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BEOWULF

B E O W U L F

I N M O D E R N E N G L I S H

A Translation

Blank Verse

MARY E. WATERHOUSE

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TO
G. W.

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Preface

The translation is based on the *Kommentar zum Beowulf* of Professor Johannes Hoops, and on the edition of the poem by Professor Klaeber, but all the available Beowulf literature has been used as well. In the difficult matter of the Finn Episode Professor Hoops has been followed in the main, except where the views of Professor Williams have prevailed.

The metre, no less than the words of *Beowulf*, requires translation for the modern ear. The Old English verse form is too unfamiliar to be acceptable to those who are not students. At the same time, when read *naturally*, it has not the heavy stresses, strongly marked *caesurae*, and jerky dactylic movement which many translations give it, and the ponderous, meaningful words of the Anglo-Saxon prevent that air of flippancy or frivolity which imitative versions in modern English give. Nor is the original overburdened with alliteration, as translations frequently are. These considerations led to the choice of blank verse as the medium, taking it as the modern heroic line and therefore the equivalent of the older one.

My thanks are due to Professor F. W. Baxter and to Professor James Boyd for their continued interest in this undertaking and their helpful advice, and to Professor Bruce who very kindly read the proofs.

Belfast, 1949

MARY E. WATERHOUSE

Introduction

i

IT WAS a common mistake at one time to consider that the history of England began with the Norman Conquest. In reality, the Norman Conquest is only one of the larger episodes of English history. At the time of its occurrence it was a major tragedy, imposing, as it did, an alien governing class upon the native population and destroying or superseding the existing social structure and many of the existing institutions. It was this native population, however, which really counted in the end, and the fact of its survival is of cardinal importance. The so-called Conquest was never more than a check, though a serious one, in the essential continuity of English development. It was also commonly believed that the Normans brought art and culture to a barbarous land, whereas, in truth, they only brought new things of the material sort, such as architecture and an improved art of war. In the things of the spirit they were actually behind the people they overcame. The virtues and characteristics on which we pride ourselves to-day, our civil and religious liberties, the rights of the individual, our parliamentary government, our justice and our protective laws—what might be called practical, or applied Christianity—all have their roots and origins in Saxon England. The genius of the race suffered a temporary eclipse, until, gradually absorbing its conquerors and taking anything of good they had to offer into itself, it fought its way to the surface once more. In no matter is this ultimate victory of England, this

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essential continuity of our nationality, better illustrated than in the history of the English language. Indeed, a strong, unbroken stream of native poetry has flowed through our history since long before the written records began.

English literature falls into three main periods, a rough chronological division based on changes which have taken place in the language. The first period is from the earliest times to the Norman Conquest; the second, from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer; the third, from Chaucer to the present day. Everyone has heard of Chaucer, and most of us, with a little practice and application, can manage to read and enjoy his poetry, but many people are rather annoyed when they are told that Chaucer really writes modern English. They consider his language quite old enough, and so it is; the oldest English that can be read without special knowledge. What then of the two periods—long periods, each of some three hundred years—which lie in the past before the age of Chaucer? There is the Middle English period, and before that again the Old English period—really Old English this time—which ends with the Conquest. It is often more comfortable to call this the Anglo-Saxon period; it makes it clear to what age it belongs and it is much more satisfactory to be able to say that one knows no Anglo-Saxon than to have to confess that one cannot read English, however old.

The truth is that although the English which we speak today is basically the same as that which was spoken in Saxon England, its vocabulary has changed so much in twelve or thirteen hundred years as to make it almost a different language, which must be learnt from the beginning like any other. Everyone knows that we have steadily acquired new words from other languages throughout the ages, but few realize that we have also steadily lost an

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immense number of striking native words, and it is these words which make the biggest change, the greatest difference between the language of *Beowulf* and that of our own time. Indeed, it is often no small difficulty in the translation of Old English that the modern language does not contain synonyms enough for the things in which (our ancestors were specially interested, such as the sea, their weapons, their battles, and their loyalties. In addition, it is a highly concentrated language, and Saxon poetry indulges in those subtleties and implications which are found in Homeric Greek. It is full of what might well be described as 'port-manteau' words, not quite in Humpty-Dumpty's sense, but taking his licence with his own word. It has none of the obliging trimmings of modern English which encourage diffusion and circumlocution. Why bother with it then? Why not let it stay dead and buried? Because, like other dead languages which we still learn, it has a great literature.

ii

The existence of Anglo-Saxon literature comes as a surprise to many whose only knowledge of King Alfred is that he burnt other people's cakes, or who have found themselves sadly bogged in the genealogical ramifications of early kings whose names all seem so much alike. This is a great pity, for Anglo-Saxon England was peopled by real people, the ancestors of most of us, and it produced kings, soldiers, poets, scholars and saints, as fine as any we have seen since, and one man who was all these together. It is a great pity, indeed, that the barrier of a changed language should lie between us and them and that no effort should so far have succeeded in breaking it down.

Many translations of Anglo-Saxon poetry have been made

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and particularly of *Beowulf*, but they seem to fall between two stools, for they are often so artificial in form and obscure in expression as to be meaningless to those who are ignorant of the original and irritating to those who are familiar with it. One would say that the proper qualifications for a translator of *Beowulf* were the poetic gift of a Tennyson and the scholarship of a Sweet, but actually the partnership which might have been expected to attain this high standard was not successful. William Morris's verse translation, which, with A. J. Wyatt's expert assistance, ought to have been a classic, is incomprehensible without a good knowledge of the original. This august failure is a temptation to those who have little learning and less inspiration, bulked out with vast enthusiasm, to make use of all the patient work of scholars and sages during the last hundred years and attempt the task again. This translation of *Beowulf* is therefore just another assault upon the barrier, undertaken in the hope of providing those who know nothing about Anglo-Saxon with a clear and straightforward version of the poem, free from archaisms, real or spurious, alike of word, phrase, or verse form. At the same time it aims at keeping as closely as possible to the original, and few liberties have been taken except where clarity of meaning required them.

With this ambitious declaration, we may move forward to the assault. Who was *Beowulf*, and what is it all about, anyway?

iii.

Beowulf is the hero of a poem of something over three thousand lines, which is called by his name for lack of a better title. It might be described as a historical novel of the Seventh Century, but for the fact that the writer was more

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concerned to state a theme than to tell a story.)The *leitmotif* is stated by the hero when he says in lines 1386-9,

Each one among us must abide the end
Of this world's life; so let him win who may
Honour ere death, for that shall best become
A man hereafter when his life is fled.

The poem was for its time much what the *Idylls of the King* are for us, a gathering up of ancient tales round the person of an ideal hero-king. It differs, however, in having a background of real history, and it is this historical hinterland which makes the story difficult to follow without some explanation.

(The hero himself is probably a purely mythological figure, but he has been very skilfully put into a historical setting. The people he meets and among whom he moves are most of them real characters, whose doings are in the history books, but whose family relationships are often hard to remember. Then it is disconcerting to find that they are Danes and Swedes and Geats and that the scene of this English poem is laid in southern Scandinavia. This is because its subject matter came to England with the Angles; the history it relates is the history of continental tribes at the beginning of the Sixth Century; the names and places belong to a pre-English past. But in every other respect—in conception, in language and in the picture of life which it presents—it is purest English, as English as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which concerns another Scandinavian prince, whose court was also in Denmark.)

Beowulf was probably written towards the end of the Seventh Century, but it only survives for us, after a series of remarkable escapes, in one manuscript of about the year 1000. It is bound in a single volume with eight other Old English texts. Of its early history we know nothing. The

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name of Lawrence Nowell written on the first page of the Codex seems to indicate (that it belonged to the Dean of Lichfield who died in 1576. He was interested in Old English, and it probably came into his hands from some monastic library after the Dissolution. It passed into the possession of Sir Robert Cotton, the antiquary, who died in 1631. Cotton's valuable library was eventually presented to the nation, but suffered from being moved about London, first to Essex House, then to Little Dean's Yard, where in 1731 a disastrous fire destroyed part of the collection and damaged the Beowulf Codex, the edges of which were badly scorched. Not until the British Museum was founded in 1753 did this national possession find a permanent resting place. Here, in 1786, two copies of *Beowulf* were made, one by G. J. Thorkelin, a learned Iclander, and one at his instigation. These are now in Copenhagen and are of great value, for they record details which have since been lost through the breaking off of the charred edges of the parchment. Thanks to Thorkelin, *Beowulf* as we possess it, is almost complete.

iv.

The subject matter deals with the three great fights of the hero, Beowulf, and it falls into two parts. The first tells how Beowulf, as a young man, comes to the court of Hrothgar the Scylding, king of the Danes, and delivers his host from the persecutions of two monsters, Grendel and Grendel's mother, whose depredations have rendered uninhabitable the beautiful hall of Heorot, which he had built to live in with his noble court. The second part passes to the latter end of Beowulf's life, when as king of the Geats himself and considerably advanced in years, he takes up his arms once more to deliver his own people from the oppression of a

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dragon and loses his life in accomplishing his object. It will be seen from this that the chief actions of the poem are mythological, but these three great scenes, as it were, are backed by a mass of historical matter which recent research has proved to be highly accurate. Much of this history is episodic, introduced as tales told, or as references to facts well known to the reader, while some of it is related in conversation. Sometimes it is used to point a moral, or to quote an instance. Much of it is confusing until the nations, their leaders and their royal pedigrees are sorted out. *It will thus be seen that *Beowulf* is the reverse of the epic type which shows history against a background of mythology, for it is rather a tale of mythology drawn in brilliant tones against a much darker canvas of historical fact. It shows the glory of the individual soul moving against the gloomy background of circumstance.

The author of *Beowulf* took for his poem a mass of existing material, consisting of pagan fairy tale and historical tradition, and, passing it through the refining fire of Christianity and the crucible of his own genius, created what he conceives to be the perfect hero-king. *Beowulf* emerges from the poem a beautiful, commanding figure; he is always a human being, but he seems to grow more real as the action advances; his character becomes more and more convincing as the tragic end approaches. Indeed, it is a characteristic of the whole poem that it seems to grow more real as it grows more tragic, and the tragic element increases steadily from the faintest indications at the beginning till in the end it dominates the whole. This unfolding of *Beowulf's* nature is noteworthy. He appears at the beginning the splendid warrior, young and strong, rich and glittering; he passes away in the nobility of perfect self-sacrifice, giving his

*See Table, pages 126 and 127

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life consciously and willingly for the sake of the people he loves and whom it is his duty to guard. Wiglaf, his faithful thane, speaks of him as shepherd of the kingdom, the ideal Christian prince.) This dragon theme seems to have had a special attraction for the English people, for at a later date they took St. George to be their patron saint, but they need not have gone to Asia in search of something new; they had in their own dragon-slayer as worthy a hero as George of Cappadocia.

V.

The theology of Beowulf is highly interesting. It is arrestingly monotheistic. Christian precepts, Christian moralizing and certain Bible stories are present, but Almighty God is the power of which the poet is always aware. Professor Tolkien suggests that this is because he has imagined more as Old Testament monotheists the people whom he knew not to have been Christians, but whom he still distinguishes from heathens. We find a survival from pagan beliefs in Wyrð, or destiny, differentiated from God, but always subject to His will. In consequence, heroic fatalism and submission to Wyrð are found side by side with fine passages in praise of God. It is a symbolic blending of old and new, of the old heroic ideals of courage and loyalty with the new ideal of self-sacrifice; of leaving a clean record behind in a changing world where nothing is stable and fate takes all away, with the teaching of love and mercy which has newly come. The transitory nature of existence is always present to the poet's mind, and Wyrð might be interpreted as a personification of circumstance, a dark power with which men strive and wrestle, but which must overcome them in the end. It is the expression of the sublime melan-

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choly and stern moral pessimism of an earlier fatalistic philosophy.)

vi.

The author of *Beowulf* is unknown. Possibly he was a court poet of the Seventh Century, attached to a North-umbrian or East Anglian court. Possibly he had withdrawn into the cloister after an active life. Certainly he was a cultured, well educated man, versed in the historical lore of his people. We cannot but be impressed with the remarkable degree of civilization which his poem depicts; it was written for those who dwelt in courts by a man familiar with courts and with the ceremonial side of life. The reader will be aware of the leisure with which the poem moves, in marked contrast to the headlong pace of a modern tale. There is no question of unfolding a plot; the denouement was well known, so there is no race to find out what happened in the end. If there were any doubt of the outcome, the author quickly removes it by prophetic remarks and by references to the fate in store. Consequently, there is no hurry, digressions are frequent but always interesting, and the tales within the tale are among its many beauties. It is magnificently constructed, and presents us with a series of interesting characters and memorable scenes. It opens with the obsequies of Scyld and closes with those of Beowulf. Throughout its length it maintains a high standard of poetic excellence, to which no translation can possibly do full justice. It is a national possession of which we may be justly proud, for the chief impressions which it must leave upon the modern reader are its high moral tone, the noble conception of the duties of a king, and the importance attached in those early days to the supreme virtues of courage and loyalty.

THE POEM OF
BEOWULF

Introduction

THE DANISH ROYAL HOUSE AND THE MURDEROUS RAIDS OF GREDEL

The Story is
of olden
times

LO, of the Spear Danes' might in days of old
And of the kings of men have we heard tell,
How princes then their deeds of glory wrought.

The ancestry
of the
Danish kings

Often Scyld SceflING from his hosts of foes,
From many clans, captured their banquet halls
And awed their chiefs, since first he was discovered
A helpless child. For that he was consoled,
Throve under heaven, prospered in dignity,
Till the surrounding peoples every one
Beyond leviathan's pathway must obey
And yield him tribute; he was a good king.
To him in course of time a child was born,
A young son in his dwelling, whom God sent
As comfort to the people; He perceived
The urgent need they had for Jong endured
Without a king. To him the Lord of Life,
Ruler of Glory, granted earthly power;
Renowned was Beowa, the son of Scyld,
And wide his fame was known in Danish lands.
So must a young man by good gifts contrive,
By handsome presents from the ancestral store,
That later in old age his loved companions
Cleave unto him and that when battle comes

Scyld, as a
little child,
came from the
sea to rule

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~~statement~~ His people serve him; for among every race
~~poetic theme~~ A man shall prosper by his deeds of praise.

burial of
Scyld Then Scyld, the warlike, in the destined hour
Fared forth into the keeping of the Lord.
His own dear comrades bore him to the strand
Of ocean, as he had himself decreed,
Whilst by his word the Scyldings' lord held sway, 30
Whilst the loved master ruled his followers.
There in the haven lay the prince's ship,
With ring-wrought prow, hoar-frosted, outward bound;
And on the vessel's breast beside the mast
They laid their famous, well-beloved prince,
The giver of the gold. Great wealth was there
Of precious things brought from far distant lands.
I never heard of vessel seemlier decked
With battle weapons and the clothes of war,
With swords and corselets; on his bosom lay 40
Full many a jewel that with him must fare
Far into the possession of the flood.
Nor with less offerings adorned they him
Out of the people's treasure, than did those
Who in the beginning sent him forth
A little child alone across the waves.
A golden banner, too, they set for him
High overhead; they let the ocean bear him
And gave him to the deep; sorrow of soul
Was theirs and grief of heart. Men cannot say 50
For sure, nor counsellors in hall nor heroes
Under heaven, who received that freight.

The Scylding Long in the cities Beowa the Scylding,
Dear sovereign of the people, was renowned

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Beowa

Among the nations—from home the king, his father,
Had passed away—till there was born to him
The noble Healfdene; while he lived he ruled,
Ancient and fierce in war, the glorious Scyldings.
To him, leader of battle hosts, four children
Were in due order born into the world,

60

Hrothg^{af} Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good,
While Yrse was the queen of Onela,
The Swedish king's loved wife, as I have heard.

The building

of Heorot, Then was success in arms to Hrothgar given
the great And fame in war; so that his loyal kinsmen

Gladly obeyed him, till his youthful host
Increased, a mighty band. Into his mind
It came, that he would order men to build
A palace dwelling, a great banquet hall,
Larger than human kind had ever known
And there within dispense to young and old
All things wherewith God had entrusted him,
Except the public land and lives of men.
Then as I heard, the work to many a clan
Throughout the world was given, to erect
That dwelling place with skill. He brought to pass
That in good time the greatest palace hall
Was finished among men and he whose word
Ruled far and wide, called its name Heorot.
He failed not in his promise, rings he gave

70

80

ingeld, King - And treasure at the feast. The building towered
of the High and broad gabled; doomed though it was to flames,
Heathobards,
foretold To hostile lire, the time was not yet come
When mortal feud of son-in-law and father
Should waken out of deadly enmity.

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ofGr^dd^g Then the ^{stron}g being who in darkness dwelt
Impatiently endured unhappy hours,
Because each day he heard the revelry
Loud in the hall; the music of the harp
Was there, the clear song of the bard. He spoke,
Who could describe man's making from of old,
He told how the Almighty wrought the earth,
The lovely plain, all that the seas enclose;
Triumphant He established sun and moon,
Lamps as lights to dwellers in the land;
And He adorned all corners of the world
With boughs and leaves; and life He also gave
To every kind that moves and has its being.

Thus pleasantly the nobles dwelt therein
With revelry, until that demon foe
Began his deeds of violence to perform.
Grendel, that being fierce was called, well known
As hunter of the borderlands, who held

His descent
from Cain

The moors, fastness and fen; the hapless wretch
The land of monsters long inhabited
Since the Creator doomed him with the race
Of Cain. The everlasting Lord avenged
The death by which he slew his brother Abel;
Nor gained he by his deed, since for the crime
Far from mankind the Ruler banished him.
Of him all monstrous things were brought to life,
Ogres and goblins and accursed creatures,
And giants also, who long strove with God,
For which He rendered them a just reward.

When night had fallen he went forth to seek
The lofty house, wherein the mailclad Danes

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**Grendel
attacks
Heorot**

Had made their quarters after the carouse.
He found therein the company of nobles
Asleep after the feast; they knew not care
Nor human misery. Greedy and malign 120
The creature of destruction, fierce and fell,
Was soon resolved and from their rest he snatched
Thirty retainers; thence he escaped again
To journey home exulting in his spoil,
To seek his dwelling with the glut of death.

**The slaughter
is discovered**

Then at the dawn with the first peep of day
Was Grendel's might in battle clear to men;
Then after joy was lamentation raised
In a great cry at morn. The famous prince,
Time-honoured, mighty king, unhappy sat 130
And grieved, he suffered sorrow for his thanes,
Once men had marked the traces of the foe,
The being cursed; that struggle was full hard,
Hateful and long drawn out. Nor was the time
Longer than one night after, ere he wrought
Yet further murder, enmity and crime,
And deeply sunk in sin felt no remorse.

**No one dares
to sleep in
hall**

It was not hard to find the man who sought
His rest elsewhere, in places more removed,
A bed among the rooms, since by clear proof 140
That warrior's hate to him was signified
And truly told; whoso escaped the foe
Kept himself after further off and safer.

**The despair
of the
Danes**

Thus he held sway and strove against the right,
Alone against mankind, till desolate
The best of houses stood. Long while it was,
Twelve winters' time, the ruler of the Scyldings

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Suffered affliction, every kind of woe
And great distress; therefore it became
Well known and manifest to the sons of men, 150
Sadly through tragic tales, that Grendel strove
Long against Hrothgar, waged malignant strife,
Hostility and feud, continuous warfare,
For many seasons; peace he would not have
With any man of all the Danish power,
Refrain from murderous violence, nor compound
For payment, nor could any sage expect
Successful issue at the slayer's hands.
Rather the monster, darksome shade of death,
Harassed the warriors, veteran and young, 160
Ambushed and snared them; all the live-long night
He ruled the misty moors; men cannot know
Where powers of darkness wander in their courses.
Thus many a crime, severe humiliation,
The horrid foe of man that walked alone
Often committed. Though in the dark nights
He dwelt in Heorot, the gold-decked hall,
No homage might he give the royal throne,
Since God forbade, nor cared he aught for it.

Great misery and despair of soul it was 170
To the Scyldings' king. Many a mighty lord
In council sat; devices they considered,
What best it were for valiant men to do
Against the terror of his swift assault.
At times they even offered sacrifice
At pagan shrines; entreated with their prayers
That from the general distress their demon
Would grant them respite. Such their practice was,
The hope of heathens; in their hearts they thought

Some revert
to heathen
practices

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Of hell, they knew not the Creator, Judge 180
Of deeds, they comprehended not the Lord,
Nor knew, indeed, to praise the Helm of Heaven,
Ruler of Glory. Woe shall be to him
Who thrusts his soul into the fire's embrace
In wicked wise; he must expect no solace,
Nor change of fate; well shall it be for him
Who after his death-day may seek the Lord
And in the Father's bosom plead for peace.

