it was bought at heavy cost,  
and that pile of rings he paid for at the end  
with his own life will go up with the flame,  
be furled in fire: treasure no follower  
will wear in his memory, nor lovely woman  
link and attach as a torque around her neck—  
but often, repeatedly, in the path of exile  
they shall walk bereft, bowed under woe,  
3020 now that their leader's laugh is silenced,  
high spirits quenched. Many a spear  
dawn-cold to the touch will be taken down  
and waved on high; the swept harp  
won't waken warriors, but the raven winging  
darkly over the doomed will have news,  
tidings for the eagle of how he hoked and ate,  
how the wolf and he made short work of the dead.”

Such was the drift of the dire report  
that gallant man delivered. He got little wrong  
in what he told and predicted.

The whole troop

*The messenger  
predicts that the  
Swedes will soon  
retaliate*

*With Beowulf gone,  
a tragic future  
awaits*

ēodon unblīðe under Earna-næs,  
 wollen-teāre, wundur scēawian.  
 Fundon ðā on sande sāwul-lēasne  
 hlim-bed healdan, þone þe him hringas geaf  
 ærran mælum; þā wæs ende-dæg  
 gōdum gegongen, þæt se gūð-cyning,  
 Wedra þeoden, wundor-dēaðe swealt.  
 Ær hi þær gesēgan syllicran wiht,  
 wyrn on wonge wiðer-ræhtes þær,  
 3040 lādne licgean: wæs se lēg-draca,  
 grimlic gryre-fāh, glēdum beswæled.  
 Sē wæs fiftiges fōt-gemearces  
 lang on legere; lyft-wynne hēold  
 nihtes hwīlum, nyðer eft gewāt  
 dennes nīosian; wæs ðā dēaðe fæst,  
 hæfde eorð-scrafa ende genyttod.  
 Him big stōðan bunan ond orcas,  
 discas lāgon ond dýre swyrd,  
 3050 ōmige, þurhetone, swā hīe wið eorðan fæðm  
 þūsēnd wintra þær eardodon.  
 Þonne wæs þæt yrfe ēacen-cræftig,  
 iū-monna gold, galdre bewunden,  
 þæt ðām hring-sele hrīnan ne mōste  
 gumena ænig, nefne God sylfa,  
 sigora Sōð-cyning, sealde þām ðe hē wolde  
 —hē is manna gehyld— hord openian,  
 efne swā hwylcum manna, swā him gemet ðūhte.  
 Þā wæs gesýne, þæt se sīð ne ðāh  
 3060 þām ðe unrihte inne gehýdde  
 wræte under wealle; weard ær ofslōh  
 fēara sumne; þā sīo fāhð gewearð

rose in tears, then took their way  
 to the uncanny scene under Earnaness.  
 There, on the sand, where his soul had left him,  
 they found him at rest, their ring-giver  
 from days gone by. The great man  
 had breathed his last. Beowulf the king  
 had indeed met with a marvellous death.

But what they saw first was far stranger:  
 the serpent on the ground, gruesome and vile,  
 3040 lying facing him. The fire-dragon  
 was scaresomely burnt, scorched all colours.  
 From head to tail, his entire length  
 was fifty feet. He had shimmered forth  
 on the night air once, then winged back  
 down to his den; but death owned him now,  
 he would never enter his earth-gallery again.  
 Beside him stood pitchers and piled-up dishes,  
 silent flagons, precious swords  
 eaten through with rust, ranged as they had been  
 3050 while they waited their thousand winters under ground.  
 That huge cache, gold inherited  
 from an ancient race, was under a spell—  
 which meant no one was ever permitted  
 to enter the ring-hall unless God Himself,  
 mankind's Keeper, True King of Triumphs,  
 allowed some person pleasing to Him—  
 and in His eyes worthy—to open the hoard.