Over the sorrow of this time the son
Of Healfdene ever grieved; the warrior wise 190
Might not avert the woe; full stern the strife,
Hateful and lingering, that befell the people,
Night's direst horror, deadliest distress.

Part I

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

A vassal of
Hygelac, king
of the Geats,
hears of

raids

AT HOME among the Geats the valiant thane
Of Hygelac heard tell of Grendel's deeds;
At that of the world of all mankind
He was the mightiest in strength, a man
Noble and strong. He ordered a good ship
To be made ready, said he would seek out
The warrior king, the famous prince, across
The swan's sea path, since he had need of men.
For that adventure his experienced friends
Blamed him but little, dear though he was to them,
They urged the brave man on and watched the omens.
The hero from among the Geatish folk
Picked champions took, the boldest he could find,
And with a band of fourteen men he went
To seek his vessel out; a seaman skilled,
The warrior to the sea shore led the way.

200

He sets sail
for the
Danish court

The hour was come; below the cliff a bark, 210
Their ship, lay on the waves. On to the bow
The ready heroes climbed; the tide rolled in,
The sea ran up the sand; the warriors bore
Their shining arms, the splendid battle gear,
Into the vessel's bosom; men pushed off
The well wrought craft upon her willing way.
Sped by the wind, the vessel, foamy necked,
Most like a bird, sailed o'er the swelling sea,

THE FIGHT WITH GREDEL

Till at the same hour of another day
The galley with the curving prow had made 220
Such progress that the seamen saw the land,
The ocean cliffs appear, the towering hills
And the broad headlands; then was the water crossed,
The voyage at an end. Quickly thence
The Geatish warriors sprang upon the land
And made the vessel fast; the clothes of war,
The mailshirts jingled; thanks to God they gave
Because their voyage had been prosperous.

The Danish coastguard challenges Tha Scylding coastguard, he who must defend
The sea-girt cliffs, then from the bluff beheld 230
Them bear their shining shields and ready mail
Across the gangway; vigilance prompted him
With the desire to know what men they were.
Then Hrothgar's thane went riding on his steed,
Shaking a great spear strongly in his hand,
Down to the water's edge and challenged them:
'What like of armed warriors are ye,
Clad in your corselets, who thus hither come
Steering a tall ship o'er the ocean path
Across the waters? Lo, I long have been 240
Guard of this coast and have kept watch by the sea
That with a hostile fleet no hateful foe
Might work destruction on our Danish land.
No shielded warriors have ventured here
More openly; ye did not know at all
The password of the soldiers, nor the mind
Of my companions. Never saw I on earth \
A mightier chief than is yon man of yours
In panoply of war, adorned with arms;
No mere retainer he, unless his face 250

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And peerless form belie him. Your lineage
I now must know, rather than that ye should
Fare hence into the country of the Danes
Like evil spies. Now, ye seafaring men,
Ye natives of a distant country, hear
My plain opinion; it were best for you
Quickly to make it known whence ye are come.'

To him the chief, the leader of the band,
Replied, opening the treasury of words:
'Men of the people of the Geats are we
And household followers of Hygelac.
My father was renowned among the nations,
A noble chieftain, Ecgtheow by name;
He lived for many winters, ere he passed,
An old man, from his dwelling; every sage
Throughout the world remembers him full well.
With friendly purpose do we come to seek
Thy master, the protector of his people,
Healfdene's son. Be of good counsel to us.
We have a mighty mission to the king,
The famous lord of the Danes, nor, as I hope,
Shall any part be hid. If it is true,
As we have heard it told for truth, thou knowest
That in the gloomy night among the Scyldings
A secret ravager, what foe I know not,
Works in dread wise unheard-of enmity,
Slaughter and ignominy. I can give
With all goodwill advice in this to Hrothgar,
How, wise and good, he may defeat the foe,
If the distress of misery for him
Should ever change and comfort come again,
And anguish of the mind more tranquil grow;

270

280

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Else ever afterwards he shall endure
Hardship and dire calamity, while still
In its high place the best of houses stands.'

The coastguard, fearless servant, spoke these words
Seated upon his horse: 'A ready soldier
Who knows his duty must be well assured
Wherein the difference lies 'twixt words and deeds.
T understand this troop is well disposed 290
Unto the Scyldings' lord. Bear forward then
Weapons and coats of mail; I will direct you,
And I will also bid my young retainers
Protect your ship, your vessel newly tarred,
In safety from all foes, upon the shore,
Until the galley with the curving prow
Shall bear again the well-beloved crew
Across the surges to the Weders' land,
Such of the brave to whom the lot shall fall
That he survive unharmed the assault of war.' 300

**They set out
for Heorot**

So they set forth with him; the ship lay still,
The broad-beamed boat upon her cable lay,
Fast at her anchor. The boar-crowned helmets shone,
Tempered and glittering, adorned with gold,
Above the visors, and the boar kept guard,
Warlike, above the brave. The men made haste,
Marching together till they could distinguish
The well-built hall, stately and bright with gold,
The most renowned of dwellings under heaven
Among mankind, wherein the great king lived; 310
Its brilliance shone afar o'er many lands.
The valiant soldier pointed out to them
That bright abode of heroes, that they might

BEOWULF

Approach it, and the warrior himself
Turning his steed about, then spoke these words:
' 'Tis time for me to go; with His good grace
May the Almighty FathfXprosper you
Safe in your journeys. I will to the sea
To keep the watch against marauding bands.'

The road was brightly paved; it showed the way
The arrival To the warrior band. The battle armour shone
of the Geats
at Hcorot Stubborn and hand-wrought and the bright chain mail
Sang in their harness, when for the first time
In all their war gear to the hall they came.
Tired with the sea, they set their ample shields,
Their bucklers hard, against the palace wall
And rested on the bench. The corselets rang,
The warriors' panoply, and the seamen's arms,
The spears of ash, tipped with gray steel, were piled
Together, for the mail-clad troop was well
Equipped with weapons.

Their formal Then a chieftain proud
reception by
Hrothgar's There asked the champions of what race they came:
'Whence do ye bring the golden plated shields,
The gray war harness and the visored helms,
The array of battle lances? I am Hrothgar's
Herald and minister. I never saw
So many strangers of more gallant mien.
I think for daring ye are come to Hrothgar,
No wise in exile but in enterprise.'

To him the proud, brave chief of the Weder Geats,
Stern underneath his helmet, then replied
And spoke in answer. 'We are Hygelac's

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Beowulfismynname

his name Unto the son of HeaHHeiieTctegftr

To state my errand, to the famous prince
Thy master, if he, gracious as he is,
Will grant to us permission to address him.
Wulfgar spoke—he was the Wendels' chief
Whose courage, prowess and experience
Were known to many—'As thou does request, 35o
I will inform the ruler of the Scyldings,
Lord of the Danes and giver of the rings,
The famous prince, of this, and of thy coming
And will forthwith make known to thee the answer
The noble king vouchsafes to give to me.'

Beowulf's
arrival is

announced to

rot gar

Then quickly he returned where Hrothgar sat
Hoary and old, among his band of earls,
The warrior brave went in and stood before
The Danish prince; he knew the courtly custom.
Wulfgar spoke these words to his kind lord: 36o
'Hither are travelled people of the Geats,
Come from afar across the sea's expanse;
These valiant champions give their chief the name
Of Beowulf. They make it their request
That they should be permitted to converse
With thee, my prince; do not to them decree
Denial of an audience, gracious Hrothgar,
They seem by their accoutrements to be
Worth the esteem of earls; the chief who led
The warriors hither is a man indeed 37o

Hrothgar, shield of the Scyldings, spoke these words:
'I knew him as a boy; his honoured father
Was Ecgtheow by name, and unto him

BEOWULF

Hrothgar Hrethel, king of the Geats, in marriage gave
parents of His only daughter; now hath his strong son
Come hither and sought out a loyal friend.
Seafaring men who bore our friendly gifts
Unto the Geats, thither for their delight,
Reported also that the warrior bold
Had in the grapple of his hands the strength **380**
Of thirty men. Him hath Holy God
Sent unto us, the Danes, as I believe,
For our support against the savage power
Of Grendel. I shall offer precious gifts
As the reward of daring to this man.
Do thou make haste, invite them to come in,
To see my band of kinsmen here assembled;
And tell them, too, in words that they are welcome
Among the Danes.' Then to the door of the hall
Went Wulfgar, from the threshold gave the message: **390**
'The Danish ruler, my victorious lord,
Bids me to say he knows your noble birth
And ye are welcome hither unto him
Across the surging sea, ye stern of purpose.
Now ye may go, in all your panoply,
Wearing your battle-helms, to visit Hrothgar;
But let the war-shields and the spears, the death shafts,
Await the outcome of the speeches here.'

Hrothgar A The hero rose, around him many men,
the Geats A gallant band of vassals; some remained, **400**
The arms they guarded, as the warrior bade.
They hastened where their guide led, underneath
The roof of Heorot, their leader strode,
Stern in his helm, until he stood within.
Beowulf spoke—on him his corselet shone,

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

The mail shirt by the armourer's cunning wrought—
'Hail to thee, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's
Kinsman and vassal; many deeds have I
In youth attempted. This affair of Grendel
Was in my home made clear and known to me. 410
Seafaring men told that this palace stands,
This finest building, idle and unused
By any man, when once the setting sun
Becomes concealed below the bright-hued heaven.
Then did my people give me this advice,
The wisest men, experienced counsellors,
That I should come and seek thee, royal Hrothgar,
Because they knew the vigour of my strength;
Themselves beheld it when from strife I came,
Stained with my enemies' blood, when five I captured, 420
Slaughtered the giants' kin and in the waves
Sea-monsters slew by night; I suffered straits,
But I avenged the Geatish wrong and crushed
The foe—they sought for trouble. And now shall I
Settle alone this matter with the giant,
Against the monster, Grendel. One request,
Lord of the noble Danes, the Scyldings' refuge,
Shield of the warriors, loved lord of men,
I now will ask of thee: that thou will not
Deny me, now that from far I thus am come, 430
That I alone and this determined band,
My troop of nobles, may cleanse Heorot.
I have learned, too, that in his recklessness
The monster is contemptuous of arms;
Therefore—so Hygelac, my lord, may be
Gracious in mind towards me—I forgo
The carrying of sword or ample buckler,
My yellow shield to war, but I shall seize

BEOWULF

The enemy in my grasp and seek his life,
 Foe against foe; and he whom death bears off 440
 Shall to the judgment of the Lord submit.
 I think if in the embattled hall he can
 Prevail against the people of the Geats,
 He will devour unmoved the flower of men,
 As he hath often done. Nor wilt thou need
 To cover up my head, for if death takes me,
 Red with my blood he will have hold of me.
 He will bear off the gory prey, intending
 To savour it, ruthless the lonely one
 Will tear it and defile the glen; nor need'st thou 450
 Care further for my body's disposition.
 Send thou to Hygelac, should warfare claim me,
 This best of battle coats that guards my breast,
 This finest mail; 'tis Hrethel's legacy
 And Weland's work. Fate goeth aye as she must/

Hrothgar, shield of the Scyldings, spoke these words:
 'Because of deeds long done and out of kindness
 Thou cam'st to seek us, Beowulf my friend.

The Danes Thy father caused the mightiest of feuds
 harboured When Heatholaf 's destroyer he became 460
 during a feud Among the Wiifings; then the Geatish Kin
 Dared not to harbour him for fear of war.
 So thence across the rolling waves he sought
 The nation of the Danes, the glorious Scyldings.
 Then I first ruled the people of the Danes
 And in my youth governed my ample realm
 And wealthy town of warriors. Heorogar
 which Was dead, my elder brother, Healfdene's son,
 afterwards Was gone; he was a better man than I.
 for fee^{gcd} With gold the feud I afterwards compounded; 470

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Over the ocean's crest I sent the Wilfings
Old treasures, and thy sire swore oaths to me.
Sorrow it is to me within my soul
To tell to any man what sudden mischief
And ignominy Grendel to me hath wrought
In Heorot with his malice. My hall guard,
My warrior troop is thinned; fate bore them off
Through Grendel's violence. God may perhaps
Bring to an end the deeds of the dire foe.
Full oftentimes my champions, flushed with ale, 480
Over the drinking tankards made the boast
That they within the banquet hall would wait
For Grendel's onslaught with their dreadful swords.
But in the morning-tide, when daylight shone,
The splendid house, the mead-hall, was besmirched
With blood and all the benches wet with gore,
With bloodshed the abode; since death destroyed them
I have the fewer dear and trusty comrades.
Now sit thou to the feast, make known thy thoughts,
Thy high deeds unto men, as prompts thy heart.' 490

The Geats
are
entertained

Then in the drinking hall a bench was set
For all the people of the Geats together;
There the stout-hearted warriors took their seats,
Proud in their strength. The thane who in his hands
Bore the wrought flagon, did his part and poured
The sparkling ale. At times a minstrel sang
Clear-voiced in Heorot. No little throng
Of Danes and Geats was there, and joy of heroes.

Unferth, son of Ecglaf, spoke these words,
Who at the feet of the Scyldings' ruler sat; 500
He picked a quarrel, for the enterprise

BEOWULF

A Danish warrior tries
to belittle Beowulf's
deeds

In all the world might ever carry out
More deeds of glory under heaven than he:
'Art thou that Beowulf who with Breca strove,
Who didst contend in the wide sea at swimming,
When ye for pride made trial of the waves,
And for foolhardiness on the deep flood
Ventured your lives? Nor was there any man,
Nor loved, nor loathed, who might dissuade you both
From your grim venture, when ye swam the sea.
There ye embraced the currents with your arms
And measured the sea paths, struck with your hands
And glided through the deep; the ocean surged
With waves and surf of winter. Seven nights
Ye toiled in the sea's power; he had more strength,
He vanquished thee at swimming. Then at morn
Unto the Heathoremes the ocean bore him
And thence he sought again his pleasant home,
The Brandings' land, and the fair, peaceful town
Where to his people dear, he ruled his folk,
His castle and his wealth. Beanstan's son
Truly accomplished all his boast against thee.
Hence I expect less than success from thee,
If all night long thou durst for Grendel wait
Here close at hand, though in the storm of battle,
In combat fierce, thou always hast prevailed.'

510

Beowulf vindicates
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheo w, spoke these words:

'Lo, about Breca thou hast spoken much,
Unferth, my friend, thou being flushed with ale,
And didst recount his venture. I maintain
That I in swimming greater strength possess,

530

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

mutual In battling with the waves, than any other,
exploit, rather This we resolved upon and made a vow,
than a contest Being but lads, when both of us were yet

 In youth, that we would venture forth our lives
 Upon the sea, and we performed it thus.
 We held our strong swords naked in our hands
 While in the deep we swam; we thought to guard
The Ourselves against the whalefish. In the billows

swimmers
meant to keep By no means could he swim away from me,
 Or faster in the flood; nor would I go from him.
 For five nights' time we were together thus
 In the sea, until the tide, the surging waves,
 The bitterest weather and the falling night
but bad Drove us apart and the fierce northern wind
weather

parted them Turned on us and tempestuous were the seas.
 The anger of the ocean beasts was roused;
 And there my shirt of mail, hard and hand-wrought,
 The woven hauberk, which, adorned with gold,
 Lay on my breast, rendered me help against
 The horrid foe. Into the depths the fell,
 Dire enemy dragged me down, he held me fast,
 Fierce in his grasp; and yet it was my lot
 That I should reach the monster with my point,
 My battle blade. The storm of war removed
 The mighty ocean creature by my hand.
 Thus constantly the evil-doers pressed
 Upon me hard; I served them properly
 With my good sword, as it was meet to do.
 The fell destroyers no wise had the joy
 Of a full meal, gorging themselves on me,
 Sitting around the feast on the sea floor;
 But in the morning wounded by the steel,
 Slain by the sword, upon the ocean strand

540

560

BEOWULF

High up they lay, so that they never since
Hindered the ocean farer in his course
On the high seas. Light in the east appeared,
God's brilliant beacon, and the waves went down, 570
So that I could behold the ocean cliffs,
The windswept walls. Often fate preserves
A man from death if courage him avail.
So it befell that with my sword I slew
Nine monsters. Nor of fiercer strife by night
Under the vault of heaven, have I heard tell,
Or in the billows a more wretched man.
Yet I escaped the foemen's clutch alive,
Exhausted with the exploit. Then the sea,
The surging waves, the flowing tide, upbore me 580
On Finnish land. Nor aught have I heard tell
Concerning thee, of such a desperate strife,
Such horror of the swords. Breca never yet,
Nor either of you, in the game of war
Such an audacious exploit brought to pass
With your bright blades—not that I boast much of it—
Though thou thy brethren's slayer didst become,
Thy nearest kin; for that thou shalt endure
Sentence in hell, however keen thy cunning.
I tell thee of a truth, thou son of Ecglaf, 590
Never had Grendel, that dire monster, wrought
So many cruelties against thy prince,
So many wrongs on Heorot, if thy heart,
Thy courage were as warlike as thou claimest;
But he hath found he need not greatly fear
The feud, the horrid clash of swords in fight
With thine own people, with the conquering Scyldings.
He takes forced tribute, never one he spares
Of Danish people, but pursues his pleasure,

Unferth's
not without
reproach

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Slays and devours, expecting no resistance
From the Spear Danes. But now ere long shall I
Offer the strength and courage of the Geats
To him in battle. Let him who may, once more
Go bravely to the mead, when on the morrow
The morning light, the sun in radiant garb
Shines from the south upon the sons of men.'

Hrothgar is The gray-haired, war-famed giver of the gold
Pleased and hopeful Was happy then; the prince of the noble Danes
Was confident of help; the people's shepherd
From Beowulf his steadfast purpose heard.

The queen with Laughter of men was there, the din resounded
gracious

And pleasant was the discourse. Hrothgar's queen,
Wealhtheow mindful of courtesy, came forth
Adorned with gold, greeted the men in hall,
And there the noble lady gave the cup
First to the lord who guards the Danish home,
Dear to his nation, begged him to be blithe
At that carousal; the illustrious king
Gladly partook of hall cup and of feast.
Then went the Helming princess round each group
Of veteran warriors and younger men,
Proffered the precious cups, till the time came
When the high-hearted queen, decked out with rings,
Offered the bowl of mead to Beowulf;
She greeted the Geat chieftain and thanked God
In thoughtful words that hope had come to her,
That she could trust some hero for relief
From violence. The warrior fierce in strife
The tankard at Wealhtheow's hands received,
And ready for the battle then discoursed.

BEOWULF

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
'I was resolved, when I put forth to sea,
When with my band of warriors I embarked
Upon my ship, that I would surely gain
Your people's thanks or perish on the field,
Fast in the enemy's grasp. I shall perform
A glorious deed, or otherwise abide
My day of death within this drinking hall.'
These words, the Geat's proud boast, pleased well the lady
And gold-adorned, the people's stately queen 640
Passed on to take her seat beside her lord.

Then as before within the hall brave words
Were spoken, and the noise of gallant men,
A nation merrymaking, rose, until
The son of Healfdene presently desired
To seek his evening rest; he knew the monster
Had purposed battle in the palace hall
Since ever they could see the light of day,
Till over everything the falling night,
Dim under heaven, the shadowy shapes of gloom, 650
Came stalking. The company all arose.
Hrothgar saluted Beowulf, one man
The other, wished him good luck and mastery
Over the drinking hall and spoke these words:
'Never since I could lift up hand or shield
Did I before entrust to any man
The mighty hall of the Danes, save now to thee.
Have thou and hold the best of houses now,
Think of thy fame, make thy great courage known,
Watch 'gainst the foe. Thou shalt not lack rewards 660
If thou come through the adventure with thy life.'

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Hrothgar, the Scyldings' refuge, with his train
Of warriors then departed from the hall;
The war chief wished to follow Wealhtheow,
The queen his consort. For the King of Kings
Had against Grendel set a guard in the hall,
As men discovered; he rendered special service
To the Danes' lord and watched against the giant.
In truth the Geat prince gladly put his trust
In his proud strength, the grace of the Creator. 670
His coat of iron mail he then removed
And helm from head, handed his jewelled sword,
Choicest of blades, to his attendant thane,
Bade him take charge of his accoutrements.
Then Beowulf the Geat, the valiant, spoke
A word of boasting: 'I count myself no less in martial prowess
And feats of arms than Grendel doth himself.
Therefore I will not slay him with the sword,
Depriving him of life, though well I could. 680
He has no skill in arms to fence with me
And hew my shield, however strong he is
In deeds of malice; but we shall both forgo
The use of swords tonight, if he dares seek
Strife without weapons; then may God, all wise,
The Holy Lord, award victorious fame
On whichever hand seems meet to Him.'

Beowulf
makes his
last formal
boast

The warrior brave lay down, the pillow took
The prince's cheek and many a sailor bold
Sank down around him on his bed in hall.
None of them thought that he should ever thence 690
Seek his dear native land again, his kin,
Or the fair town in which he had been reared,

BEOWULF

For they had heard it told how in the hall
Already violent death had carried off
Too many of the Danes. But the Lord granted
To them the lot of victory, consolation
And help to the Weder people, that they all
Conquered their enemy through the strength of one
And his own power; the truth is manifest 700
That mighty God hath governed from of old
The race of men.

Grendel
approaches
Heorot

In the dim night the prowler
In darkness stalking came. The warriors slept
Whose task it was to guard the gabled dwelling,
All except one. It was well known to men
That should the Lord forbid, the spectral foe
Might not remove them to the shades of death,
But he to spite the spoiler keeping watch,
Waited in wrath the outcome of the fray.

Then from the moor beneath the misty hills 710
Grendel, striding came, God's curse he bore;
Themiscreant intended to ensnare
Many a man within the lofty hall.
Beneath the clouds he went to where he knew
Full well the palace stood, men's treasure hall,
Bright with its golden plating. Nor was that
The first time he had sought out Hrothgar's home;
Yet never he in life before or since
Came upon thanes in hall with harder fortune.

Then to the house the spoiler roving came 720
Bereft of joy. The door, with iron bound,
Burst forthwith when he struck it with his hands;

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Then in a rage the enemy flung wide
The palace portal. Quickly thereupon
Across the patterned floor the foeman strode
And walked in furious temper; from his eyes
An ugly light shone forth, most like to fire.
He saw within the building many men,
A band of warriors, a crowd of kinsmen,
Sleeping together. In his heart he laughed; 730
The horrid monster meant to rend apart
Body and soul of every one of them
Ere day came, for the hope of a great feast
Possessed him. Yet fate did not allow
That he should feed again upon mankind
After that night. Hygelac's kinsman" strong
In might, observed how the destroyer meant
To set about his ominous attack.
Nor thought the beast an instant to delay it,
But quickly fell upon a sleeping man 740
Directly, and unhesitating rent
And tore his body, drank from his veins the blood,
Swallowed him piecemeal, till he had devoured
Everything to the very feet and hands
Of the dead man. Nearer he advanced
And with his hands he clutched the hero brave
Upon his bed, with his claws the enemy
Reached out for him; Beowulf quickly seized
The crafty knave and rose upon his elbow.
Soon did the lord of crimes become aware 750
He had not met in any other man
In all the world, in all the bounds of earth,
A mightier handgrip, and he grew afraid
In heart and soul, yet might not thence make off.
He longed to go, he wished to fly to cover,

Beowulf
watches,
uncertain of
Grendel's
methods,

but the
monster
instantly
destroys a
man

BEOWULF

To seek some demons' crew; nor was his plight
Such as he ever knew in life before.

The combat Then Hygelac's brave kinsman called to mind
His speech at eventide; he sprang upright
And grappled with him firmly; fingers cracked; 760
The giant sought retreat, the chief advanced.
The infamous wretch meant, if he could, to flee
Further afield and thence escape away
To swampy coverts; he knew that mastery
Lay in his foeman's grasp. A sorry journey
The miscreant had made to Heorot.
The lordly hall resounded, terror fell
On each bold man, each chief, on all the Danes
Dwelling within the town. The angry tenants
Of the house were both enraged, the building rang. 770
It was great wonder that the banquet hall
Withstood the combatants, that the fair dwelling
Fell not to earth, but it was strongly clamped
By the smith's skill both inside and without
With bands of iron work. As I have heard
Marjy A mead-bench wrought with old was wrenched
Out of the floor, where the opponents struggled.
The wise men of the Scyldings never dreamed
That any man by any means could ever
Destroy the house, splendid and bright with ivory, 780
Or shatter it by craft, unless the fire's
Embrace with flames devoured it. Tumult strange
And overwhelming rose; a desperate fear
Laid hold upon the Danes, on all the men
Who from the ramparts heard the cry, and heard
God's adversary sing his grisly dirge,
His deathsong of defeat, the thrall of darkness

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL

Bewail his injury. For he who was
At that time of the world of all mankind
The mightiest in strength held him securely.

The warriors' defender did not mean
To let the murderous guest escape alive
By any means, nor held his life of use
To any nation. Many a follower
Of Beowulf's drew his ancestral sword
Desiring to defend, if so he might,
The life of his good lord, the famous prince.
They did not know, those stern-souled fighting men,
When in the struggle they took part, and thought
To strike from every side and to seek out
His very soul, that not the choicest steel
Throughout the earth, not any battle blade
Against that sinful enemy would avail,
For he made useless by a spell all swords
And conquering weapons. The manner of his death
At that time of the world was doomed to be
Unhappy, and the alien being fated
To pass afar into the power of foes.
Then he who formerly against mankind
Wrought so much heartbreak and so many crimes,
Who was the enemy of God, discovered
That his great body would avail him not,
For Hygelac's brave kinsman by the hand
Had seized him; each to the other while he lived
Was hostile. Mortal pain the horrid monster
Endured; upon his shoulder a great wound
Grew visible; the sinews sprang apart,
The muscles tore. To Beowulf was given
Glory in battle; thence Grendel had to flee

BEOWULF

Sick unto death along the boggy slopes
To seek his joyless home; he knew full well
That the conclusion of his life was reached,
His tale of days. 820

The desire of all the Danes
After the mortal combat was fulfilled;
He who erst came from far, wise and stouthearted,
Had cleansed the hall of Hrothgar and redeemed it
From evil. He rejoiced in his night's work,
His deed of fame. The chieftain of the Geats
Had carried out his promise to the Danes,
And likewise had amended all their woe, 830
The tribulation, no small misery
Which they before endured and of grim need
Were forced to suffer. It was a certain proof,
When the intrepid warrior fixed the hand,
The arm and shoulder, under the broad gable,
And Grendel's limb all in one piece was there.

Part II

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

They track
the monster
to the mere

THE N in the morning many fighting men,
As I have heard, assembled round the gift hall;
The people's leaders came from far and near
From distant regions to behold the wonder,
The traces of the foe. Nor did his death
Appear a cause of grief to any man,
Who tracked the footprints of the vanquished one,
And saw how weary, conquered in the struggle,
Dying and put to flight, he left a trail
Of blood, thence to the monsters' mere away.
The surging water there was stained with gore,
The evil swirl of billows all stirred up
With fervid blood seethed with the sanguine stream;
Death doomed he had plunged in, when robbed of joy
In the fen refuge he laid down his life,
His heathen soul, and death received him there.

The return
journey

Thence veteran friends and many a young man too,
Heroes on horses gray, set forth again
High hearted from the mere to ride their steeds
Back from the glad excursion. There the fame
Of Beowulf was told; many declared
Full oft that south nor north between the seas
Over the wide world 'neath the sky's expanse
There was no other warrior in arms
Better than he, nor worthier of a kingdom.

BEOWULF

Yet they their friend and master, gracious Hrothgar,
No whit disparaged, for he was a good king.

**Thetoyal
minstrel
praises
Beowulf**

Sometimes the warriors let their dappled steeds
Gallop and race in emulation, where
The beaten track seemed good to them, and known
For excellence. Sometimes a thane of the king's,
A man of eloquence, mindful of old lays,
One who remembered very many tales
Of ancient times, composed new sentences 870
Appropriately turned. He then began

**Beowulf is
compared
with
Sigemund**

To treat of Beowulf's exploit with skill
And to narrate apt stories with success,
Playing with phrases. All that he had heard
Related about Sigemund's deeds of valour
He recounted, many, a thing unknown,
The Waelsings' struggle and the feuds and crimes,
Far voyages of which the sons of men
Knew nothing sure, save Sigemund himself
And Fitela, when uncle unto nephew 880
Chose to relate such things, for they were ever
Comrades in need in each adversity
And had laid low full many of the race

**Sigemund's
slaying of
the dragon**

Of giants with their swords. No little glory
Accrued to Sigemund after he was dead,
For brave in battle he the dragon slew,
The guardian of the hoard; the prince's son
Under the hoary mountain dared alone
The audacious deed; Fitela was not with him.
Yet he succeeded and the sword transfix'd 890
The splendid dragon, so that the lordly steel
Stood fast in the cliff; the reptile died the death.
The hero by his valour brought to pass

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

That of his own free will he might enjoy
The hoard; into his vessel's hold the son
Of Waels the glittering treasure bore and filled
His bark; of its own heat the dragon melted.

**Sigemund
contrasted
with
Heremod**

He was the most renowned adventurer
Wide through the nations and a lord of men
Through valorous deeds—for which he had won fame-
After the might of Heremod, his strength

**Heremod's
early death
in exile**

And prowess, were eclipsed; among the Jutes
He was delivered to the power of foes,
Swiftly dispatched; his overwhelming troubles
Had hampered him too long. He to his people,
To all his chiefs became a bitter grief;

**and failure
to fulfil
his people's
hopes.**

And many a wise man likewise oft deplored
The champion's way of life in earlier times,
Such as had looked to him for help from evils,
Hoping this prince would prosper and uphold
The honour of his house, govern his race,
Treasure and citadel, the warriors' realm,
The Scyldings' home. Dearer to all mankind
Hygelac's kinsman, Beowulf, became
And to his friends; but sin possessed the other.

And then again they measured the gray road
In racing with their steeds. Now was the morning
Advanced and passing. Many a brave-souled man
Came to the lofty palace to behold
The wonder strange; the king himself as well,
The famous guardian of the treasure, known
For manly virtue, from his chamber came
With a great company and with him his queen
Paced up the pathway with her troop of maids.

BEOWULF

Hrothgar approached the hall and took his stand
Upon the steps; he saw the lofty roof
Adorned with gold, and Grendel's hand, and spoke:
'May thanks forthwith be rendered for this sight
To the Almighty! Much evil I endured,
Sorrow at Grendel's hands; wonder on wonder
Can God, Shepherd of Glory, ever work.
Not long since I despaired of ever finding
A remedy for any of my woes
Throughout my lifetime, when with blood besmirched
And stained with gore the best of houses stood—
A wide-spread sorrow for all counsellors
Who had no hope that they could ever more
Protect the people's stronghold from its foes,
Spectres and apparitions. Now a man
Hath by the power of God performed a feat
None of us could contrive to do before
With all our wisdom. Lo, whomever she be
Of womenkind who brought forth such a son
Among the nations, if she yet lives can say
That Ancient God was gracious unto her
In her child-bearing. Now, Beowulf, will I
Cherish thee in my heart as mine own son,
Thou best of men; henceforward this new kin
Preserve thou well. Thou shalt not lack for aught
Of this world's benefits that I control.
Full oft did I assign reward for less,
Honouring with my gifts a meaner man,
Weaker in strife. Thou hast thyself by deeds
Established that thy glory shall endure
For ever. May the Almighty recompense thee
With goodly gifts, as hitherto he hath/

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 'We very gladly wrought this deed of might,
 This combat, and audaciously defied
 The might of the unknown. Rather would I **960**
 That thou shouldst have beheld the foe himself
 In **all** his battle order, faint to death.
 I thought to bind him quickly on the bed
 Of slaughter with the cruel bonds of death,
 That he, because of my hand grip should lie
 Struggling for life, if he did not escape me.
 Since God forbade, I could not hinder him
 In his departure, closely though I clung
 To the fell enemy; in his stride the foe
 Was overstrong. Although he left his hand, **970**
 Shoulder and arm behind to save his life
 And mark his track, nevertheless no comfort
 The miserable being thereby gained;
 The evil-doer lives not any longer
 Harassed by sins, for in a forceful grip
 With cruel fetters narrowly hath pain
 Laid hold on him, and guilty of his crimes
 For the great judgment now the man must wait,
 Till glorious God pronounce his final doom.'

Then Ecglafs son was a more silent man **980**
 Unferth In boastful speech concerning deeds of war,
 SeJSed Since owing to the hero's strength, the princes
 Beheld above on the high roof the hand
 And fingers of the foe; each at the tip,
 Each one of his hard nails, was most like steel,
 The talons of the heathen adversary,
 Horrible, hideous; everybody told
 How no time-honoured broadsword of the brave

BEOWULF

Against him could avail, which sought to **maim**
The bloody battle talons of the monster.

Command was quickly given and within
Was Heorot adorned; many there were
Both men and women who prepared the palace,
The festal hall. The hangings on the walls
Shone bright with gold and many a wondrous sight
Was there for those who gaze upon such things.
The splendid house, though firm with iron bands,
Was sorely shattered everywhere inside,
Door hinges wrenched apart; the roof alone
Remained throughout undamaged, when the monster
Guilty of deeds of violence turned to flight,
Despairing of his life. It is not easy
|To fly from death, let any try who will,
For by necessity compelled he must
Seek the appointed place of human souls,
Of all the sons of men who dwell on earth,
Where in the grave confined his body sleepeth
After the feast of life.?

Then the time came
That to the hall the son of Healfdene went;
The king himself desired to share the feast.
I have not heard that people in such numbers
Bore themselves better round their generous king.
Illustrious men sat down upon the benches,
Rejoicing in the banquet; and the kinsmen
Hrothgar and Hrothulf, those great-hearted ones,
Partook with courtesy of many cups
Hrothulf In the high palace. Heorot inside
wasn't With friends was overcrowded; no ill faith

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

Did people of the Scyldings practise then.

Hrothgar's As victory's reward the son of Healfdene 1020
gifts to

Beowulf A golden banner gave to Beowulf,
A wrought war standard, and a helm and corselet;
Many beheld the sword, renowned and precious,
Presented to the hero. In the hall
Beowulf drained the cup; for such rich gifts
He needed not feel shame before the warriors.
I have not heard of many men who gave
In friendlier fashion at the banquet-benches
To others, four such treasures, gold encrusted.
Around the helmet's crown outside a roll 1030
Entwined with filigree guarded the head,
That when the shielded warrior should go
Against his foes, the sword audaciously,
File wrought and hammer hardened, might not scathe him.
Eight steeds with golden plated bridles then
The chief of earls commanded to be led
Within upon the floor; on one there lay
A saddle finely wrought, adorned with gems.
It was the war seat of the sovereign king
When in the clash of weapons Healf dene's son 1040
Desired to share; in the van when fell the slain
The illustrious leader's prowess never failed.
And there the guardian of the Scyldings gave
Possession both of weapbns and of horses
To Beowulf; bade him enjoy them well.
Thus nobly did the famous prince, the warden
Of the warriors' treasury, reward the onslaught
With steeds and jewels, so that whosoever
Will speak the truth aright can not decry them.

BEOWULF

Further the lord of warriors presented 1050
Treasure upon the banquet seats, an heirloom,
To each of those who crossed the ocean path
With Beowulf, and ordered compensation
In gold for him whom Grendel in his sin
Had slain, as more of them he wished to slay
Had not wise God and that man's fortitude
Averted fate from them. | Ever the Creator
Hath governed all mankind as still he doth,
Wherefore discernment, forethought of the mind,
In every case is best. Of good and ill 1060
He must experience much who sojourns long
Here in these days of struggle in the world.

tale is told Music and song were raised together there
of a fight Before the battle leader of the Danes,
the Frisian The sweet harp sounded, 'twas a tale oft told,
Dane That Hrothgar's minstrel on the banquet benches
. Must tell as entertainment in the hall,
Of Finn's retainers, when disaster claimed them,
And Hnaef the Scylding, hero of the Danes,
Was doomed to fall upon a Frisian field. 1070

wife of Finn Truly had Hildeburg no cause to praise
and sister of The Frisians' faith: guiltless she was bereaved
Hnaef
Of her beloved ones in the battle play,
Of son and brother; wounded by the spear
Fated they fell; a mourning woman she.
Nor did Hrothgar's daughter without cause bewail
The destined doom, when morning came and she
The slaughter of her kinsmen might behold
By daylight. There where he before possessed
The greatest earthly joy, the fight destroyed 1080
All but a very few of Finn's retainers,

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

Finn cannot
drive the
Danes, under
Hengest,
from the hall
of Finnsburg

So that by no means could he offer fight
To Hengest in the open field, nor drive
The Danish remnant under the prince's thane
By battle from the building; so they offered
Terms to the Danes, that they would allocate
Part of the hall to them and one high seat,
That with the Frisians they might own the half,
And Finn, Folcwalda's son, should every day
Do honour to the Danes in treasure giving,
Distinguishing with gifts the troop of Hengest,
With precious presents of the plated gold,
To just the same extent that he rewarded
His Frisian followers in the drinking hall.

1090

Finn offers
terms

They make
peace

Then upon either side they pledged their faith
In a firm pact of peace; Finn unto Hengest
Declared on oath in greatest earnestness
That he the remnant would in honour hold
By judgment of his council, that no man
By word or deed should violate the treaty,
Or in malicious cunning ever mention
That they, robbed of their prince, should render **service**
To their lord's slayer, as they needs must do;
If any Frisian with audacious speech
Should call to mind the blood hostility,
Thereafter should the sword's edge do the same.

1100

Both sides
unite to bury
the slain

The funeral pyre was raised and costly gold
Brought from the hoard. The noblest fighting **man**
Of the warrior Scyldings for the pyre was ready;
The bloodstained shirt of mail was plain to see
Upon the pyre, the golden casque, the helm
Boar-crested, iron hard, and many a chief
Dead of his wounds; no few died on the field.

1110

BEOWULF

Then ordered Hildeburg that her own son
Be given to the flames upon HnsePs pyre,
His body laid upon the stack and burned
Beside his uncle. The lady made lament
And mourned with dirges. The chief was borne aloft.
Up to the clouds the greatest death fire swirled
And roared before the barrow; heads were melted, 1120
Wide wounds, the body's cruel gashes, gaped,
When blood gushed forth. Fire, the greediest creature,
Devoured all those whom battle had destroyed
Of both sides, and their glory was departed.

The compact
is kept, but
with
difficulty,
during die
winter

The Frisian warriors of their friends bereft,
Sought their abodes, went to their homes and city
In Frisian land, while Hengest yet with Finn
Dwelt through the winter of hostility
Very unhappily; he dreamed of his own land,
Although he could not drive the ring-wrought prow 1130
Over the sea. The ocean surged with storm
And strove against the tempest, winter locked
The waves in icy fetters; till a new year
Came to the dwellings, as it still doth come—
The glorious bright days which evermore
Their season due observe. Winter was gone,
Fair was earth's bosom and the exile longed
To leave, the guest would quit the house; he brooded
More on revenge for hurt than on seafaring,
How he might bring about a fierce encounter 1140
To recompense the Frisians with the steel.
So he did not repudiate the duty
Of vengeance when the son of Hunlaf laid
The war flame, best of blades, upon his knees,
Whose edges were well known among the Frisians.

Hengest
broods on
revenge for
his chief,
Hnsef

One of the
Danes urges
vengeance for
his father

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

Thus in his turn a cruel death by the sword
 Befell bold-hearted Finn in his own home,
 brothers will W^{k^en} of the fierce attack after the voyage
 not forgo And of their grief, Guthlaf and Oslaf grumbled,
 Blamed Hengest for their woes; their restless temper 115 o
 Could not be held in check. The hall was reddened
 With the life's blood of foes, and Finn the king
 Was slain among his guard and the queen taken.
 The Scylding warriors carried to their ships
 All household goods belonging to the king,
 As well as all the jewels they could find
 token home* And curious gems. They bore the royal dame
 again by Over the sea path to the Danish land
 And took her to her people.

The song was sung,
 The minstrel's story. Mirth arose again, 1160
 The revelry rang out, cup-bearers poured
 Wine out of wondrous jugs. Wealhtheow came forth,
 Hrothgar An^dW^en^tiⁿ h^er golden crown to where the twain,
 further Uncle and nephew sat; as yet at peace,
 treachery to Each to the other true. "Unferth, the spokesman,
 Sat at the Dane king's feet; each of them trusted
 His heart, that he was brave, though to his kin
 In fight untrue. The Scylding lady spoke:
 'Accept this goblet, my illustrious lord,
 Distributor of treasure. Be thou glad, 1170
 Generous friend of men, and to the Geats
 Speak with kind words, as it is meet to do.
 Be gracious to them, mindful of the gifts
 That thou from far and near dost now possess.
 I understand that thou wouldst have as son
 This warrior hero. Heorot, the brilliant

BEOWULF

Treasure hall is cleansed. While yet thou mayst,
Be generous of rewards, and to thy kinsmen
Leave realm and people when thou must go forth
To meet the destined doom. I know my gracious 118c
Hrothulf well and he will justly rule
The younger men, shouldst thou depart this world
Sooner than he does, monarch of the Scyldings;
I think that he will recompense our children
With benefits, if he remembers all
That we in kindness earlier performed
To do him joy and honour as a child.'

Then turned she to the bench where sat her sons,
Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the warriors' lads,
Young men together; by the brothers twain 1190
Sat Beowulf the Geat, the valiant one.

To him the cup was brought and cordial pledge
Offered in words, and golden metal work
On him was graciously bestowed, two armlets,
Rings and a mail shirt and the finest collar
That ever I heard tell of in the world.