What came about brought to nothing  
 the hopes of the one who had wrongly hidden  
 3060 riches under the rock-face. First the dragon slew  
 that man among men, who in turn made fierce amends

*The Geats find the two bodies*

gewrecen wrǣðlice. Wundur hwār þonne  
eorl ellen-rōf ende gefēre  
lif-gesceafta, þonne leng ne mæg  
mon mid his mǣgum medu-seld būan.  
Swā wæs Bīowulfe, þā hē biorges weard  
sōhte, searo-nīðas; seofa ne cūðe  
þurh hwæt his worulde-gedāl weorðan sceolde;  
swā hit oð dōmes dæg dīope benemdon  
3070 þēodnas mære, þā ðæt þær dydon,  
þæt se secg wære synnum scildig,  
hergum geheaðerod, hell-bendum fæst,  
wommum gewītnad, sē ðone wong strude;  
næs hē gold-hwæte gearwor hæfde  
āgendes ēst ær gescēawod.

Wīglāf maðelode, Wīhstānes sunu:  
“Oft sceall eorl monig ānes willan  
wræc ādrēogan, swā ūs geworden is.  
Ne meahton wē gelæran lēofne þēoden.  
3080 rīces hyrde ræd ænigne,  
þæt hē ne grētte gold-weard þone,  
lēte hine licgean þær hē longe wæs,  
wīcum wunian oð woruld-ende;  
hēold on hēah-gesceap. Hord ys gescēawod,  
grimme gegongen; wæs þæt gifeðe tō swīð.  
þē ðone þēod-cyning þyder ontyhte.  
Ic wæs þær inne ond þæt eall geondseh,  
recedes geatwa, þā mē gerȳmed wæs,  
nealles swæslīce sīð ālyfed  
3090 inn under eorð-weall. Ic on ofoste gefēng  
micle mid mundum mægen-byrðenne  
hord-gestrēona, hider ūt ætbær  
cyninge mīnum: cwico wæs þā gēna,

and settled the feud. Famous for his deeds  
a warrior may be, but it remains a mystery  
where his life will end, when he may no longer  
dwell in the mead-hall among his own.  
So it was with Beowulf, when he faced the cruelty  
and cunning of the mound-guard. He himself was ignorant  
of how his departure from the world would happen.  
The high-born chiefs who had buried the treasure  
declared it until doomsday so accursed  
3070 that whoever robbed it would be guilty of wrong  
and grimly punished for their transgression,  
hasped in hell-bonds in heathen shrines.  
Yet Beowulf's gaze at the gold treasure  
when he first saw it had not been selfish.

Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke:  
“Often when one man follows his own will  
many are hurt. This happened to us.  
Nothing we advised could ever convince  
3080 the prince we loved, our land's guardian,  
not to vex the custodian of the gold,  
let him lie where he was long accustomed,  
lurk there under earth until the end of the world.  
He held to his high destiny. The hoard is laid bare,  
but at a grave cost; it was too cruel a fate  
that forced the king to that encounter.  
I have been inside and seen everything  
amassed in the vault. I managed to enter  
although no great welcome awaited me  
3090 under the earthwall. I quickly gathered up  
a huge pile of the priceless treasures  
handpicked from the hoard and carried them here  
where the king could see them. He was still himself,

*Wiglaf ponders  
Beowulf's fate*

wīs ond gewittig. Worn eall gespræc  
 gomol on gehðo ond ēowic grētan hēt,  
 bæd þæt gē geworhton æfter wines dædum  
 in bæl-stede beorh þone hēan,  
 micelne ond mærne, swā hē manna wæs  
 wīgend weorð-fullost wīde geond eorðan,  
 3100 þenden hē burh-welan brūcan mōste.  
 Uton nū efstan oðre sīðe  
 sēon ond sēcean searo-gimma geþræc,  
 wundur under wealle; ic ēow wīsigē,  
 þæt gē genōge nēon scēawiað  
 bēagas ond brād gold. Sīe sīo bær gearo,  
 ædre geæfned, þonne wē ut cymen,  
 ond þonne gefērian frēan ūserne,  
 lēofne mannan, þær hē longe sceal  
 on ðæs Waldendes wære gepolian.”  
 3110 Hēt ðā gebēodan byre Wihstānes,  
 hæle hilde-dīor, hæleða monegum,  
 bold-āgendra, þæt hīe bæl-wudu  
 feorran feredon, folc-āgende,  
 gōdum tōgēnes: “Nū sceal glēd fretan,  
 —weaxan wonna lēg— wigena strengel,  
 þone ðe oft gebād īsern-scūre,  
 þonne stræla storm strengum gebæded  
 scōc ofer scild-weall, sceft nytte hēold,  
 fæðer-gearwum fūs, flāne fullēode.”  
 3120 Hūru se snotra sunu Wihstānes  
 ācīgde of cordre cyniges þegnas,  
 syfone ætsomne, þā sēlestan,  
 ēode eahta sum under inwit-hrōf