Of no more precious jewel owned of men
Heard I on earth, since Hama carried off
The necklace of the Brosings, gem and setting,
To the bright city; from the fierce pursuit 1200
Of Eormenric he fled and found salvation.

Nephew of Swerting, Hygelac the Geat
Carried that necklace on his last adventure
When 'neath his banner he his wealth defended,
Guarded the spoil of war; fate bore him off
When in vainglory he for trouble sought,
War at the Frisians' hands. The mighty prince
Across the trough of waves the jewel bore,

A famous
necklace is
given to
Beowulf,

which
Hygelac later
lost on his
last raid
against the
Franks.
1.2172,2354,
2503

CELEBRATIONS IN HEOROT

The precious gem; he fell beneath his shield.
The king's corse with his harness and the necklace 1210
Into the Frankish power together fell
And hostile warriors despoiled the slain
Of the Geat race and held the battlefield
After the carnage.

The hall caught up the applause;
Wealhtheow spoke, she said amid the throng:
'Wear with good fortune, dear young Beowulf,
This necklace and use well this coat of mail,
A treasure of our folk, and prosper well;
Make thyself known by strength, and to these youths
Be kind of counsel; I will recompense thee. 1220
For thou hast brought to pass that far and near
Throughout the generations men esteem thee,
Where'er the sea, the birthplace of the winds,
Encompasses the cliffs. Prince, while thou livest
Be prosperous. I wish for thee the best
Of rich possessions. Be thou to my son
A friend in deeds, thou who art happy now.
Each warrior here is faithful to the other
And kind of heart and loyal to his lord;
The chiefs are trusty and the people ready, 1230
The revelling men-at-arms do as I bid.'

Then went she to her seat. The choicest feast
Was there and men drank wine; nor knew their fate,
The stern doom fore-ordained, nor what should chance
For many warriors, once evening came
And mighty Hrothgar to his room had gone
Unto his rest. A host of fighting men
Remained in hall, as oft long since they did.

BEOWULF

They cleared the benches and the floor was spread
With beds and pillows. Of the boon companions 1240
One laid him on his couch in hall death-doomed.
They placed the battle bucklers at their heads,
The shining shields, and there upon the bench
Above each chief was plainly to be seen
The helm that towers in battle, the ring corselet
And mighty spear-shaft. Such their custom was
That for the fray they ever were prepared,
Whether at home or in the field, or both,
Even at such times as necessity
Befell their lord. They were a goodly people. 1250

Part III

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL/s DAM

THEY SANK to sleep. One man full dearly paid
For his night's rest, as had full oft befallen
When Grendel occupied the golden hall
And practised wrong until the reckoning came,
Death after wicked deeds. Now it grew plain
And clear to men that an avenger yet
Survived the hated enemy for a time
After the grievous battle. Grendel's mother,
Woman and monster, called to mind her woe,
She who was doomed to dwell in the dread mere 1260
And in the bitter waters, ever since Cain
Became a slayer of his only brother,
His father's son; outlawed, with murder branded
From human happiness he fled away
And lived in barren lands. Of him was born?
Many a fatal being; one was Grendel,
The hateful outcast who in Heorot found
A watchful warrior waiting for the fray;
The monster there had come to grips with him.
However, he recalled his mighty strength, 1270
The liberal gift that God had granted him
And trusted to the Almighty for His grace,
Comfort and aid. Thus he subdued the foe,
Vanquished the demon being. Bereft of joy
The foe of man humiliated fled
To seek the abode of death, and now his dam

BEOWULF

Greedy and wrathful meant to undertake
The venture grim her son's death to avenge.

Grendel's
dam comes to
Hcoiot

She came to Heorot where slept the Danes
Throughout the hall. Reverse or fortune soon 1280
Befell the warriors, once Grendel's mother
Forced her way in. Even so much less
The horror was, as is a woman's might,
A maiden's martial prowess than a man's,
When the wrought broadsword by the hammers forged,
The bloodstained blade resistless in its edge,
Cleaves the boar crest above the opposing helm.
Then in the hall the hard-edged sword was drawn,
The war brand from the benches, many a broad
Shield firmly raised in hand; none thought of helm 1290
Or ample corselet when the terror seized him.
She was in haste when once she was discovered,
Desiring thence to fly, to save her life;

She kills
Aeschere the
king's closest
friend

But quickly, as she went towards the fen,
One of the princes firmly had she seized.
He whom she slew at rest to Hrothgar was
The dearest of his men between the seas
In rank of vassal, and a mighty soldier,
A splendid captain. Beowulf was not there,
For after the gift-giving other quarters 1300
Had been assigned to the illustrious Geat.
Uproar in Heorot rose; the well known hand,
Blood-smeared, she carried off; grief was renewed,
And to the house returned. 'Twas no good bargain
That they on either side were forced to make
With their friends' lives.

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDENs DAM

gief

Then the ancient king,
The gray-haired warrior was grieved at heart
When once he knew his chief retainer slain,
That of his men the most beloved was dead.
Beowulf, rich in victories, was fetched 131 o
In haste to his chamber. With the break of day
The warrior, the high-born chief himself
Went with his comrades where the wise old king
Waited to know whether Almighty God
Ever would grant respite from evil news.
The man renowned in battle crossed the floor
With his companions, while the hall beams rang,
Until with greetings he addressed the wise
Lord of the Ingwines, asked if his night had been
As pleasant as to suit with his desire. 13 20
Hrothgar, shield of the Scyldings, spoke these words:
'Ask not of pleasure; sorrow is renewed
For Danish people. Aeschere is dead,
YrmenlaPs elder brother, my close friend
And counsellor, the staunch companion at my side
When in the conflict we our heads defended,
When troops of footmen clashed, when the boar-crested
Helmets rang. Such should a captain be,
A proven prince, and such Aeschere was.
In Heorot a wandering murderous being 1330
Became his slayer and I know not whither,
Proud of the kill, exulting in the feast,
The horror hath feturned. She hath avenged
The feud wherein last night in violent wise
Thou slewest Grendel with a cruel grasp,
Because too long my people he destroyed
And thinned their number out. His life being forfeit
He fell in fight, and now hath come another

BEOWULF

Wicked destroyer to avenge her kin,
And thoroughly the death feud hath she wreaked, **1340**
As may appear to many followers
Who weep in spirit for their generous chief,
A cruel grief of heart. For now the hand
Lies low that could have served your every wish.

The ~~monsters~~ I heard my people say, both counsellors
~~desolate land~~ in hall and dwellers on the land, that two
Such mighty haunters of the borderlands,
Such alien beings, had they seen inhabit
The wilderness. As far as they could tell
For certain, one of them was in the form **1350**
Of woman; the other misbegotten wretch
In shape of man the paths of exile trod,
Save that he greater was than any man.
In days of yore the country people called
Grendel his name; they knew naught of a father,
Nor if before him any secret being
Had been conceived. A hidden land they inhabit,
Wolf-haunted valleys, perilous fen paths
And windswept headlands, where the mountain stream
Descends beneath the shadow of the cliffs, **1360**
A torrent down the crag. Measured by miles
It is not far from here that the mere lieth;
Rime-frosted groves hang over it, a wood
Fast rooted overshadoweth the wave.
There every night a portent maybe seen,
Fire on the water. Of the sons of men
Lives none so wise that he the sounding knoweth.
Though the heath-rover, the strong antlered stag,
Pressed by the hounds and fleeing from afar
May seek that forest, rather will he yield **1370**

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDL/s DAM

His life upon the brink than venture in
To hide his head. 'Tis not a pleasant spot;
Dark towards the clouds the turmoil of the waves
Leaps upward from it, when the tempest stirs
Disastrous storms, until the heaven grows dark
And the skies weep. Now once again doth help
Depend on thee alone. Thou knowest not yet
The ground, the perilous place, where thou mayest find
That sinful creature. Seek it if thou durst.
I will reward thee for the feud with gifts, 1380
With ancient treasures and with twisted gold,
As erst I did, if thou return again.'

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
'Grieve not, wise man. Better it is for each
That he avenge his friend than mourn him much.

The poetic Each one among us must abide the end
stated by the Of this world's life; so let him win who may
cro Honour ere death, for that shall best become
A man hereafter when his life is fled.
Rise guardian of the kingdom, let us forth 1390
At once to view the track of Grendel's kin.
I promise thee, refuge he shall not find,
Nor in earth's bosom, nor in mountain wood,
Nor on the ocean's floor, go where he will.
This day do thou have patience in each one
Of all thy woes, as I expect of thee.'
The aged king sprang up and he thanked God,
The mighty Lord, for what the hero said.

Then was his horse, his steed with braided mane,
Bridled for Hrothgar; the experienced prince 1400
Rode off magnificent; the troop of foot

BEOWULF

Equipped with shields went forward. All along
The forest path the tracks were plain to see,
The trail along the ground where straight she went
Across the darkling wilderness and bore
Bereft of life the very bravest thane
Of those who watched with Hrothgar o'er the home.
The princely band traversed steep rocky slopes,
Difficult paths and narrow single tracks,
Uncertain footways and precipitous heights, 1410
Past many a cavern of the water monsters.
The old king with a few experienced men
Rode on before to scrutinize the ground,
Till suddenly he found the mountain trees,
The dreary forest, leaning out above
The hoary rock, and the mere lay below
Turbid and dyed with blood. For all the Danes,
The Scylding followers and every man,
It was a heartfelt sorrow to endure,
A woe for every chief, when on the cliff 1420
Above the lake they found Aeschere's head.
The men looked down, the water surged with blood,
With fervid gore. At times the trumpet sounded
An eager battle song. The footmen rested.
Many a reptile in the lake they saw
And strange sea dragons moving through the flood,
While on the sloping headland monsters lay,
Serpents and wild beasts, such as undertake
Often at morning-time on ocean paths
A sinister adventure. They plunged away 1430
Savage and angry, when they heard the blare,
The war horn sounding. With his bow and arrow
The Geatish prince deprived one of its life
And stopped its wallowings, for the strong war shaft

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDENs DAM

Struck to its vitals, and it grew the slower
In swimming on the water as death claimed it.
Straight was the wondrous rover of the sea
With sharply barbed boar spears hard beset
Upon the surges, and assailed by force, and dragged
Out on the headland and the men examined 1440
The grisly stranger.

Beowulf clad himself

In warrior panoply, nor recked of life;
His coat of mail, ample and brightly wrought,
Close linked by hand, must now explore the deep,
The armour which could well protect his frame,
So that the onslaught might not harm his breast,
The foeman's vile embrace destroy his life.
The gleaming helmet, too, his head defended,
That decked with gems was to disturb the floors
Of ocean and invade the tumbling waves, 1450
Clasped with a coronet, as long ago
The smith of weapons wrought it; wondrously
He fashioned it, and with boar shapes adorned it,
That neither brand nor blade might cleave it after.
Nor was the meanest of these powerful aids

Bewulf a sword Lent him by Hrothgar's spokesman for his need;
For Hrunting was the hiked broadsword's name
That stood unmatched amongst ancestral treasures;
The blade was iron, etched in patterned lines,
In bloodshed tempered; it never yet in fight 1460
Failed any man who grasped it in his hand,
Who dared set forth on terrible adventures,
The battlefields of foes; nor was that time
The first that it should do a deed of valour.
For Unferth, son of Ecglaf, strong in might,
Remembered not what erstwhile in his cups

BEOWULF

He said, when to a better fighting man
He lent the weapon; he did not dare himself
To risk his life beneath the weltering waves,
To do brave deeds; he forfeited thereby 147c
Fame and heroic glory. Not so the other,
Since now he had arrayed himself for battle.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
Beowulf
commends
his followers
care 'Remember now, wise prince, renowned son
Of Healfdene, generous friend of men, now I
Am ready for the venture, what we said
A while ago, if I should lose my life
In thy behalf, that thou wouldst ever be
To me, departed, in a father's place.
Be thou a guardian to my young retainers 1480
To my companions true, should the fight claim me;
And also send to Hygelac the treasures
Which thou, beloved Hrothgar, gavest to me.
For by the gold the lord of the Geats may know
And Hrethel's son perceive, when on that wealth
He looketh, that I found a treasure-giver
Munificent and prospered while I might.
Do thou let Unferth, the illustrious man,
Have my ancestral sword, the hard edged blade
Inwrought with scroll work; I shall win myself 1490
Glory with Hrunting, or else death shall take me.'

The fight
Grendel's
Ts After these words, bravely the Geatish prince
Made haste; by no means would he wait
Upon an answer and the tumbling waves
Received the battle chief. A long time passed
Ere he the bottom of the mere might see.
At once she, who for half a hundred years

THE FIGHT WITH GREDEL'S DAM

Ravening had possessed the flood's domain,
Greedy and grim, discovered that some man
Sought from above the dwelling of the monsters. 1500
She clutched at him, she seized the warrior
With hideous claws, yet did not thereby injure
His body hale, for all around his corselet
Protected him, so that she could not pierce
His hauberk, his linked shirt, with hostile fingers.
The water-wolf, when once she reached the bottom,
Bore the rich prince into her dwelling place,
So that however brave he was, he could not
Handle his arms, but rather many monsters
Harassed him in the water and sea creatures 1510
Strove with fierce tusks to penetrate his mail
And beasts molested him. Then the prince knew
That he was in some kind of hostile hall
Wherein no water anyway oppressed him,
Nor could the swift rush of the torrent touch him
Because of the roofed cavern; he beheld
Firelight, a brilliant radiance, brightly shining.

The cave
behind the
cataract

The first
phase of the
combat

The champion then made out the accursed hag,
The mighty water-witch; he gave his sword
A powerful swing, nor flinched his hand on the stroke 1520
That on her head the ring-wrought blade sang out
A greedy note of war. Then the intruder
Found that the flame of battle would not bite
Or harm her life, but that the weapon failed
Its lord at need; many a fight before
It had endured and oft had hewed the helm
And armour of the doomed; for the first time
The precious heirloom had belied its fame.

BEOWULF

The scold Mindful of glory, nowise slow in courage,
Hygelac's kinsman made a fresh resolve. 1530
The angry champion flung the damasked sword
Adorned with scrolls, so that on earth it lay
Steel-edged and strong; he trusted to his strength,
The grasp of his own might. So must a man,
If in the battle he intends to win
Enduring praise; he recks not of his life. |
The Geatish prince, he shrank not from the contest,
Then by the shoulders seized the dam of Grendel
And brave in battle threw the deadly foe
So that to earth she fell, for he was wroth. 15 40
But quickly she requited him again
With a fierce grapple and clutched hold of him;
The champion then, strongest of warriors,
Uncertain stumbled so that he was thrown.
She knelt on the intruder, drew her dagger,
Her broad, bright steel, desiring to avenge
Her child, her only son. Upon his shoulder
The woven harness lay; it saved his life,
To point and edge an entrance it denied.
The champion of the Geats, the son of Ecgtheow, 1550
Would there have perished from the face of earth,
But that his hauberk, his strong battle-mail
Afforded him defence and Holy God
Controlled the victory; the All-knowing Lord,
The Ruler of the Heavens soon decided
Aright, when once again he struggled up.

The third Then in this strait he saw a conquering blade,
An ancient giant sword with edges strong,
The pride of soldiers; it was the choicest weapon,
But mightier than any other man 15 60

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL's DAM

Into the tumult of the fight could bear,
Splendid and true, the handiwork of titans.
The Scyldings' champion seized the chain-bound hilt,
Fierce and inflamed he drew the ring-wrought sword,
Despairing of his life, enraged he struck
So that the brand made impact on her neck,
Shattered the neck-bones and the steel shore through
The body doomed; upon the floor she fell,
Bloody the sword, glad in his deed the man.

The radiance brightened and the light streamed in, 15 70
As when the lamp of heaven from the sky
seeklGrendd Shines brilliantly. He gazed around the abode,
to slay him, Then turned along the wall and Hygelac's thane
Angry and resolute, by the hilt swung up
The cruel sword; nor purposeless the blade
Was to the warrior, for he meant at once
To deal with Grendel for the many onslaughts
Which he had carried out against the Danes
Many times more than in a single visit,
When in their slumber Hrothgar's hearth-companions 15 80
He slaughtered, and in sleeping had devoured
Out of the Danish nation fifteen men
And carried off as many more besides,
already dead A frightful booty. But the angry champion
Already had repaid him, so that now
He saw war-shattered Grendel on his bed
Lie lifeless, just as earlier the fight
In Heorot had maimed him. His corse leaped far
When after death a blow, a cruel sword-stroke,
He suffered and the prince cut off his head. 15 90

BEOWULF

Meanwhile die Danes have given up	Experienced warriors who with Hrothgar gazed Upon the water, presently observed The turmoil of the waves was all stirred up And the deep stained with blood. Gray-haired old men Spoke with each other of the valiant chief, Saying they had no further hope for him That he victorious would return to seek The famous prince, for many were agreed The she-wolf of the water had destroyed him.	
Hrothgar departs	The ninth hour came. The Scyldings bold forsook The headland and the generous friend of men Thence to his home departed. Sick at heart The strangers sat and stared upon the mere; They hoped, yet did not think that they should see Their lord and friend himself.	1600
The Geats still keep watch		
The sword melts in Beowulf's hand	And then the sword, The brand, because of that fierce gore began To melt in icicles of steel; it was A marvel how it all dissolved like ice, When God the Father, He who has command Of times and seasons, slacks the bonds of frost And frees the fettered pool; true Lord is He. Nor took the Geatish prince more precious things Within the halls, though many there he saw, Beyond the head and the hilt bright with gems; The blade had melted and the damasked steel Had burned, so hot that blood, so venomous The alien being who had perished there.	1610
out from the cave again	Soon he was swimming who in fight survived His foes' destruction; through the flood he rose; The welter of the waves, the spacious dwelling,	1620

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL's DAM

Was all made clean when once the alien being
Departed life and this uncertain world.
Then the stout-hearted shield of mariners
Came swimming to the land; in his sea spoil
Rejoiced he, in the great burden which he bore.
The valiant band of vassals ran to meet him,
Gave thanks to God, delighting in their prince
Because they might behold him safe and sound.
Helmet and corselet from the doughty man
Were quickly taken off. The lake subsided, 1630
The mere with bloodshed stained beneath the sky.

The return Thence forth along the footpath glad at heart
They fared, and journeyed by the beaten track,
The well-known roadway; with the greatest toil
For every one of all the valiant band
From the sea cliff the daring warriors
Carried the head; ('tis said that four of them
Upon a shaft of war could hardly bear
The head of Grendel towards the golden hall;)
Till presently the fourteen Geats, determined 1640
And warlike, at the palace hall arrived;
Valiant among his troop the lord of men
Across the meadows by the mead-hall strode.
The chief of thanes, the hero brave in fight,
The man in action bold, with glory crowned,
Then made his entrance Hrothgar to salute.
The horrid head of Grendel by the hair
Was borne across the hall where men were drinking,
Before the warriors and the lady too,
A wondrous spectacle; men gazed upon it. 1650

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:

BEOWULF

'Lo, these sea-spoils that here thou dost behold,
Son of Healfdene, sovereign of the Scyldings,
We bring to thee with joy, in proof of glory.
In strife beneath the waters I escaped
But hardly with my life; I dared the task
With difficulty and my struggle almost
Had come to naught, but that God shielded me.
Nor in the battle might I compass aught
With Hrunting, worthy though that weapon be; 1660
But the Creator of mankind, who oft
Hath helped the friendless, granted that I saw
A beautiful great sword of old time hang
Upon the wall and that I drew the blade.
Then when chance offered in the fight I slew
The guardian of the house. Yet when that blood,
Hottest of battle gore, sprang forth, the sword,
The damasked blade burned up. Thence from my foes
I carried off the hilt and as was meet
Punished their crimes, the slaughter of the Danes. 1670
And now I promise thee that thou canst sleep
Care-free in Heorot with thy warrior host,
And each retainer of thy people, youths
And veterans, and that thou needst not fear
Death from that quarter for thy followers,
Prince of the Scyldings, as thou didst before.'

**The hilt of
the giant
sword is
given to
Hrothgar**

The golden hilt, the ancient work of giants,
To the old warrior, gray-haired battle chief,
In his own hand was given; the sldlled smith's work
Passed to the Danish prince's ownership 1680
After the demons' fall, when that fierce being
The enemy of God, guilty of murder,
And his dam also had surrendered life;

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL's DAM

To the possession of the very best
Of earthly kings between the seas it passed,
Of those who dealt out gifts in Danish lands.

Then Hrothgar spoke—he gazed upon the hilt,
The ancestral sword, on which was etched the start
Of the far struggle when the surging deep,
The deluge, carried off the race of giants;
They suffered sore, they were a hostile tribe
To the Eternal Lord; by flood of waters
The Ruler dealt them final retribution.
And also on the guard of shining gold
It was set down and told and truly marked
In lettering, for whom that sword had been
First forged, that choicest blade with twisted hilt
And serpent decoration. Then the sage,
The son of Healfdene spoke and all were still:
'Lo, as the old guardian of this realm, as one

Beowulf is Who furthers truth and right among his people,
Of memory long, I may declare this man
The best yet born. Beowulf, my friend,
Thy glory is extolled in distant lands
Among all peoples. Steadfastly preserve
Thy strength with wisdom. I shall fulfil to thee
My friendship, as we erst agreed; thou shalt
Become a lasting comfort to thy people,
A help to men.

Hefemod, the Not such was Heremod
antitype,

reverse of To the brave Scyldings, children of Ecgwela,
should be He grew not to their liking, but he brought
Death and destruction to the Danish people.
In anger he destroyed his table-comrades

BEOWULF

And bosom friends, until the famous **prince**
Went forth alone from human happiness.
Though mighty God had dowered him with the joy
Of strength, with power, and had exalted him
Above all men, yet in his spirit grew
Bloodthirsty thoughts; no rings unto the Danes
Gave he for honour's sake; joyless he lived 1720
So that he suffered sorrow for his doings
And long-drawn tribulation. Learn by this,
Lay hold on manly virtue; old in winters
I speak these words for thee.

Wondrous it is
To tell how mighty God with generous heart
Bestows sagacity upon mankind,
Domain and rank; He holds control of all.
The fortunate Sometimes he lets the inmost thoughts of a man
Of famous race dwell on his native land,
Grants him the wealth of earth in his own home, 1730
The warriors' fenced city to possess,
Making earth's regions and its broad dominions
Subject to him as well, that in his folly
He can himself conceive no end to it.
He lives in happiness; ill health and age
In no wise trouble him and tribulation
Gouds not his mind, nor hatred anywhere
Rouses hostility, but all the world
Bows to his will; misfortune he knows not,
Until within him a great arrogance 1740
Conscience Grows and increases. Then the guardian sleeps,
The shepherd of the soul; a sleep too deep,
Beset with danger, for a foe is near
Who shoots a bolt with treachery from his bow.

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDL/s DAM

and avarice
gains power
over the
man

Then is he struck in the breast beneath his guard—
He cannot shield himself—by the keen shaft,
The perverse promptings of a cursed being.
What long he owned, to him too little seems,
He covets fiercely, he bestows no more
iThe golden rings with honour, he forgets 1750
And heeds not fate, because of the great wealth
Which God, the King of Glory, granted him.
And at the latter end it comes to pass
The mortal body perishes, and doomed
To death decays; another man inherits
Who recklessly deals out the gold, the chief's
Long-hoarded wealth, and heeds the owner not|
Guard thee from such dark guilt, dear Beowulf,
Thou best of men, and choose the better part,
The everlasting gain; shun arrogance, 1760
Illustrious champion. For a while the flower
Of thy great strength endures, but soon 'twill chance
That sword or sickness rob thee of thy might,
Either the clutch of fire or ocean's surge,
Or the brand's onslaught or the javelin's flight,
Or dire old age; or else the light of the eyes
Shall fail and darken; but it comes to pass
That death, brave warrior, conquers thee at last.

Hrothgar
applies his
moral to
himself

Thus under heaven I ruled the mail-clad Danes
For half a hundred years and guarded them 1770
From many tribes throughout the world by force
Of arms, with spear and sword, until I counted
No single foe beneath the sky's expanse.
Lo, thus to me reverse of fortune came
In my own home, grief after joy, when Grendel
The ancient foe appeared as my assailant;

BEOWULF

Great grief of heart I bore continually
From that invasion. But thanks be to God,
The eternal Lord, I have lived long enough
That with mine eyes I may behold this head 1780
After the long drawn struggle stained with blood.
Now take thy seat, enjoy the feast's delights,
By battle glorified; when morning comes
Full many a treasure shall I share with thee.'

The Geat was glad at heart, he went at once
To find his seat, as the wise monarch bade.
Then once again as formerly the feast
Was fittingly prepared for the brave men
Who sat in hall. The shades of night descended
Dark o'er the people. All the veterans rose; 1790
The ancient, gray-haired Scylding monarch wished
To seek his bed. The Geatish prince, the brave
Soldier, desired exceedingly to rest;
Immediately the guest from lands afar,
By feat of arms fatigued, the chamberlain
Conducted forth, he who in courteous wise
Attended all a noble's needs, such as
Seamen are wont to have on such a day.

The chivalrous chief reposed; the palace towered
Spacious and bright with gold; the guest within 1800
Slept till the sable raven, blithe of heart,
Announced the joyous sun. Then came bright day
Striding across the darkness. Men-at-arms
Made haste; the chiefs were ready to return
To their own people; the adventurous guest
Desired far thence to seek his vessel out.

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDI/s DAM

**Beowulf
returns
Unferth's
sword**

The hero ordered Hrunting to be borne
To Ecglaf's son, bade him resume his sword,
The precious steel; he thanked him for the loan
And said he deemed the weapon excellent 181 o
And strong in battle; no wise censured he
The broadsword's edges, generous as he was.
And when the warriors were fully armed
Ready to leave, one prince, dear to the Danes,
Went to the high seat where the other sat;
The hero, brave in battle, greeted Hrothgar.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
'Now we seafaring men, come from afar,
Desire to make it known that we are fain
To seek out Hygelac. Here were we entertained 1820
To our best liking; thou hast used us well.
If I can earn by any means on earth,
By any deed of daring, lord of men,
More of thy heart's affection than I have
As yet deserved, forthwith shall I be ready.
If I should hear across the sea's expanse
That neighbouring peoples harass thee with war,
As formerly the hateful monsters did,
A thousand vassals will I bring to thee,
My warriors to thine aid. Of Hygelac, 183 o
Lord of the Geats and shepherd of his people,
I know, though he is young, by word and deed
He will encourage me to help thee well
And bring my lance, and succour of my strength,
To thy support, shouldst thou have need of men.

An invitation If Hrethric, the king's son, decides to come
son Unto the Geatish court, he there shall find
Plenty of friends; visiting foreign lands

BEOWULF

Is good for him who is himself of worth/

Hrothgar in answer spoke these words to him: 1840
'These sentiments doth the sagacious Lord
Put in thy mind; wiser I never heard
Uttered by any man so young in years;
Mighty thou art in strength, mature in mind,
Prudent in speech. If it should come to pass
That cruel warfare, illness or the sword,
Or the spear's point should carry off thy lord,
The son of Hrethel, shepherd of his people,
And thou art still alive, I hold it likely
That the Sea Geats could find no better man 1850
To choose as king and guardian of the wealth
Of warriors, if thou thy kinsman's realm
Wilt rule. Beloved Beowulf, the more
I know thy disposition doth it please me.
Thou hast accomplished that a mutual peace
Shall be between our peoples, the Spear Danes
And the Geat nation, and that strife shall cease,
The hostile deeds that erstwhile they performed,
That mutual presents pass, so long as I
Rule this wide kingdom; many a one the other 1860
Shall greet with gifts across the sea-gull's bath;
The ring-wrought ship shall bear across the sea
Offerings and gifts of love. I know the people
Firmly resolved alike towards friend and foe,
The senior leaders faultless every way.'

bids farewell The warriors' protector, Healfdene's son,
to Beowulf Gave him besides twelve jewels in the hall
And bade him seek in safety with the spoil
His own dear folk and speedily reach home.

THE FIGHT WITH GRENDL/s DAM

The king of lineage high, prince of the Scyldings, 1870
Then clasped the best of vassals round the neck
And kissed him, and the gray-haired monarch's tears
Flowed down. Ancient, experienced, both chances
Occurred to him, but more especially one,
That they thereafter never more should meet
High-souled in council. So dear to him the man
His strong emotion he might not restrain,
But in his bosom, deep in his heart strings,
A secret longing for the man beloved
Burned in his blood.

Beowulf, the champion 1880
Decked out with gold, across the greensward trod,
Rejoicing in his wealth; the ocean craft
Which rode at anchor tarried for her master.
And on the journey often were the gifts
Of Hrothgar praised. He was a matchless king,
Blameless in every way, till age which injures
Many deprived him of the joys of strength.

Part IV

BEOWULF'S HOMECOMING

The coast-guard sees them off with courtesy

THE COMPANY of youthful, dauntless men
Came to the sea; they wore their coats of mail,
Their woven panoply. The coastguard saw
The warriors' return, as he had seen
Their coming; he greeted not the guests with challenge
From the headland, but to meet them rode and said
The bright-armed soldiers to their vessel went
Assured of welcome from the Geatish people.
There on the strand the broad-beamed vessel lay
With ring-wrought prow, laden with war equipment,
With horses and with treasure; the mast towered
Over the precious things from Hrothgar's hoard.
Beowulf gave the guardian of the ship
A sword, mounted with gold, so that thereafter
He was more highly honoured through this treasure,
An heirloom, on the mead-bench.

The home

voyage

Forth went the ship

To plough the deep, and left the Danish land.
A spread of canvas by the mast was set,
Her sail held by its sheet; the timbers thundered;
No adverse wind across the waves delayed
The galley in her course; the bark drove on,
The well-wrought vessel skimmed with foamy neck
Forth o'er the sea, across the ocean currents,
Till they could sight the headlands of the Geats,

BEOWULF'S HOMECOMING

The well-known cliffs. The galley forward thrust,
Driven before the wind, until she grounded.
The harbour guard who by the sea afar
Had eagerly kept watch for the loved crew
For long, was promptly ready by the flood;
He moored the broad-beamed vessel to the shore
Fast by her anchor cables, lest the strength
Of the waves deprive them of their graceful craft.
He bade the nobles' wealth be brought ashore, 1920
Trappings and plated gold; nor far for them
To seek was their distributor of treasure;
For Hygelac, son of Hrethel, with his vassals
Dwelt there at home close by the ocean cliffs.

wife of The house was splendid, most renowned the king
In the high hall, and Hygd the very young
Was wise and sensible; although she had
Spent but few winters in the mighty stronghold,
Yet Haereth's daughter was not miserly,
Nor niggardly of gifts, of precious treasure, 1930
Unto the Geatish people.

Modthryth, the haughty
Queen of her people, practised dreadful crimes;
None of her own associates was so bold,
Except her destined lord, that he dared venture
To gaze upon her frankly with his eyes,
But knew the bonds of death, of purpose wrought,
Ordained for him; and following his arrest
Quickly thereafter was the sword appointed,
So that the damasked broadsword should decree
And tell his death. No lady's custom such 1940
For maid to practise, peerless though she be,

BEOWULF

That a peace-loving girl exact the life
Of a good man for a pretended insult;
But Offa, Hemming's kinsman, dealt with that.
Moreover, men across the tankards told
She wrought no further wrong upon the people,
No treacherous hate, since ever she was given,
A maid of noble lineage, gold adorned,
To the young champion; since with her sire's consent
The hall of Offa voyaging she sought 1950
Over the saffron sea. There afterwards
Upon the throne, famous for her good deeds,
Living she made good use of her life's fate

her husband And kept true love towards the warriors' prince,
Offa ' Who was the very best, as I heard tell,
Of all the race of men between the seas,
Of all mankind; for valiant with the spear
Offa was honoured far and wide for gifts
And for his prowess, and with wisdom ruled
His native land; of him was Eomer sprung 1960
To be the help of men, in battle strong,
Grandson of Garmund, of the line of Hemming.

seeks out The hero with his followers set out
Hygelac Over the sand to cross the level shore,
The broad sea beach. The sun, lamp of the world,
Shone moving towards the west. They took their way,
All armed they went to where they knew the brave
Young warrior king, guardian of fighting men,
Who caused the death of Ongentheow, dispensed
The rings within his castle. To Hygelac 1970
Beowulf's coming was at once made known,
That there the chief of captains, his war-comrade,
Entered alive and well within the precincts,

BEOWULF'S HOMECOMING

Returned to court unscathed by war's assault.
Then quickly was the hall arranged within,
As the king ordered, for the warrior guests.

When his liege lord with ceremonious speech
And formal words, he loyally had greeted,
He who survived the battle took his seat
Beside him, kin with kin. Haereth's daughter **1980**
Passed through the palace hall with jugs of mead,
Was gracious to the men and put the tankards
Into their hands. Hygelac began
To question his companion courteously
In the high hall, for interest prompted him,
What the adventures of the Geats had been:
'How fared ye on your way, dear Beowulf,
When thou didst suddenly resolve to seek
Warfare beyond the salt sea far away,
Battle in Heorot? Didst thou in aught **1990**
Relieve his well-known sufferings for Hrothgar,
The famous prince? I brooded over it
In care and grief of soul, nor trusted in
My dear man's venture; I besought thee long
Not to approach at all the murderous being,
But let the Danemen settle for themselves
Their war with Grendel. Thanks I give to God
That now I may behold thee safe and sound.'

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
'That great encounter, Hygelac my lord, **2000**
Is now well known to many of mankind,
What hour of struggle in that place befell
'Twixt Grendel and myself, where he inflicted
Full many griefs and endless miseries

BEOWULF

Upon **the** Scyldings; I avenged it all.
Therefore no one of Grendel's kin on earth
Dares to exult over that clash at dawn,
Not he that longest lives of that vile race
Engaged in crime.—As soon as I arrived
At the king's palace Hrothgar to salute,
When once he was acquainted with my purpose,
The famous son of Healfdene to the seat
Next his own sons assigned me. The assembly
Made merry; all my life I never saw
'Neath heaven's vault a greater revelry
Of men in hall. At times the illustrious queen,
Bond of the peace of nations, passed throughout
The hall, cheering the youths; often she gave
Some man a present, ere she took her seat.
At times before the veterans, Hrothgar's daughter
Bore the ale tankards to the chiefs in turn;
I heard her called Freawaru by those
Who sat in hall, where to the warriors

2010

2020

Hrothgar She the bossed chalice gave. Young, gold-adorned,
~~the feud~~ To Ingeld, Froda's gentle son, she is promised;
~~Heathobards~~ The Scylding's lord, the shepherd of his people
his daughter Arranged it and considers it good counsel,
to Ingeld That through the woman he the many death-feuds
And wars may settle.

doubts **the** After a prince's fall
~~success~~ of It seldom happens that the deadly spear
Reposes long, however fair the bride. J
He suggests Then It may cause displeasure to the prince
~~what may~~
~~easily happen,~~ Of the Heathobards, and each man of that people,
actually When Ingeld with the maid goes into hall
~~appen~~ And on her courtiers, nobly welcomed,

Heathobard treasures, tempered and ring-wrought,
 The old swords of their ancestors shine forth,
 Weapons their fathers wielded while they might,
 Until those trusty friends to their destruction
 In game of war they led with their own lives. 2040
 An old Then an old spearman mutters at his beer,
 incites a Who knows the brand and who remembers all
 Ivcngchk¹⁰ The slaughter of his friends, whose soul is fierce,
 father Begins from his heart's thought in sullen mood
 To make assay of a young champion's mind
 And waken enmity, and says these words:
 'Canst thou, my friend, the weapon recognise,
 The precious steel, which thine own father bore
 For the last time beneath his battle helm
 To combat, when the Danes, the hardy Scyldings, 205 o
 Slew him and held the battlefield, when after
 The death of heroes Withergyld was slain?
 And now the son of one among his slayers
 Comes into hall here flaunting his equipment,
 Boasts of the murder and parades the precious
 Treasure, which by rights thou shouldst possess.'
 Thus constantly he urges and reminds
 With bitter words, until there comes a time
 When the bride's vassal for his father's deeds
 Sleeps from the sword-stroke, red with his own blood, 2060
 His life being forfeit; and the other thence
 Escapes alive, knowing the country well.
 Then on both sides the oaths of warriors
 Are broken; whereon deadly enmity
 Rises in Ingeld and the love of wife
 Grows cooler for the anguish of his mind.
 Hence loyalty of the Heathobards, this great
 Alliance, deem I to the Danes unfair,

BEOWULF

And an unstable friendship.

Beowulf
recounts his
adventures

I shall tell,

Giver of treasure, more concerning Grendel, 2070
That thou mayst truly know how further chanced
The warriors' struggle. Once the gem of heaven
Sank underground the angry being came,
Terrible, fierce at eve, to seek us out
Where we secure inhabited the hall.
For Hondscio there, fore-doomed to violent death,
The fight was fatal and the girded champion
Was first to fall; for Grendel with his jaws
Became the slayer of the goodly youth,
Devoured the body of my dear retainer. 2080
Even so the murderer with bloody fangs
Bent on destruction, would not empty-handed
Make off again out of the golden hall;
But fierce in might made trial upon me,
Clutching with ready claw. A pouch depended
Ample and strange, firm wrought with curious bands;
And it was all ingeniously contrived
By demon's skill out of the pelts of dragons.
The daring evil-doer wished to thrust
Me, unoffending, into it and many 2090
Others as well, but it was not to be,
Because I then sprang upright in my wrath.
To tell how I repaid the people's foe
Quittance for every evil is too long;
I there, my prince, did honour by my deeds
Unto thy people. He escaped away
And for a little while enjoyed his life;
However, his right hand remained behind
In Heorot, and he far thence, despised

BEOWULF'S HOMECOMING

And sick at heart, on the lake floor sank down. **2100**
The ruler of the Danes, when morning came
And we our seats had taken for the feast,
With many presents and with plated gold
For mortal conflict made me recompense.
There was both tale and song; the Scylding prince
Old and experienced, told of far-off days;
At times a warrior woke the harp's delight,
The sounding wood; at times he told a tale
Tragic and true; at times the chivalrous king
Related in all truth a wondrous story; **2110**
At times again an ancient warrior
Bowed down with age began to mourn his youth
And battle strength; his heart within him swelled
When, old in winters, he recalled so much. 1

Thus in the building all the live-long day
We took our pleasure, till another night
Came to mankind. Forthwith the dam of Grendel
Was ready in her turn for grief's revenge,
Woeful she came; death and the enmity
Of the Geats had claimed her son. The monstrous woman
Avenged her child and daringly dispatched [2120
A fighting man. There the life passed away
From Aeschere, the wise old counsellor,
Nor might the Danish folk when morning came
Consume his lifeless body in the fire,
Nor lay the loved man on the funeral pile,
For in her enemy embrace she bore
His corse away beneath the mountain torrent.
It was the bitterest of griefs to Hrothgar
That long had fallen on the people's chief. **2130**
So then the prince implored me by thy life

BEOWULF

In grief of mind, that I my prowess show
In the tumultuous seas, venture my life,
And achieve fame; he promised me reward.
And there I found, as is well known, the fierce
And grisly guardian of the flood's abyss.
There for a while we struggled hand to hand;
The water surged with blood, for I cut off
With a great sword the head of Grendel's dam
In the deep cavern; hardly I escaped 2 140
Thence with my life; I was not doomed as yet;
And Healfdene's son, the warriors' shield, again
Presented me with many precious gifts.

The people's king practised a noble custom
And I in no way lacked for recompense,
The guerdon of my strength, for Healfdene's son
Bestowed the treasures on me at my choice
Which I will bring and with affection render
Unto thee, hero king. Henceforth on thee
All happiness depends; I have but few 2150
Near kinsmen, Hygelac, besides thyself.'

**Beowulf
gives his
treasures to
Hygelac**

He bade them bring the boar-wrought banner in,
The helm that towers in fight, the corselet gray
And splendid battle blade, then made this speech:
"This battle-garment Hrothgar, the wise prince,
Gave me; and in particular he bade
That first I tell thee of its history.
He said Heorogar, the king and chief
Of the Scyldings, long possessed it; none the less
He did not wish to give the coat of mail 2160
Unto his son, the valiant Heorowearð,
Dear though he was to him. Enjoy all well!"

BEOWULF'S HOMECOMING

He gives
Hygd the
famous
necklace,
1.1195 and
1. 2503

I heard that four swift horses followed close
Upon the war equipment, dapple gray
And all alike; he did his liege lord honour
With steeds and gifts. So should a kinsman do,
Not spread a net of malice for his kindred
With secret guile, nor set the snare of death
For his companions. To Hygelac, the brave
In battle, was his nephew very dear 2170
And each was mindful of the other's good.
I heard that he bestowed on Hygd the necklace,
The rare, wrought ornament which Wealhtheow,
The prince's daughter, gave him, with three steeds,
Graceful and gaily saddled; ever after
That jewel-giving was her breast adorned.

Beowulf's
youth had
been un-
promising

Thus did the son of Ecgtheow prove his worth,
The man renowned for battles and high deeds
Strove after fame; nor slew his hearth-companions
In their cups; his spirit was not fierce 2180
Though he, valiant in fight, the greatest strength
Of all mankind possessed, the generous gift
God granted him. He had been long despised,
For Wedermen did not account him brave,
Nor would the ruler of the Geats regard him
As worthy of much honour on the mead-bench;
They rather deemed the prince was indolent
And full of sloth. Compensation came
To the illustrious man for every trial.