alive, aware, and in spite of his weakness  
 he had many requests. He wanted me to greet you  
 and order the building of a barrow that would crown  
 the site of his pyre, serve as his memorial,  
 in a commanding position, since of all men  
 to have lived and thrived and lorded it on earth  
 3100 his worth and due as a warrior were the greatest.  
 Now let us again go quickly  
 and feast our eyes on that amazing fortune  
 heaped under the wall. I will show the way  
 and take you close to those coffers packed with rings  
 and bars of gold. Let a bier be made  
 and got ready quickly when we come out  
 and then let us bring the body of our lord,  
 the man we loved, to where he will lodge  
 for a long time in the care of the Almighty.”

*He reports Beowulf's  
last wishes*

3110 Then Weohstan's son, stalwart to the end,  
 had orders given to owners of dwellings,  
 many people of importance in the land,  
 to fetch wood from far and wide  
 for the good man's pyre.

*Wiglaf gives orders  
for the building of a  
funeral pyre*

“Now shall flame consume  
 our leader in battle, the blaze darken  
 round him who stood his ground in the steel-hail,  
 when the arrow-storm shot from bowstrings  
 pelted the shield-wall. The shaft hit home.  
 Feather-fledged, it finned the barb in flight.”

3120 Next the wise son of Weohstan  
 called from among the king's thanes  
 a group of seven: he selected the best  
 and entered with them, the eighth of their number,

*He goes with seven  
thanes to remove the  
treasure from the  
hoard*



hilde-rinca; sum on handa bær  
 æled-lēoman, sē ðe on orde gēong.  
 Næs ðā on hlytme, hwā þæt hord strude,  
 syððan orwearde, ænigne dæl,  
 secgas gesēgon on sele wunian,  
 lāne licgan; lýt ænig mearn,  
 3130 þæt hī ofostlice üt geferedon  
 dýre mādmas; dracan ēc scufun,  
 wyrm ofer weall-clif, lēton wēg niman,  
 flōd fæðmian frætwa hyrde.  
 Pā wæs wunden gold on wæn hladen,  
 æghwæs unrīm, æþelingc boren,  
 hār hilde-rinc tō Hrones-nasse.  
 Him ðā gegiredan Gēata lēode  
 ād on eorðan unwāclīcne,  
 3140 helmum behongen, hilde-bordum,  
 beorhtum byrnum, swā hē bēna wæs;  
 ālegdon ðā tōmidde mārne þeoden  
 hæleð hīofende, hlāford lēofne.  
 Ongunnon þā on beorge bæl-fýra mæst  
 wīgend weccan: wudu-rēc āstāh  
 sweart ofer swioðole, swōgende lēg,  
 wōpe bewunden — wind-blond gelæg—  
 oðþæt hē ðā bān-hūs gebrocen hæfde,  
 hāt on hreðre. Higum unrōte  
 3150 mōd-ceare mǣndon, mon-dryhtnes cwealm;  
 swylce giōmor-gyd Gēatisc mēowle  
 . . . . . bunden-heorde  
 song sorg-cearig. Sāde geneahhe,  
 þæt hīo hyre here-geongas hearde ondrēde  
 wæl-fylla worn, werudes egesan,  
 hýnðo ond hæft-nýd. Heofon rēce swealg.

under the God-cursed roof; one raised  
 a lighted torch and led the way.  
 No lots were cast for who should loot the hoard  
 for it was obvious to them that every bit of it  
 lay unprotected within the vault,  
 there for the taking. It was no trouble  
 to hurry to work and haul out  
 the priceless store. They pitched the dragon  
 over the clifftop, let tide's flow  
 and backwash take the treasure-minder.  
 Then coiled gold was loaded on a cart  
 in great abundance, and the grey-haired leader,  
 the prince on his bier, borne to Hronesness.