Hygelac gives 2190
The shield of warriors, the courageous king,
Hrethel's Bade them bring in Hrethel's ancestral brand,
Inlaid with gold; among the Geats there was not
A greater treasure in the form of sword;

BEOWULF

Across the knees of Beowulf he laid it,
And gave him seven thousand hides of land,
A house and princely seat. Among that nation
Land was inherited by both of them,
Estate, ancestral home, but more by one,
The ample realm by him who was the ruler.

Part V

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

Beowulf
succeeds
Heardred,
son of
Hygelac, as
king of the
Geats

The dragon
begins his
raids

A fugitive
thrall by-
chance
discovered
the hoard;
he stole a
vessel

IN L A T E R days, in clash of war, thereafter 2 200
It came to pass—when Hygelac had fallen
And swords in war had brought about the death
Of Heardred beneath his covering shield;
When the stern fighting men, the warrior Swedes,
Had sought him out among his victor people
And pressed Hereric's nephew hard in battle—
That the broad kingdom passed into the hands
Of Beowulf. Full well he governed it
For fifty winters, till—the king being old,
A ruler full of years—a certain dragon 2210
In the dark nights began his persecutions,
Who on the upland heath guarded his hoard
And lofty barrow; all unknown to men
A passage led beneath. Some man who found
His way close by the heathen hoard went in
And a great jewelled cup his hand removed;
Nor did the beast with patience bear the loss,
Although he was defrauded while asleep
By the thief's cunning; that he was enraged
The nation and the neighbouring folk discovered. 2220

Not of intent, nor his own will, did he
Who wronged him, violate the dragon's hoard;
But of extreme necessity some man's thrall
Fled from the punishment of the sons of men,

BEOWULF

In need of shelter, and the guilty man
Forced his way in. But once he gazed therein
A deadly terror on the intruder fell;
Nevertheless the wretched fugitive
Through whom the feud began, escaped the monster,
Swift in his going when the danger pressed him. 2230
The precious cup he took.

**The story of
the hoard**

Many such gems

Of olden times were in that cavern house,
Just as a certain man in days of yore,
Full of his memories, concealed them there,
A precious store, the mighty heritage
Of high born men. Death had claimed them all

**The last
owner
conceals the
treasure**

In former times and he the latest left,
Alone of all his people's well tried host,
The lord, mourning his friends, like fate expected,
That but a little while he might enjoy
The ancient wealth. A finished funeral mound
Stood on the plain close by the ocean waves
Beside the cliff, new made and hard of access;
And there within the owner of the rings
Carried the richest portion of the hoard

2240

**He mourns
his lost
friends**

And of the beaten gold. Few words he spoke:
'Hold thou, oh earth, now men no longer may
The wealth of princes. Lo, from thee the brave
Won it long since; but now hath death in battle,
A cruel end borne off each man of my race
Who hath laid down this life and who had shared
Our household joy. None have I who may wield
The sword, or polish the wrought golden cup,
The precious goblet; the host elsewhere departed.
The tempered helmet overlaid with gold

2250

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

Shall of its plates be reft; the servants sleep
Who should have burnished up the masks of war;
So too the mail-shirt which in fight withstood
The slash of swords across the splitting shields
Follows its lord to dust. Nor can the corselet **2260**
Pass onward with the war chief, by the side
Of heroes. There is no sweet sound of harp,
No joy of music; no good falcon flies
Across the hall, nor does the swift steed paw
The castle courtyard. Death by violence
Hath done away with many a living creature.'

Thus he, the last of all, his grief lamented
In sombre mood and loitered, reft of joy
By day and night, until the surge of death
The dragon **2270** Seized on his heart. The ancient twilight foe,
appropriates Thre dragon, evil smooth, who burning seeks
The hollow barrows out and flies by night
In fire enveloped, found the splendid hoard
Standing unguarded; him the country folk
Dread greatly. He is wont to seek for wealth
Beneath the earth, where, winters old, he guards
The heathen gold, nor profits aught thereby.

Thus for three hundred years the people's foe
Over that mighty treasure house held sway
Beneath the earth, until that very man **2280**
Enraged his mind; unto his lord he bore
The golden vessel and besought his master
For his forgiveness. Thus the hoard was found,
The store of jewels plundered, the petition
Granted the wretched man. For the first time
The king then saw men's ancient craftsmanship.

The thrall
buys his
pardon with
the cup

BEOWULF

discovers Then when the dragon woke, the feud began;
his loss He charged along the rock and stern of heart
Picked up the foeman's trail, who had advanced
With secret guile, too near the dragon's head. 2290
Thus one not doomed, whom the Almighty's grace
Protects, may easily survive misfortunes
And exile. The guardian of the hoard along
The ground searched eagerly; he wished to find
The man who sorely used him in his sleep;
Inflamed and fierce, all round outside the mound
He ranged repeatedly, though no man was
In the waste lands, yet fain was he for strife,
The work of battle; then to the mound returned he
And sought his chalice; he had soon discovered 2300
That with the gold and with the splendid treasures
Some man had tampered. The guardian of the gold
Waited impatiently till evening came;
The warden of the barrow was enraged,
The beast was fain to be avenged with fire
For the dear goblet. Then, as the serpent wished,
The day departed; long beside the mound
He would not wait, but sallied forth with flames,
Full armed with fire. Terrible that beginning
Was for the country folk, and soon became 2310
A grievous ending for their generous king.

The dragon
raids the
countryside

The creature then began to spit forth flames
And burn the royal hall; to men's dismay
The conflagration rose; the hateful flier
Desired to leave no living thing behind.
The serpent's warfare, his relentless malice
Was widely evident both near and far—
How the marauder hated and ill-used

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

The Geatish people. He hastened ere the day
Back to his hoard again, his secret mansion. 23 20
The country folk with fire he had encompassed,
With flame and burning, trusting to his cave,
His walls and prowess, but his hope deceived him.

In Beowulf's
absence it
destroys
his home

Then the disaster was at once made known
For very truth to Beowulf, that his home,
Finest of dwellings, royal throne of the Geats,
Had fallen in surging flames. It caused the king
Sorrow of spirit and the greatest heartbreak;
The wise prince feared he had offended gravely
The Ruler, the eternal Lord, against 2330
The ancient law; his heart within him seethed
With dark forebodings, which was not his wont.

The fiery dragon had laid waste in flames
The people's stronghold, the surrounding land
And coast without; for that the warrior king,
Prince of the Weders, planned his punishment.
The chief of warriors and lord of men
Commanded that a splendid shield, all iron,
Be fashioned for him, since full well he knew
That timber, lindenwood against the fire 23 40
Could not avail him. The time-honoured prince
Was to abide his end of mortal days
And earthly life together with the reptile,
Though it had long possessed the hoarded wealth.
The mighty prince disdained to seek in fight
The roving flier with a host of men,
An ample band; he feared not strife with him,
Nor recked he of the dragon's valour aught,
His strength and prowess, for he had survived

BEOWULF

2350

Many a fight before, defying danger,

And many a clash of war, since he, the rich

Beowulf's In victories, had cleansed the hall of Hrothgar

former deeds And crushed to death in strife the Grendel kin

how he came

to be king Of hateful race.

The battle

in which

Of hand-to-hand encounters

.Hygelac fell, That was not least where Hygelac was slain.

When the Geat king, his people's friend and lord,

The son of Hrethel, in the assault of war

Died by the thirsty swords in Frisian lands,

Felled by the steel. Thence Beowulf escaped

By his own strength; he wrought a feat of swimming, 23 60

For thirty coats of mail upon his arm

He held, when all alone the sea he entered.

The Hetware who against him forward bore

Their shields might not in any wise exult

In that engagement; from that warrior bold

But few escaped to seek their homes again.

Then Ecgtheow's son, alone and in distress,

Swam o'er the seas's expanse back to his people,

not accept Where Hygd to him treasure and kingdom offered

the kingship, And wealth and throne; she did not trust a boy 23 70

That he against a foreign foe could guard

The ancestral seat, now Hygelac was dead.

Nevertheless the luckless people could not

Prevail upon the prince by any means

That he Heardred's monarch should become,

Or take the royal power upon himself;

Hygelac's But he before men with advice sustained him,

Heardred? Kindly with honour due, till he grew older

on the throne And ruled the Weder-Geats.

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

The feud with ^{T h e} banished sons
 Of Ohthere sought Heardred o'er the sea; 2380
 Eadgils, sons They had rebelled against the Swedish king,
 take refuge' Their uncle Onela, the famous prince,
 with the Geats Best of the sea -kings who distributed
 Heardred is Treasure in Sweden. That caused Heardred's end,
 Onela pursues When Hygelac's son, for hospitality,
 nephew'sio^{US} Received his death wound from the broadsword's stroke;
 And Onela, son of Ongentheow returned
 To seek his home after Heardred fell;
 But letting Beowulf possess the throne
 And rule the Geats; he was a good king. 2390

In after days he thought on retribution
 For his king's fall and he became a friend
 Beowulf To Eadgils in his exile, with an army
 avenges Heardred's Supported Ohthere's son, with men and weapons,
 helping O'er the far sea; who then avenged his exile
 fgaSonek With a g rim raid and slew the Swedish king.

Thus had the son of Ecgtheow survived
 Each enmity, each dangerous conflict, each
 Valorous deed, until that very day
 When he against the serpent must contend. 2400
 The monarch of the Geats, inflamed by wrath,
 Went with eleven men to view the dragon;
 He now had learned whence rose that bitter feud,
 Men's dire affliction. Into his possession
 The famous cup came through the finder's hand,
 Who in the party was the thirteenth man,
 The miserable thrall who caused the start
 Of conflict and must guide them to the place,
 Humiliated. He went against his will

BEOWULF

To where he knew this earth-abode to be, 2410
This subterranean cavern near the waves
And strife of waters, which was full within
Of gems and rings. The monstrous sentinel,
The ancient eager fighter, underground
Guarded the golden wealth; no easy prize
Was that for any man to carry off.

The doughty king, the Geatmen's generous friend,
Sat on the headland while he bade farewell
To his hearth-comrades; his spirit was perturbed,
Restless, anticipating death; the fate 2420
Was very near which should assail the sage
And seek the treasury of his soul and sever
Life from the body, however long it was
The prince's spirit had been clothed in flesh.

Beowulf recalls his youth Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:

"Many an onslaught I survived in youth,
Many an hour of strife; I mind it all.
Seven winters was I when the people's lord,
He was The rich prince, took me at my father's hands
adopted by Hrethel, king Fostered and kept me; Hrethel the king bestowed 2430
his grand ' Treasure and feast on me, remembering kin.
father Not ehile he lived, was I, his man in hall,
Less loved of him than any of his sons,
Herebeald and Haethcyn, or mine own Hygelac.
The eldest on a bed of violent death
Was by his brother's deed unseemly laid,
Haethcyn When Haethcyn with an arrow from his bow
accidentally shot his elder Struck him who was his well-beloved friend;
He missed his mark and shot his kinsman dead,
One brother slew with bloody shaft the other. 2440

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

The deed
could not be
avenged

Inexpiable that collision, great in guilt,
 Exhausting to the soul, and none the less
 The young prince unavenged must lose his life.
 'Tis piteous also for an aged man
 That he should live to see his young son swing
 Upon the gallows. Then may he make lament,
 A mournful death-song, when his offspring hangs,
 A feast for ravens, and he, old and wise,
 Can work for him no help of any kind.
 He is reminded of his child's departure 245 o
 Constantly every day, nor does he hope
 To live to see within his castle halls
 Another heir, when one through death's compulsion
 Has had experience of tribulation.
 Heartbroken he beholds his son's apartment,
 The empty banquet hall, the resting place
 Draughty and reft of joy; the horsemen sleep,
 The warriors in their graves; no strain of harp
 Is there, nor mirth at home, as was of old.
 He seeks his couch, one for the other utters 2460
 His lamentation; to him seem all too large
 Acres and homestead. Thus too the Weders' lord
 Suffered a swelling sorrow of the heart
 For Herebeald, since not by any means
 Could he exact the penalty from the slayer;
 Nor might he even persecute the warrior
 With retribution, though he loved him not.
 Then through the sorrow which too sorely smote him
 He quitted human joy and chose God's glory;
 He left his sons cities and lands, as doth 2470
 A prosperous man, when he departed life.

Hrethel died
of grief and
Haethen
succeeded

Conflict and crime there was 'twixt Swedes and Geats

The feud
with the
Swedes

O'er the wide water, mutual enmity
And cruel warfare after Hrethel died,
And Ongentheow's sons themselves became
Daring and warlike and would not maintain
Friendship across the sea, but often wrought

The Swedes
raid the
Geats

Treacherous carnage round Hreosnaburg.
For feud and dreadful deed my loyal kinsmen
Exacted their revenge, as well was known,
Till one of them paid for it with his life,
A cruel bargain, for the battle proved

2480

The Geats
attack the
Swedes,
Haethcyn
is slain and
next day
Ongentheow,
king of the
Swedes.
1. 2922

Fatal to Haethcyn, monarch of the Geats.
I heard how with the sword's edge Hygelac
Next day avenged his brother on the slayer,
When Ongentheow sought out Eofor,
The battle-helmet split, the veteran Swede
Death-wounded fell; Eofor's hand remembered
Battles enough, nor faltered from the stroke.

Hygelac
succeeds

As fate allowed me with my shining sword
In battle I discharged to Hygelac
The gifts he gave me, for he granted me
Domain and happy home. No need had he
That he among the Spear Danes or the Gifthas
Or in the Swedish realm should have to seek
A lesser warrior, to reward with fee,
For ever before them in the host would I
First in the vanguard be and so always
Shall I do battle, while the sword endures

2490

Beowulf
avenges the
death of
Hygelac on
Daeghrefn,
the Frankish
standard
bearer, see
1. 2354

That soon and late hath often served me well,
Since in my prowess I became the slayer
Of Daeghrefn, the champion of the Franks.
No wise might he the jewelled necklace take,
The breast adornment, to the Frisian king,

2500

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

For in the fight the standard-bearer fell,
The warrior in his might; nor was the blade
His bane, but my fierce grapple crushed his body,
The throbbing of his heart. Now the brand's edge,
Hand and hard sword must battle for the hoard.'

Beowulf spoke these words, he made his boast 2510
For the last time-'Many a fight I dared
In youth; now old, the guardian of my people,
I yet will seek this combat and achieve
A deed of glory, if the evil-doer
Will come to meet me from his cavern hall.'/

For the last time he greeted each of his
Retainers, hardy warriors, his own dear
Companions: 'No sword would I bear, no weapon
Against the serpent, if I only knew
How else I might in honour grapple with 2520
The monster, as I did of old with Grendel;
But I expect the heat of deadly fire,
Poison and burning breath; wherefore I wear
Mail-shirt and shield. To the mound's sentinel
I will not yield one pace, but at the cave
As fate, ruler of every man, decrees
It shall befall us. I am resolved in mind
And so refrain from boast against the dragon.
Await upon the hill, ye armed men,
Clad in your panoply, which of us two 2530
After the mortal combat better may
Endure his wounds. This is no task for you,
Nor in the power of man save mine alone
To measure strength against the beast and do
A deed of valour. I shall win the gold

BEOWULF

By courage, or else war, a cruel death
By violence, shall carry off your sovereign.

The fight with the dragon Then with his shield and stem beneath his helm

The daring warrior rose; in hauberk clad
To the cliffs' foot he went, in one man's strength 2540

He put his trust, not such the coward's way.
Then he who had survived full many a fight
And press of war, when troops of footmen clashed,
Supreme in manly virtue, saw at the cave

The dragon's breath Stone arches standing and a swirl surge forth
Thence from the barrow; the fiery exhalation
Was hot with deadly flames, nor near the hoard
Could any man survive for long unburned
Within the passage, for the dragon's fire.

The lord of the Weder-Geats, since he was wroth 2550
phase of the out of his bosom gave his challenge forth;
combat Dauntless he shouted and the sound went in

To echo clear beneath the hoary rock.
Hate was aroused; the guardian of the hoard
Knew a man's voice; there was no further time
To treat for peace. At once the monster's breath
A burning, hostile vapour issued forth
From out the cavern and the earth resounded.
The man who faced the cave, lord of the Geats,
Swung round his shield to meet the dreadful foe; 2560
And then the heart of the coiled beast was moved
To seek for conflict. The brave warrior king
Had drawn his broadsword, his ancestral blade
Keen in the edges; in each mortal foe
A terror of the other one arose.
Behind his towering shield the prince of comrades

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

Intrepid took his stand and waited, armed,
 As swift the serpent drew himself together.
 The fiery beast came charging in his coils,
 Rushing upon his fate. A shorter time 2570
 Than he could wish for did the shield protect
 His life and limb for the illustrious prince,
 And there for the first time he must endure
 Occasion when to him fate did not grant
 Triumph in war. His hand the lord of the Geats
 Lifted on high, he struck with the great brand,
 Terrible, glittering, but the shining blade
 Turned on the scales, and bit uncertainly,
 Just when the people's king, by danger pressed,
 Had need of it. Then the mound's sentinel 2580
 After the mighty stroke in savage temper
 Cast deadly fire around; the battle-flames
 Spread far and wide. The generous prince of the Geats
 Boasted no glorious conquest, since his sword,
 The bare blade, failed in conflict, as a steel
 Time-honoured should not do. For Ecgtheow's
 Illustrious son it was no easy thing
 To be prepared to quit this pleasant earth,
 And an abode elsewhere against his will
 Perforce inhabit, yet thus must every man 2590
 Surrender mortal days.

followers had Nor was it long
 deserted him Till once again the dreadful foemen met.
 fight began The guard of the hoard took heart, his breast again
 Swelled with his breath; he who long ruled his people
 Suffered sore straits encompassed by the fire.
 Yet his companions, sons of nobles, failed
 To hold their ground about him in a band

BEOWULF

Courageously, but fled into the wood
And saved their lives. In one of them the soul
Surged with remorse; nothing can ever change
The tie of blood for him who knows his duty. 2600

wiglaf, son His name was wiglaf, son of Weohstan,
cousin of ' A splendid soldier and a Scylfling noble,
Beowulf Kinsman of Aelfhere; his liege lord he saw
Suffer the blaze beneath his battle helm.
Then he remembered the estate he gave him,
The prosperous homestead of the Waegmundings,
Each privilege, just as his father held them,
He could not then forbear, his hand caught up
His yellow shield, he drew his ancient sword, 2610
Relic of Eanmund, Ohthere's son,
Among mankind; for Weohstan had been
That friendless exile's slayer with the steel
In battle and to Onela had taken
The glittering helm, the corselet wrought of rings
And huge old sword; Onela granted him
His nephew's war accoutrements, his ready
Battle-gear—he did not speak of feud,
Though Weohstan his brother's son had slain.
For many years Weohstan kept the equipment, 2620
The sword and corselet, till his son was able
To do heroic deeds like his old sire;
Then countless arms of war bequeathed he him
Among the Geats, when, old in his departure,
He quitted life. The first time now it was
For the young champion that he must endure
The battle onslaught by his dear lord's side.
His heart quailed not, nor did his father's sword
Falter in battle, as the serpent found

The history
of Wiglaf's
sword

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

When once they had joined issue with each other. 2630

Wiglaf, whose soul was troubled, spoke these words,
Many reproofs he uttered to his comrades:

while wiglaf I' *call to mind* the time when we drank mead,
tries to rally When to our lord who gave us rich equipment

companions We made our promise in the drinking hall,
That we would recompense him for the war-gear,
Helmets and tempered swords, if such a strait
As this befell him. Therefore from the host
Of his own will he chose us for this venture,

Adjudged us fit for fame, and gave me arms, 2640

Because he deemed us daring warriors

And dauntless fighting men, although our lord,

The shepherd of his people, meant to do

This work of glory for us all alone,

Since he of men the greatest deeds hath done

And desperate exploits. Now the day is come

When our liege lord hath need of stalwart men

And of brave warriors; forward let us go

To help our battle chief, though hot it be

And fierce the dreadful glow. For me, God knows 2650

I had much liefer that the blaze enfold

My mortal body with my generous lord.

Methinks it is not seemly that we bear

Homewards our shields again, unless we can

First slay the enemy and defend the life

Of the Weders' prince. I know full well it was

No fashion of old days that he alone

Of all the Geatish power should suffer pain

And fall in the engagement. Sword and helm,

Corselet and hauberk shall we share in common. 2660

BEOWULF

wiglaf goes Through the deadly fumes he strode, he bore
assistance His arms to his lord's aid, few words he spoke:
'Beloved Beowulf, play well thy part,
As thou didst vow of yore in youthful days
That thou wouldst never let thy glory fade
So long as thou didst live. Now, steadfast prince,
Renowned for deeds, must thou thy life defend
With all thy power. I come to succour thee.'

Thesecond Upon these words the furious dragon came,
The dire, malicious enemy, aglow
With surging flames, a second time to seek
His foes, the hateful men. The waves of fire
Consumed his shield all but the rim, his corselet
Could give the youthful warrior no protection,
Rather the young man quickly stooped beneath
His kinsman's shield, when once his own was by
The blaze destroyed. Again the warrior king,
Remembering fame, struck with tremendous force
With his great brand, so that with violence driven
It struck the dragon's head; Naegling broke,
The sword of Beowulf, ancient and chased,
Failed in the conflict. It was not his fortune
That blades of iron in the fight could be
Of help to him; too powerful was that hand
That tested with its stroke, as I heard tell,
Each sword too highly, when to fight he bore
A weapon wondrous strong; nor gained he aught.

The third The dread fire-drake, the enemy of men,
phase A third time on the combat fixed his purpose,
Fiery and fierce in war, when the chance offered
He charged the valiant king and with sharp fangs

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

Caught him about the neck; he was bedaubed
With his heart's gore and blood in waves gushed out.

In the extremity of the people's king,
As I heard tell, the kindred chief made known
His courage, strength and nerve, as was his nature.
He aimed not at the head, though as he helped
His kinsman the brave soldier's hand was burned,
The armed warrior struck the horrid foe
A little lower, so that the sword, gold-wrought 2700
And bright sank in, whereon the fire at once
Began to dwindle. Then the king himself,
Recovering his senses, drew the dagger,
Sharp and keen edged, that on his mail he wore;
The Weders' lord ripped up the serpent's belly.
They slew the foe—his life elsewhere departed—
And they, the kindred princes, there between them
Had killed him. Such should a man, a soldier
Be in the hour of need. For the prince it was
His latest hour of triumph, of achievement 2710
Through his own deeds.

Then began the wound
Which the earth-dwelling dragon had inflicted
To burn and swell and shortly he discovered
That deep within his breast the poison surged
With deadly potency. Then went the prince
And wise in thought sat down upon a seat
Beside the wall; he saw the work of giants,
How the primaeval cavern hall within
Held a stone vault on uprights firmly based.
And there with his own hands the warrior 2720
Exceeding good with water washed his lord,

BEOWULF

The famous prince, with blood of battle stained,
Worn out with fighting, and unloosed his helm.

Beowulf spoke these words—hurt as he was,
Wounded to death, he spoke; he knew full well
That he his span of life and earthly joy
Had now fulfilled; the number of his days
Was all accomplished, death exceeding near—
'Now would I wish to give a son of mine
My panoply of war, if any heir 2730
Of mine own blood had been vouchsafed to me
To follow me. This people have I ruled
For fifty winters, nor was there a king
Of any one of the surrounding peoples
Who dared attack me with his fighting men
Or threaten me with warfare. I abode
My destiny on earth, held well mine own,
Sought not malicious enmity, nor swore
Any false oaths. Though sick of mortal wounds,
In all these things I may rejoice, because 2740
The Ruler of mankind need not reproach me
With murder of my kindred, when my life
Escapes my body. Go thou quickly now,
Beloved Wiglaf, to inspect the hoard
Under the gray rock, now the serpent lies
And sleeps sore wounded, of his treasure reft.
Be now in haste that I the ancient wealth,
The gold hoard, may behold, may truly see
The brilliant jewels; that I may surrender
My life, my people whom I long have ruled, 2750
More easily because of this rich prize.'

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

Imerfthe Then straightway on this speech, as I heard tell,
 cavcm Weohstan's son obeyed his wounded lord,
 Sore hurt, and strode wearing his coat of mail,
 His woven hauberk, 'neath the barrow's roof.
 The brave young vassal then triumphant saw
 When to the place he came, much precious stones
 And gold, glinting upon the ground, a marvel
 Along the wall, and saw the lair of the beast,
 The ancient fly-by-night, and pitchers stand 2760
 Uncleansed, the decoration fallen from them,
 Vessels of former ages; many a helm
 There was, rusty and old, and many bracelets
 Cunningly twisted. Treasure, hidden gold
 Can easily get the better of a man,
 Whoever he may be who buries it.
 Also he saw a gold-wrought banner hang
 High o'er the hoard, of finest workmanship,
 Woven by skilful hands, from which the light
 Fell back, so that he might perceive the floor 2770
 And look upon the jewels. Of the serpent
 There was no vestige, for the sword had claimed him.

Within the mound, the ancient work of giants,
That man then robbed the hoard, as I heard tell;
He piled at will the tankards and the dishes
Against his breast; the standard too he took,
Brightest of emblems. For the blade of steel,
The ancient monarch's falchion had destroyed
Him who had long been guardian of the treasure,
And hot upon the hoard's account had borne 2780
With him the terror of the fire, at midnight
Fiercely surging, till he died the death.
Urged by the prize the messenger was in haste,

BEOWULF

Impatient to return; a fear impelled
The adventurer to know if he should find
The Weders' prince alive upon the mead
Where he had left him, weary unto death.
Bearing the wealth, he found the famous prince,
His master there all bloody, at the end
Of life, and he began again to cast 2790
Water upon him, till the point of speech
Pierced through his thoughts.

The ancient hero king

Gazed in distress upon the gold and spoke:
T'or all these treasures which I here behold
I speak with words of thankfulness to God,
The King of Glory, the eternal Lord,
Because before the day of my departure
I was allowed to win them for my people.
Now that for hoard of treasures I have sold
My old life-span, unto my people's need 2800
Attend thou still; I cannot long remain.
Bid famous warriors build a splendid barrow
Upon the headland, after the funeral fire,
That shall as a remembrance to my people
On Hronesness rear itself up on high,
So that seafaring men, who drive their ships
Afar across the darkness of the flood
BeowulPs Barrow may hereafter call it.'
The brave-souled king took from about his neck
The golden circlet, to his thane he gave it, 2810
To the young warrior, his gold-wrought helm,
His ring and corselet, bade him enjoy them well;
'Thou art the latest left of all our house
Of the Waegmundings; fate hath taken all

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

My kindred, princes in their bravery
To destined doom; I must go after them.'
Such was the old king's final utterance
Of his heart's thoughts, ere he the pyre accepted,
The hot, fierce flames, and from his breast his soul
Went forth to seek the glory of the just. 2820

Part VI

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

AND SO with sorrow it had come to pass
JL\ For the young man that on the ground he saw
The most beloved pitifully fare
At life's extremity. The murderer, too,
The terrible dragon, lay of life bereft,
By ruin overcome. Nor longer might
The crooked serpent own the hoarded rings,
For blades of iron, hard and battle keen,
The hammer's heritage, had borne him off,
So that the far-flying monster, stilled by ^{^fC}Und[^] 1530
Crashed to the ground close by the ^{treasure} house.
No more ^{across} the ^s ^h hours
Flying he went, nor proud in his possessions
Made manifest his presence, but to earth
He fell, through the war chieftain's handiwork.
In truth, as I heard tell, in all the land
No mighty man of valour had succeeded,
Though he were bold enough for any deed,
In battling with the poisonous foeman's breath
Or touching with his hands the treasury, 2840
Who found the guard inhabiting the mound
Upon the watch. On Beowulf in death
Many a princely jewel was bestowed;
Each of the two had reached the latter end
Of transitory life.

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

It was not long
 Until the cowards from the wood came forth,
 The craven traitors, ten of them together,
 Who in their liege lord's great necessity
 Had dared not to do battle with their spears;
 But now ashamed they came, where the old king 2850
 Lay dead, wearing their shields and coats of mail,
 And gazed at Wiglaf. Weary the warrior sat
 By his lord's shoulder and with water strove
 To rouse him, but in naught did he succeed.
 Not upon earth, though greatly he desired it,
 Might he detain the life within his chief,
 Nor influence in aught the Almighty's doom;
 God's ordinance had jurisdiction then
 With power o'er every man, as still it has.

Then was a fierce address from the young man 2860
 Ready enough for such as had lost courage.
 Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke these words,
 Sad, sick at heart he looked on those he loved not:

Wiglaf 'Lo, who desires to speak the truth may say
 the cowards That the liege lord who gave his gifts to you,
 The very war equipment that ye wear—
 When on the banquet bench he often gave
 Corselet and helm to those who sat in hall,
 The prince to his retainers, such as were
 The bravest far or near that he could find,— 2870
 Had merely thrown away the battle gear
 Disastrously, once strife upon him came.
 Of his war comrades might the people's king
 Not boast; yet God, Ruler of Victories,
 Granted that he avenged himself alone
 With his own sword, when he had need of valour.

BEOWULF

Little protection for his life could I
Give him in fight yet none the less I went,
According to my power, to help my kinsman;
When with my sword I struck the deadly foe 2880
He grew the weaker and the fire less strongly
Surged from his head. Too few supporters thronged
Around their prince, when that ill hour befell him.
The grant of treasure and the gift of sword
All joy of home and happiness shall cease
Towards your kindred; of your family
Each man shall go deprived of privilege
As holder of his land, when once the princes
Hear from afar the rumour of your flight
And your inglorious action. Death is better 2890
For every warrior than a life of shame.'

Beowulf's death is made known Then bade he that the combat be made known
In the fort, high on the steep ridge, where the band
Of captains, shielded warriors, sad at heart
Waited all morning long in expectation
Of either chance, the death or the return
Of the beloved man. He who rode up
The bluff about the tidings was not silent,
But faithfully before them all he said:
'Now is the good king of the Weder people, 2900
The lord of the Geats, fast on his bed of death,
Rests on the couch of war by the serpents deed;
Beside him lies the deadly enemy
Sick unto death from dagger wounds; his sword
In no wise could inflict an injury
Upon the monster. Over Beowulf
Wiglaf, the son of Weohstan, is sitting,
One chief above the other lifeless one

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

The death watch in distress of soul is keeping
Over both friend and foe.

The past Now must our people 2910
Expect the hour of strife, once far and wide
The feud with Among the Franks and Frisians the king's fall
the Franks Is spread abroad The stern feud with the Hugas
H YELAC'S was first b^eg^{un} when Hygelac went sailing
fatal exped- With an armada to the Frisian land,
the Franks. With force of arms the Hetware there opposed him
and 2501: And by superior strength soon brought to pass
That Hygelac, the armed chief, must die,
Among his troop he fell; the prince no booty
Gave to his army. Ever since to us 2920
The Merovingian's favour is denied.

the Swedes with No rdo I loo^k for an y p^{ea}ce o^r faith
From the Swede people, for 'twas widely known
That Ongentheow of his life deprived
Haethcyn, Hrethel's son, at Ravenswood,
first success- When in their pride the people of the Geats
ful, is killed in b^attle first attacked the warrior Swedes.
when Ongen-
theow rescues Ohthere's father, Ongentheow, old
And terrible at once returned the assault,
Cut down the raiding chief, rescued his wife, 2930
His ancient consort of her gold bereft,
Mother of Ohthere and of Onela;
And then pursued his mortal enemies
Until with difficulty they escaped
Without a leader into Ravenswood.
With a great force he there besieged the remnant,
Exhausted by their wounds; the live-long night
He threatened oft the wretched band with woe,

	Said that next morning with the edge of the sword He would destroy them, some on the gallows tree	2940
Hygelac	A ^s ^s P ^{ort} for birds. With break of day once more comes in time Hope was forthcoming for the gloomy hearted remnant of Once they made out the trumpets and the horns his brother's Qf clamour as the king	
	Came following up the army of his people. The bloody track of Swedes and Geats all round, The mortal strife of men, was plain to see How they joined battle with each other there. Then the experienced leader, Ongentheow,	
The Swedes retreat to their stronghold	Withdrew a little way, anxious and wise, Retreated on his stronghold with his vassals; He had heard tell of Hygelac's battle prowess, The proud king's might; he did not trust his own Resistance to repel the ocean raiders, To guard the gold, the children and the women, Against the seamen; so the old chief withdrew	2950
The Geats capture the Swedish fortress	Within the rampart. Then pursuit was made After the Swedish people; Hygelac's banners Forward across the place of refuge charged After the Geats had stormed the citadel.	2960
Eofor and Wulf attack Ongentheow	And there the gray-haired leader, Ongentheow, Was by the broadswords' edges brought to bay, So that the Swedish king was forced to take His doom at Eofor's hands. Angrily Wulf, The son of Wonred, struck him with his weapon That from the blow the life-stream from his veins Sprang forth beneath his hair. The veteran Swede Was dauntless even so, and swift repaid The deadly onslaught with a worse exchange, As swift the monarch wheeled upon his foe. Nor could the gallant son of Wonred deal	2970

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

The ancient warrior a counterblow,
 For he had cleft the helmet on Wulf's head
 So that blood-boltered to his knees he sank
 And fell to earth; but yet he was not doomed,
 For he recovered, though the wound had hurt him.

Eofor, valiant thane of Hygelac,
 When Wulf his brother fell, with his broad blade,

Ongentheow The huge old sword, shattered the giant helm
 Over the sheltering shield; then fell the king, 2980
 The people's shepherd to the life was struck.

Many there were who quickly lifted Wulf
 And bound his wound, once it was given the Geats
 To hold possession of the battlefield.

Meanwhile one warrior the other plundered;
 Eofor stripped the mail from Ongentheow,
 His tempered sword, rich hiked, and his helmet.
 He bore the old king's arms to Hygelac,

rewards the The war gear here i y e d and fairly promised
 two brothers Rewards in public; and he kept his word; 2990

When he reached home again the lord of the Geats,
 The son of Hrethel, recompensed the onslaught
 To Eofor and Wulf with costly treasures,
 Gave each a hundred thousand hides of land,
 And twisted rings—no man on earth could slight
 His gifts—because they wrought those famous deeds,
 And gave as pledge of grace to Eofor
 His only daughter to adorn his home.

forebodin s It: i stliat feud that hostility,
 Men's deadly enmity, as I expect, 3000
 That among us the Swedish folk will seek
 As soon as they hear tell that our protector
 Is lifeless, he who previously defended

BEOWULF

Treasure and kingdom and the warriors bold,
After the death of heroes, from our foes,
Advanced the people's good and furthermore
Performed high deeds.

Quickest now is best
For us to look upon our sovereign there,
That we may carry him who gave us rings
Upon the funeral way. No paltry share 3010
Shall melt beside the brave, for there is hoard
Of gold and untold treasure sternly bought,
And rings, now at the last with his own life
Secured; these shall the burning brand devour,
The fire enfold—never shall warrior bear
A jewel in remembrance, nor fair lady
Wear on her neck an ornament of rings.
Rather in mourning, reft of gold, not once
But often shall he tread a land of exile,
Now that the captain laughter, joy and mirth 3020
Hath laid aside. Therefore shall many a spear,
Cold in the morning, in the grasp be seized
And raised in hand, nor shall the sound of harp
Waken the warrior, but the swarthy raven
Greedy above the dead, shall gossip much
And tell the eagle how he fared at meat
When, matched against the wolf, he robbed the slain.'

The Geats
follow the
messenger

Thus the bold warrior the bearer was
Of evil tidings, nothing false he told
Of facts or words. The company all arose; 3030
Unhappily they went with flowing tears
Under the Eagle's cliff to see the marvel.
Lifeless upon the shore, laid on his bed

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

Of death, they found him who in former times
Gave them the rings; the final day was reached
For the good chief, whereon the warrior king,
Prince of the Weders, died an unwonted death.
Already they had seen the creature strange,
The horrid serpent stretched upon the field
Before their eyes; it was the fiery dragon 3040
Terrible, glittering and scorched with flame;
Upon his resting place he was in length
Full fifty feet, who ruled the joyous air
During the night and downward swept again
To seek his den; now he was fast in death,
And had enjoyed his last of earthen caverns.
The pitchers and the tankards by him stood,
The dishes and the precious broadswords lay,
Rusty and eaten through, as they had lain
There in earth's bosom for a thousand years; 3050
Moreover was that vast inheritance,
The gold of men of yore, held by a spell,
So that no man upon that treasure house
Might lay his hands, unless that God Himself,
True King of victories Who guardian is
Of men, let whom He would unseal the hoard,
Even such a one as fitting seemed to Him.

The dragon Then it was clear the venture had not prospered
for his For him who wrongly kept the hoard concealed
theft Within the cave. The guardian beast had slain 3060
One and no more; and then the feud had been
Grimly avenged. Strange is it in what place
A valiant warrior may meet the end
Of destined life, once he no longer may
Dwell with his kindred in the drinking hall.

BEOWULF

'Twas so with Beowulf when the barrow's guard
And cruel strife he sought; himself he knew not
Through what his parting from the world should come,
For the famed princes who there laid the gold
Had solemnly declared that till the day 3070
Of doom the man who should disturb that place
Guilty of sin should be, snared in the curse,
Fast in the bonds of death, punished with evil.
Yet Beowulf had ne'er before beheld
From close at hand the owner's rich bequest.

takes Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke these words:
command oft for the sake of one shall many a chief
Suffer distress, as hath befallen us.
We could not offer our beloved lord,
The kingdom's shepherd, any good advice, 3080
Not to approach the guardian of the gold,
But let him lie where he so long had been
And dwell in his abode till the world's end.
He held to his high destiny. Sternly won
The treasure is revealed; too hard a lot
Was that which hither drew the people's king.
I was within there and inspected all
The chamber's treasures, as my task befell,
An errand given in no kind circumstance
To go beneath the mound. In haste I seized 3090
A great and mighty burden in my arms
Of hoarded treasures, hither to my king
I bore them out. He was as yet alive,
Conscious and clear; the old man in distress
Said many things and told me to salute you:
He bade you build, where e'er his pyre shall stand,
A lofty mound, great and renowned, as fits

BEOWULF'S OBSEQUIES

Your dear lord's deeds, for he of all men was
 The most illustrious warrior in the world,
 Whilst he his rich dominions might enjoy. 3100
 Now let us for a second time make haste
 To see and fetch the mass of curious gems,
 The marvel in the cavern; I will guide you
 So that ye shall behold at hand, broad gold
 And rings in plenty. Let the bier be ready,
 Forthwith prepared, when we come forth again,
 And let us then our master bear away,
 The man beloved, where for long he shall
 Continue in the keeping of the Lord.'

The funeral Weohstan's son, the warrior brave in fight, 311 o
 pyre

Gave the command to many fighting men
 And heads of houses, that they, the people's chiefs,
 Should bring from far wood for the funeral pyre
 For the good king: 'Now shall the blaze devour,
 The gloomy flame consume the prince of men,
 Who many a time survived the iron shower,
 When by the bowstring urged the storm of arrows
 Shot o'er the wall of shields, when feather-winged,
 The shaft its duty did and sped the point.'

And then the thoughtful son of Weohstan 3120
 Called seven of the king's retainers forth
 Together from the guard, the very best,
 And with them went beneath the hostile roof;
 One of the warriors who went in front
 Carried a burning torchlight in his hand.
 No lot was drawn who should that hoard despoil
 Since, all unguarded, every part of it
 Abiding in the hall the men beheld

BEOWULF

Lying mouldering; small scruple any one
Felt as he carried out the precious treasure 3130
Without delay; the dragon too, the serpent,
They heaved over the cliff, they let the sea
Receive, the flood enfold, the treasure's keeper.
Then the wrought gold, untold in quantity
Was loaded on a wain; the prince, the gray
Old battle chief, was borne to Hronesness.

The Geatish people there prepared for him
Upon the ground a noble funeral pyre,
Hung round with helmets and with battle shields
And with bright corselets, as he had desired; 3140
And in the midst the mourning warriors laid
The famous prince, their well-beloved lord.
There on the hill the soldiers set alight
The greatest funeral fire; the wood smoke rose
Dark o'er the blaze, the roaring fire ascended
Mingled with lamentation, till, the swirl
Of wind subsiding, red-hot at the core
It had destroyed the body. Sad at heart
They told their grief of soul, their liege lord's death;
Likewise his ancient wife with braided hair, 3150
Grief-stricken raised a song of lamentation
For Beowulf; repeatedly she said
That sore she dreaded evil days would come,
Much carnage, war's alarms, captivity
And ignominy. Heaven swallowed up the smoke.

Beowulf's barrow

The people of the Geats erected there
Upon the cliff, a barrow high and broad,
Plain to be seen by mariners afar,
And in ten days they built the monument

BEOWULF S OBSEQUIES

Of the war hero; round the fire's remains
A chamber they erected, such as men
Most skilful could most worthily devise.
Within the barrow gold and gems they laid
And all such ornaments as doughty men
Already from the treasury had taken;
They let the earth possess the wealth of earls,
Gold in the ground, where now again it lies
To men as useless as it was before.