3130

3140

3150

The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,  
 stacked and decked it until it stood four-square,  
 hung with helmets, heavy war-shields  
 and shining armour, just as he had ordered.  
 Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,  
 mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.  
 On a height they kindled the hugest of all  
 funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke  
 billowed darkly up, the blaze roared  
 and drowned out their weeping, wind died down  
 and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,  
 burning it to the core. They were disconsolate  
 and wailed aloud for their lord's decease.  
 A Geat woman too sang out in grief;  
 with hair bound up, she unburdened herself  
 of her worst fears, a wild litany  
 of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,  
 enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,  
 slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

*Beowulf's funeral**A Geat woman's  
dread*

Geworhton ðā Wedra lēode  
 hlēo on hōe, sē wæs hēah ond brād,  
 wēg-līðendum wīde gesȳne,  
 ond betimbredon on tȳn dagum  
 3160 beadu-rōfes bēcn; bronda lāfe  
 wealle beworhton, swā hyt weorðlicost  
 fore-snotre men findan mihton.  
 Hī on beorg dydon bēg ond siglu,  
 eall swylce hyrsta, swylce on horde ær  
 nīð-hēdige men genumen hæfdon;  
 forlēton eorla gestrēon eorðan healdan,  
 gold on grēote, þær hit nū gēn lifað  
 eldum swā unnyt, swa hit æror wæs.  
 3170 Þā ymbe hlāw riodan hilde-dēore,  
 æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,  
 woldon ceare cwīðan, kyning mǣnan,  
 word-gyd wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan:  
 eahtodan eorlscipe ond his elle-weorc;  
 duguðum dēmdon, swā hit gedēfe bið  
 þæt mon his wine-dryhten wordum herge,  
 ferhðum frēoge, þonne hē forð scile  
 of lic-haman lǣded weorðan.  
 Swā begnornodon Gēata lēode  
 hlāfordes hryre, heorð-genēatas;  
 3180 cwædon þæt hē wære wyruld-cyninga,  
 manna mildust ond mon-ðwærust,  
 lēodum līðost ond lof-geornost.

Then the Geat people began to construct  
 a mound on a headland, high and imposing,  
 a marker that sailors could see from far away,  
 and in ten days they had done the work.  
 3160 It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire  
 they housed inside it, behind a wall  
 as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.  
 And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels  
 and a trove of such things as trespassing men  
 had once dared to drag from the hoard.  
 They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,  
 gold under gravel, gone to earth,  
 as useless to men now as it ever was.  
 Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,  
 3170 chieftain's sons, champions in battle,  
 all of them distraught, chanting in dirges,  
 mourning his loss as a man and a king.  
 They extolled his heroic nature and exploits  
 and gave thanks for his greatness; which was the proper  
 thing,  
 for a man should praise a prince whom he holds dear  
 and cherish his memory when that moment comes  
 when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.  
 So the Geat people, his hearth companions,  
 sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.  
 3180 They said that of all the kings upon the earth  
 he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,  
 kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.