Then round about the mound in number twelve,
Brave warriors, the sons of princes, rode;
It was their part to mourn, bewail their king,
Recite an elegy and acclaim the man;
They praised his prowess, and his mighty deeds
They fittingly extolled, as right it is
A man should honour his kind lord in words
And love him from his heart, when he must forth
And from his mortal body be set free.
Thus did the people of the Geats lament,
His hearth-companions, for their prince's fall;
themeis They said that of all earthly kings he was
stated finally Gentlest of men and kindest unto all,
To men most gracious and most keen for praise.

Analysis of the Poem

i.

THE POEM begins with an account of the founding of the Danish royal house by a mythical ancestor, Scyld Scefing, and in a moment we are in the full flow of the narrative. Right here at the start we meet one of the most thrilling of literary themes, familiar from the Arthurian legends and particularly from Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*. It is the story of the mysterious child who comes from the sea to rule over a people in need and who, full of years and glory, departs once more out to sea. 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

The poet passes rapidly to Scyld's great-grandson, Hrothgar, the second of three brothers and the fifth king of his house, and the main story now opens with the glories of Hrothgar's reign and the building of Heorot. Heorot is the finest royal hall in the world, built by Hrothgar for the administration of his realm, for feasting and the giving of treasure. The structure of Anglo-Saxon society, centering in the person of the king, will become clear as the poem is read. His followers are bound to him by the closest ties of loyalty and duty and his obligations to his people are equally clear. The giving of treasure in reward of service is one of his chief functions. He is Chancellor of the Exchequer, as well as Commander-in-Chief and Lord Chief Justice, so that 'treasure-giver' or 'ring-giver' becomes a synonym for 'king'. The Saxon hall, it should be added, was a large oblong building, resembling a barn, with a door at each end. The fire burned in the middle and the high seat, where the king and his chief men sat, was half way down the side. A

BEOWULF

secondary high seat faced the king's. The most important people had separate sleeping places, but the rest spread their beds on the floor of the hall at night. Heorot is the perfect mead-hall of Saxon ideals.

In the proud moment of completion, a deadly danger threatens Heorot. While the 'scop', or minstrel, celebrates the event by singing the story of the Creation, Grendel, the outcast creature, descendant of Cain, hears the revelry with great resentment, and attacks and ravages the hall. All monsters, giants and other horrible people are descendants of Cain, the crime of fratricide being no less frightful to the Anglo-Saxons than it is to us. '

Grendel's murderous raids continue and for twelve years he persecutes Hrothgar, so that the hall cannot be used after dark. Then Beowulf, far away in Geatland, hears of this lamentable state of affairs and sets out with fourteen companions for the Danish court. On landing they are challenged by the coast-guard, who rides down to meet them with surprising boldness. Beowulf makes a formal reply explaining that he is a vassal of Hygelac, king of the Geats, and the son of Ecgtheow, a famous noble, and that he has come to investigate the matter of Grendel. The coast-guard, satisfied of their good intentions, sets them on their way to Heorot with his blessing.

Challenged once more by Wulfgar, one of the king's ministers, Beowulf makes known his name, which is here mentioned for the first time. Hrothgar receives the Geats, and it appears that he had once befriended Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow the Waegmunding, when he had to fly from his own country on account of a feud, and Hrothgar had also paid the 'wergeld', or compensation, on Ecgtheow's behalf.

A feast in Heorot follows with the drinking of mead and the telling of stories. A curious character called Unferth asks

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Beowulf if he is the same man who was beaten at swimming by a certain Breca, and provokes Beowulf to a retort, in which he gives an account of the exploit. Like most incidents connected with Beowulf, the basis of this is mythological, but it is brought into the narrative with vivid reality and treated with such realistic detail that it altogether loses its fairy-tale character, except for the impossible time factor. This mythic exaggeration is rare in the poem and is confined to feats of swimming, but more than ordinary powers are not enjoyed by Beowulf alone, for Breca is a good second string.) The scene in the hall closes with the appearance of the queen, Wealhtheow, who ceremonially offers the wine cup to her husband and his distinguished guest, and more polite speeches follow. The formalities of life as the author knew them are clearly shown.

The fall of night, heralding the approach of Grendel, puts an end to a revelry which Heorot has not heard for a long time. Hrothgar retires and preparations are made. Beowulf makes one more brief and formal boast before he lies down with his warriors in the hall. Grendel's approach is then described in three remarkable paragraphs. There is no exaggeration here. Indeed, the monsters are always handled with wonderful skill and restraint; they are never defined, something is always left to the imagination. Grendel is nowhere described except as being bigger than a man; the horror of him is conveyed by the effect he produces on others. He smashes in the doors of Heorot and advances on his prey. Before Beowulf can realise what he is about, he has devoured Hondscio, one of the Geats. The hero then grapples with him and wild uproar follows. Beowulf's companions rush to his aid with swords, but to these the monster is invulnerable, a fact for which we have been prepared by Beowulf's boast in forswearing arms against him. So the

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bitter wrestling match continues until Beowulf succeeds in tearing off Grendel's arm and shoulder and the monster flees, mortally injured, to die in the moorland fens.

This victory is followed by great rejoicings and one of the bards tells the story of such another fight in which Sigemund, son of Waels, had slain a dragon and makes references to other deeds in which his nephew Fitela was his comrade in arms/it is like a faint far-off whisper of Beowulf's own doom in the midst of his first triumph.! Heremod, an earlier Danish king, is also mentioned, but as a contrast, as a man of whom great things had been expected, but who had failed his people and had died in ignominy. Thanks are poured on Beowulf, but he seems a little riled that he has not succeeded in killing the enemy outright. The hall of Heorot is cleared up after the battle, another feast is given, and magnificent gifts are heaped on Beowulf by Hrothgar. The most important item of this entertainment for us is the story of the Fight at Finnsburg told by a minstrel. This moving tale seems to have been a great favourite and the poet only gives a summary of it, assuming the familiarity of his readers with the facts. Even with the aid of a fragment discovered in the library of Lambeth Palace, which seems to tell the same story, it is hard to follow. But it is stark history crashing through the cultural background of Saxon England. Hildeburg, a Danish princess, is married to Finn the Frisian. Her brother Hnsef, and his Danish followers, on a visit to Finn, find themselves attacked in the hall, which they defend. The circumstances and origins of the fight are obscure and we do not know who began it. Hnsef, the Danish leader, is killed and also Hildeburg's own son, his nephew. Hengest the Dane, upon whom the leadership of his side then devolves, finds himself forced to make terms with the enemies who have slain his lord. A truce is concluded and the dead of both

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sides are burned together. As it is winter, the Danes cannot go home, but with the return of spring the intolerable situation reaches breaking point, the Danes fall upon Finn in vengeance for their lord, slay him, burn Finnsburg and take the wretched Hildeburg home to her own people. It is a most dramatic and graphic summary, in which the chief interest is psychological, lying in the emotional conflict in the unhappy woman and in the collision of duties which tear Hengest. Circumstances have forced him into an impossible position; he is torn between the duty of keeping his oath to his foe and that, equally sacred, of taking vengeance for his leader.

So the evening wears away in tales of old wars, in revelry and more praises, and in the giving of gifts. One of these is the famous necklace, which occasions the first mention of Hygelac's fatal raid (A.D. 516) when he sailed up the Rhine and plundered the Frisians, the Franks and the Hetware. According to the poem, Hygelac was killed by the Frankish standard-bearer, Daeghrefn, who was in turn slain by Beowulf to avenge his king. But all this still lies in the future.

ii.

After the banquet, in due course, the company go to bed, confident in their safety from further persecution. But another foe comes upon them before the dawn. Grendel's mother, a nameless, vague, unshapen horror, comes to avenge her son upon his slayer—a proper action even in a monster—and takes as her victim, Aeschere, the dearest of Hrothgar's thanes. Beowulf is not present, having been given a private apartment for the night, as befits his rank.

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The hag-demon flees when the rest of the sleepers awake and seize their arms. She escapes with her prey and leaves the old king heartbroken over this personal loss. Beowulf is sent for and hears the sad tale. This passage contains the famous description of the haunted mere and Beowulf's noble exhortation to his host. He undertakes to follow the monster, and they set off and track her to the dreadful mere, where they find the head of Aeschere upon the bank. Beowulf girds on his armour and Unferth, son of Ecglaf, far from bearing him any ill will for their previous argument, lends him a very special sword. With another brief and formal boast, such as was expected from him, he plunges in, and makes a prolonged dive through the beast-infested waters, to be seized by Grendel's dam and to be dragged into her very den, where he is once more free of the water. Beowulf's dive must not be thought of as taking him to the bottom of the mere. The fight does not take place under water, but in a cavern behind the waterfall under which he has dived.

In the fierce battle which follows the sword fails him, not through any fault, but because, as before, no ordinary steel can prevail against such an enemy, and until Beowulf notices the giant sword hanging on the wall he is unable to defeat the witch. After killing her he finds the body of Grendel and cuts off the head as a trophy, or, as Bruce's friends would have said, 'to mak sikker', but with disastrous results to the marvellous weapon, for Grendel's blood melts the blade.

Beowulf dives back again and finds his faithful thanes awaiting him, though despairing of ever seeing him again. They return to Heorot and are received with joy. In a semi-philosophical discourse, Hrothgar gives Beowulf much singularly good advice, which is just as sound to-day as it

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was in the poet's time. Heremod is again mentioned in contrast, as an example to be shunned, and we gather that he had been guilty of murder and had suffered a lonely and tragic exile in consequence. The following morning Hrothgar gives Beowulf further presents and after they have taken farewell of one another, Beowulf leaves for home.

The scene now shifts to the Geatish court and we see Beowulf among his own people. Hygelac is at the height of his power and has recently married Hygd, daughter of Haereth. Hygd's praises are sung, as were Beowulf's earlier, by means of drawing a contrast and the poet tells the interesting story of Modthryth, wife of Offa, who was probably a king of the Angles towards the end of the fourth century. Beowulf, made welcome by Hygelac, gives him an account of his doings and ends with a piece of gossip from the Danish court which is new to us, namely, that Hrothgar has betrothed his daughter, Freawaru, to Ingeld, king of the Heathobards, with a view to putting an end to the feud between the Danes and the Heathobards which had previously caused the deaths of Ingeld's father, Froda, and Hrothgar's father, Healfdene. Beowulf doubts the success of any such attempt to settle a feud by an alliance of marriage and puts forward, as a hypothetical case, an indication of what actually happened later. The young bride has in her retinue a Danish follower who is wearing, not very tactfully, the arms plundered in earlier warfare from a Heathobard warrior. These are immediately recognized by an old spearman, a tough, embittered veteran with a long memory, who points out his father's arms to the son of the slain warrior (probably Withergyld) and inflames him to the sacred duty of revenge. This means that the truce is broken and another marriage wrecked on tribal enmities.

Beowulf then presents his Danish gifts to Hygelac,

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Hygelac gives Beowulf King Hrethel's sword in return, and the first part of the poem, about two-thirds of the whole, comes to an end.

iii.

The second part of the poem makes a big jump to the end of Beowulf's life and when it opens we find that he has already been king of the Geats himself for some time. The poet says for fifty years, but this is just an epic manner of speaking. The intervening history is told to us by the same method as before, by means of recollections, references and conversations. The poem here is packed with history and we find ourselves faced by the dynasties, feuds and battles of a new set of peoples, chief among them the Geats and the Swedes.

It will be as well to collect all this scattered information here and tell the story of the Geat royal house, and the circumstances by which Beowulf has come to the throne. His father, Ecgtheow, was a famous warrior of the house of the Waegmundings, and his mother was daughter of Hrethel, king of the Geats. Beowulf himself was brought to Hrethel's court as a child of seven and there reared. King Hrethel, his grandfather, had three sons, Herebeald, Haethcyn, and "my own Hygelac", as Beowulf calls his youngest uncle, for long his beloved lord, who must have been fairly near to him in age. The eldest son, Herebeald, was accidentally killed while hunting by his brother, Haethcyn, and this tragic occurrence weighed so much on the old king's mind that he died of grief, for the circumstances of the death naturally deprived him of the possibility of vengeance.

Haethcyn, the unintentional fratricide, succeeded, but not for long. He and his younger brother, Hygelac, undertook

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a raid on the Swedes in payment for previous aggression, and the historic battle of Ravenswood, about A.D. 505, was the result. It is described again later in the poem with vivid detail. Haethcyn was killed and also the renowned king of the Swedes, Ongentheow. Hygelac, wresting victory from defeat, returned to reign over the Geats. This was the position at the time of Beowulf's visit to Heorot.

Much has happened in the time that has passed since the slaying of the monsters among the Danes. Hygelac, accompanied by Beowulf had made his historic raid on the Franks, which can be dated A.D. 516. This, beginning successfully, ended in complete disaster. Hygelac was slain and Beowulf, after nameless deeds of prowess, barely escaped with his life by swimming, at which we know he was hard to beat. The crown of the Geats was offered to him by the queen, Hygd, as the greatest champion of the nation, but he refused it, rather than usurp the throne from his young cousin Heardred, Hygelac's son. He became regent for Heardred, until the boy was old enough to rule. All went well until another phase of the Swedish wars arrived, much complicated by internal faction in the Swedish royal house. Onela, son of the terrible Ongentheow, seized the Swedish throne upon the death of his brother, Ohthere, and drove out his nephews Eanmund and Eadgils, the sons of Ohthere, who then took refuge with the Geats. Onela followed them and attacked the Geats. Eanmund and his host, Heardred, were both killed in the battle, after which Onela was content to return to Sweden and Beowulf succeeded to the throne as king, being now the nearest heir. The Geats subsequently avenged Heardred's death by helping the survivor, Eadgils, against Onela, who in his turn was slain.

This brings us to the time at which the second part of the poem begins, when Beowulf has already had a long and

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peaceful reign. We are now told about the dragon and the circumstances which lead up to the plundering of his hoard, followed by his vengeful attack upon the Geats. The reality of the dragon is remarkable. He has all the usual appurtenances: wings, fiery breath, and horny scales, and above all a hoard of gold to watch over, but he is so convincingly portrayed that we have no choice but to take him as much for granted as did the people of the seventh century, to whom he was a recognized specimen of natural history. Perhaps his occasional startling resemblance to a fast bombing aeroplane helps to make him real to the modern mind.

The brooding tragedy of the poem, which now develops with increasing power, is emphasized by the elegiac description of the origin of the gold hoard. An old man, the last of a great race of warriors, buries their accumulated wealth in a funeral barrow, surviving from much earlier times, which has never been used. These grave mounds containing a chamber reached by a passage, are still to be seen in the British Isles and are generally assigned to the end of the Stone Age. This wealth the dragon subsequently finds and proceeds to brood over. Some man, nameless and obscure, who has been guilty of a crime and is anxious to make reparation to his master, as the law of those days allowed, accidentally stumbles on the hoard and, the dragon being asleep, manages to steal a valuable vessel. The dragon, discovering the theft, lays waste the countryside, burning the homesteads of the inhabitants by night and even Beowulf's own royal hall, from which he is absent. Beowulf then determines to free his people from the scourge, as he had freed the Danes from Grendel and his dam.

Having decided to attack the dragon in his lair, Beowulf has a special iron shield made, for he knows that the yellow linden wood, the usual material of shields, will be no

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protection against its fiery breath.' He takes leave of the thanes who have accompanied him to the mound, including among his reminiscences some of the events already reviewed, and with a last formal boast, as on the other occasions, he advances to the fight. The fiery breath of the dragon issuing from the cave before he appears is very realistic.

In the first encounter Beowulf corses off badly, for his sword will not bite on the scales and he finds but little protection behind his shield from the flames. The thanes, watching from afar off, are filled with terror and with the exception of one, seek refuge in a wood. Now this desertion of their lord by his followers is very remarkable, and not what we might expect. Professor Klaeber suggests that it is influenced by the flight of the disciples from the Garden. Its artistic effect is considerable; it shows the unmanning and terrorizing power of the unearthly foe, it emphasizes Beowulf's heroism, and throws into relief the behaviour of Wiglaf, who with a courage second only to his master's, emerges as the perfect thane and qualifier for taking over the kingship after Beowulf's death. The digression which gives Wiglaf's antecedents and his exhortation to his companions is really a cast back in the story and must be regarded as happening concurrently with the first phase of the dragon fight. Wiglaf is also a Waegmunding and Beowulf's cousin, but his father, Weohstan, evidently had Swedish connections, for he was fighting under Onela when he acquired the sword which his son now uses.

A desperate encounter follows. Beowulf breaks his sword and is wounded, Wiglaf is scorched but succeeds in driving his blade into the dragon's body below the scales and Beowulf finishes him off with a long dagger.

The excitement which has hitherto held the interest and postponed the impending tragedy now ebbs into reaction

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and increasing gloom. Beowulf is fatally wounded and, knowing his time has come, speaks to Wiglaf in words which recall Arthur's farewell to Bedivere in Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*. Indeed, the whole scene must strike us as remarkably similar, as we watch Wiglaf, the 'latest left of all his knights/ doing the errands of the dying king and receiving his final charges. He fetches some of the treasure for the king to see and Beowulf commits his people to his care and gives instructions for his own burial.

Now that all is safely over, the cowards arrive to find Wiglaf broken-hearted by the body of their lord and to be thoroughly abused by him when he becomes aware of their presence. A messenger is sent back with the news, and in announcing to the Geats the death of their king he indulges in gloomy reminiscences, chiefly concerning the Swedish wars, and gives an account of the battle of Ravenswood, here mentioned for the second time and in more detail. The Swedes had raided the Geats and fought them near Hreosnaburg, after which the brothers, Haethcyn and Hygelac, made an expedition of revenge. In an initial success they carried off plunder and prisoners, including the Swedish queen, but Ongentheow counter-attacked, rescued his wife, killed the Geatish king, Haethcyn, and drove the remnant of the Geat army to take refuge in Ravenswood, where they were besieged all night by the enraged old king. Unexpected help came at dawn when Hygelac arrived to rescue them. The Swedes were completely overcome and their stronghold was captured. Ongentheow himself was killed by two brothers, Wulf and Eofor, and Hygelac, returning in triumph, became king of the Geats.

The common crowd then begins to collect and to gaze on the dead dragon and marvel at him and admire the vast treasure, upon which a curse is said to lie and which was

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accursed for them, in that it had cost them the life of their famous king. The poem closes with one last notable scene of Beowulf's funeral pyre and the building of the barrow over it.

TABLE

SHOWING THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF

BEOWULF

WITH APPROXIMATE DATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH

PROFESSOR KLAEBER'S RECONSTRUCTION

***Tabk showing the Historical Background of .BEOWULF with approximate dates ,
in accordance with Professor Klaeber's reconstruction***

HEATHOBARDS

DANES or Scyldings

Scyld Scefig

Beowa

Healfdene

Heorogar
|
Heoroweard

Hrothgar
= Wealhtheow

Halga Yrse(?)=Onela
|
Hrothulf

Froda

Ingdd = Freawaru Hrethric Hrotnmund

493 Froda, k. of the Heathobards, slays Healfdene, k. of the Danes and Hrothgar succeeds his father.

494 Hrothgar and Halga make war of revenge on the Heathobards and Froda is killed.

500

505

BEOWULF visits Heorot and slays Grendel and his darn.

510

Ingeld, k. of the Heathobards, marries Freawaru, d. of Hrothgar, but the feud breaks out again and the Heathobards attack the Danes and burn Heorot but are repulsed.

515

520

Hrothgar dies.
Hrothulf slays Hrethric and seizes the throne.

525

530

*Table showing the Historical Background of BEOWULF with approximate dates,
in accordance with Professor Klaeber's reconstruction*

GEATS or Wcders	Waegmundings	SWEDES
Hrethei	Waegmund	
Herebeald	Haethcyn Hygelac	1. Ecgtheow Weohstan
-Hygd	(sister of Hereric) BEOWULF Wiglaf	Ongentheow
Wonred		Ohthere Onela = Yrsc
Wulf Eoifor = dau.	Heardred	Eanmund Eadgils
		A.D.
BEOWULF comes to HretheFs court as a boy. Haethcyn accidentally shoots Herebeald. Hrethei dies and Haethcyn succeeds to the throne.		497
		500
The Geats are raided by the Swedes near Hreosnaburg. Haethcyn and Hygelac attack the Swedes, at first successfully; later, attacked by Ongentheow, Haethcyn is slain. Hygelac rescues remnant from Ravenswood, defeats Swedes. Ongentheow slain. Hygelac becomes king. Ohthere becomes king of the Swedes.		505
		310
Hygelac sails up Rhine, raids Frisians and Franks. Rear-guard overwhelmed. Hygelac slain by Daeghrefn. BEO-WULF then slays Daeghrefn and escapes by swimming. Heardred king with BEOWULF as regent.		515 516
		520
		525
Ohthere dies. Onela seizes throne and drives out Eanmund and Eadgils who take refuge with Geats. Onela invades the Geats and Heardred and Eanmund are killed. BEOWULF succeeds to the throne. Eadgils, helped by the Geats, slays Onela and becomes King of the Swedes.		530

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