*Beowulf's barrow*

*His people lament*

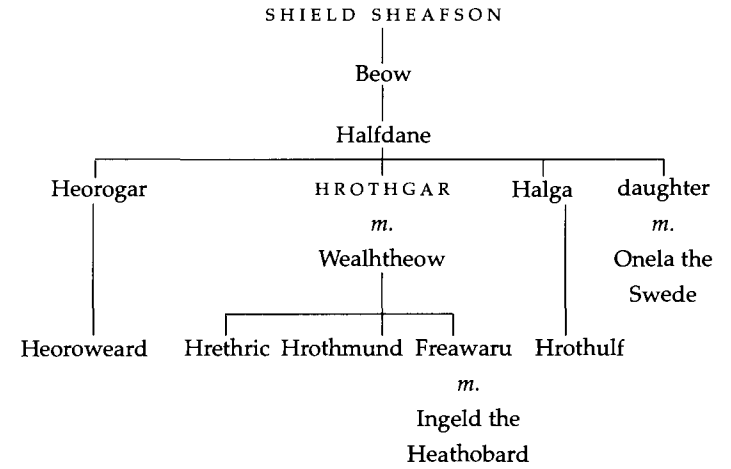
*Family Trees*

*Acknowledgements*

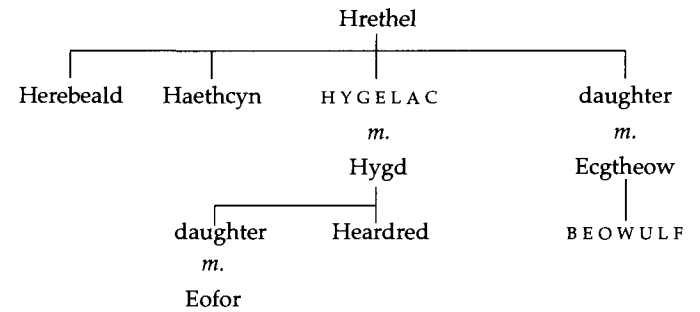
# Family Trees

Family trees of the Danish, Swedish, and Geatish dynasties.  
Names given here are the ones used in this translation.

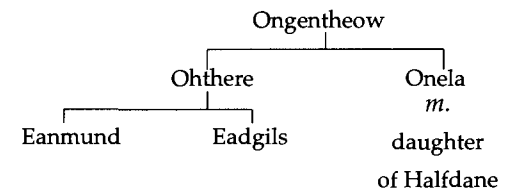
## THE DANES or THE SHIELDINGS



## THE GEATS



## THE SWEDES



## *Acknowledgements*

The proposal that I should translate *Beowulf* came in the early 1980s from the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, so my first thanks go to M. H. Abrams and Jon Stallworthy, who encouraged the late John Benedict to commission some preliminary passages. Then, when I got going in earnest four years ago, Norton appointed Professor Alfred David to keep a learned eye on what I was making of the original, and without his annotations on the first draft and his many queries and suggested alternatives as the manuscript advanced towards completion, this translation would have been a weaker and a wobblier thing. Al's responses were informed by scholarship and by a lifetime's experience of teaching the poem, so they were invaluable. Nevertheless, I was often reluctant to follow his advice and persisted many times in what we both knew were erroneous ways, so he is not to be held responsible for any failures here in the construing of the original or for the different directions in which it is occasionally skewed.

I am also grateful to W. W. Norton & Co. for allowing the translation to be published by Faber and Faber in London and Farrar, Straus and Giroux in New York.

At Faber's, I benefited greatly from Christopher Reid's editorial pencil on the first draft and Paul Keegan's on the second. I also had important encouragement and instruction in the latter stages of the work from colleagues at Harvard, who now include by happy coincidence the present Associate General Editor of *The Norton Anthology*, Professor Stephen Greenblatt. I remember with special pleasure a medievalists' seminar where I finally recanted on the use of the word "gilly" in the presence of Professors Larry Benson, Dan Donoghue, Joseph Harris, and Derek Pearsall. Professor John R. Niles happened to attend that seminar and I

was lucky to enjoy another, too brief discussion with him in Berkeley, worrying about word choices and wondering about the prejudice in favour of Anglo-Saxon over Latinate diction in translations of the poem.

Helen Vendler's reading helped, as ever, in many points of detail, and I received other particular and important comments from Professors Mary Clayton and Peter Sacks.

Extracts from the first hundred lines of the translation appeared in *The Haw Lantern* (1987) and *Causley at 70* (1987). Excerpts from the more recent work were published in *Agni*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*; also in *A Parcel of Poems: For Ted Hughes on His Sixty-fifth Birthday* and *The Literary Man, Essays Presented to Donald W. Hannah*. Lines 88–98 were printed in January 1999 by Bow & Arrow Press as a tribute to Professor William Alfred, himself a translator of the poem and, while he lived, one of the great teachers of it. Bits of the introduction first appeared in *The Sunday Times* and in an article entitled "Further Language" (*Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. XXX, no. 2). The epigraph to the introduction is from my poem "The Settle Bed" (*Seeing Things*, 1991). The broken lines on p. 151 indicate lacunae in the original text.

S.H.