

## From Beowulf: A New Verse Translation by Seamus Heaney

### *Introduction of the Danes*

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

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,  
A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
As his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coats  
Beyond the whale-road had to yield to him 10  
And begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
A cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
By God to that nation. He knew what they had **tholed\***,  
The long times and troubles they'd come through  
Without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
The glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:  
Beow's name was known through the north  
and a young prince must be prudent like that, 20  
Giving freely while his father lives  
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts  
steadfast companions will stand by him  
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired  
is the path to power among people everywhere. *\*tholed- suffered*

Shield was still thriving when his time came  
and crossed over into the Lord's Keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them  
when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
they shouldered him out to the sea's flood, 30  
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbor,  
Ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.  
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
Laid out by the mast, amidships,  
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
I never heard before of a ship so well furbished  
With battle tackle, bladed weapons  
And coats of mail. The massed treasure 40  
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
on out into the ocean's sway.  
They decked his body no less bountifully  
With offerings than those first ones did  
Who cast him away when he was a child  
And launched him alone out over the waves.  
And they set a gold standard up  
High above his head and let him drift  
To wind and tide, bewailing him  
And mourning their loss. No man can tell, 50  
No wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
Knows for certain who salvaged that load.

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

The fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.  
 Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
 Young followers, a force that grew  
 To be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
 To hall-building: he handed down orders  
 For men to work on a great mead-hall  
 Meant to be a wonder of the world forever;                   70  
 It would be his throne-room and there he would dispense  
 His God-given goods to young and old—  
 But not the common land or people's lives.  
 Far and wide through the world, I have heard,  
 Orders for the work to adorn that wallstead  
 Were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,  
 Finished and ready, in full view,  
 The hall of halls. Heorot was the name  
 He settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings                   80  
 And torques at the table. The hall towered,

Its gables wide and high and awaiting  
 A barbarous burning. That doom abided,  
 But in time it would come: the killer instinct  
 Unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.

***Grendel Attacks Herot***

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

So times were pleasant for the people there  
 Until finally one, a fiend out of hell,                   100  
 Began to work his evil in the world.  
 Grendel was the name of this grim demon  
 Haunting the marches, marauding round the heath  
 And the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time  
 In misery among the banished monsters,  
 Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed  
 And condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel  
 The Eternal Lord had exacted a price:

Cain got no good from committing that murder  
 Because the Almighty mad him anathema 110  
 And out of the curse of this exile there sprang  
 Ogres and elves and evil phantoms  
 And the giants too who stove with God  
 Time and gain until He gave them their reward.

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out  
 For the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes  
 Were settling into it after their drink,  
 And there he came upon them, a company of the best,  
 Asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain  
 And human sorrow. Suddenly then 120  
 The God-cursed brute was creating havoc:  
 Greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men  
 From their resting places and rushed to his lair,  
 Flushed up and inflamed from the raid,  
 Blundering back with the butchered corpses.

Then as dawn brightened and the day broke  
 Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:  
 Their wassail was over, they wept to heaven  
 And mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,  
 The storied leader, sat stricken and helpless, 130  
 Humiliated by the loss of his guard,  
 Bewildered and stunned, staring aghast  
 At the demon's trail, in deep distress.  
 He was numb with grief, but got no respite  
 For one night later merciless Grendel  
 Struck again with more gruesome murders.

Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.  
 It was easy then to meet with a man  
 Shifting himself to a safer distance  
 To bed in the **bothies\***, for who could be blind 140  
 To the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness  
 Of that hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped  
 Kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

*\* bothies- small huts or cottages*

So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,  
 One against all, until the greatest house  
 In the world stood empty , a deserted wallstead.  
 For twelve winters, seasons of woe,  
 The lord of the Shildings suffered under  
 His load of sorrow; and so, before long,  
 The news was known over the whole world. 150  
 Sad **lays\*** were sung about the beset king,  
 The vicious raids and ravages of Grendel,  
 His long and unrelenting feud,  
 Nothing but war; how he would never  
 Parley or make peace with any Dane  
 Nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.  
 No counselor could ever expect  
 Fair reparation from those rabid hands.  
 All were endangered; young and old  
 Were hunted down by that dark death-shadow 160  
 Who lurked and swooped in the long nights  
 On the misty moors; nobody knows  
 Where these **reavers\*** from hell roam on their errands.

*\*lays- stories about how things are*

*\*reavers- raiders or pillagers*

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

These were hard times, heart-breaking 170  
 For the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counselors,  
 The highest in the land, would lend advice,  
 Plotting how best the bold defenders  
 Might resist and beat off sudden attacks.  
 Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
 Offerings to idols, swore oaths  
 That the killer of souls might come to their aid  
 And save the people. That was their way,  
 Their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
 They remembered hell. The Almighty Judge 180  
 Of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,  
 Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,  
 Was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he  
 Who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul  
 In the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;  
 He has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he  
 Who after death can approach the Lord  
 And find friendship in the Father's embrace.

So that trouble time continued, woe  
 That never stopped, steady affliction 190

For Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.  
 There was panic after dark, people endured  
 Raids in the night, riven\* by the terror.

\*riven- to be split or torn apart

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane  
 Was on home ground, over in Geatland.  
 There was no one else like him alive.  
 In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,  
 High-born and powerful. He ordered a boat  
 That would ply the waves. He announced his plan:  
 To sail the swan's road and search out that king, 200  
 The famous prince who needed defenders.  
 Nobody tried to keep him from going,  
 No elder denied him, dear as he was to them.  
 Instead, they inspected omens and spurred  
 His ambition to go, whilst he moved about  
 Like the leader he was, enlisting men,  
 The best he could find; with fourteen others  
 The warrior boarded the boat as captain,  
 A canny pilot along coast and currents.

### ***A hero arrives***

*(Beowulf and his men traveled over a calm sea from Geatland to Denmark, and as they disembark, a Danish coast guard questions them- especially why they have come dressed for battle. The Geat leader answers... )*

The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
 The distinguished one delivered this answer:  
 "We belong by birth to the Geat people 260  
 and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.

In his day, my father was a famous man,  
 A noble warrior-lord name Ecgtheow.  
 He outlasted many a long winter  
 And went on his way. All over the world  
 Men wise in counsel continue to remember him.  
 We come in good faith to find your lord  
 And nation's shield, the son of Halfdane.  
 Give us the right advice and direction.  
 We have arrived here on a great errand  
 To the lord of the Danes, and I believe therefore  
 There should be nothing hidden or withheld between us.  
 So tell us if what we have heard is true  
 About this threat, whatever it is,  
 This danger abroad in the dark nights,  
 This corpse-maker mongering death  
 In the Shildings' country. I come to proffer  
 My wholehearted help and counsel.  
 I can show the wise Hrothgar a way  
 To defeat his enemy and find respite—  
 If any repose is to reach him, ever.  
 I can calm the turmoil and terror in his mind.  
 Otherwise, he must endure woes  
 And live with grief for as long as his hall  
 Stands at the horizon, on its high ground.”

270

280

*(The coast guard recognizes the nobility in the Geat leader, and readily leads them to Heorot. The Geat soldiers leave their boat and carry their beautiful, ancient, and family battle-gear toward the mead-hall. Upon arrival, Wulfgar, a renowned fighter, similarly questions them about their intentions at Heorot. )*

The man whose name was known for courage, 340

The Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,  
 Answered in return: “We are retainers  
 From Hygelac's band. Beowulf's my name.  
 If your lord and master, the most renowned  
 Son of Halfdane, will hear me out  
 And graciously allow me to greet him in person,  
 I am ready and willing to report my errand.”

*(The guard takes this message to Hrothgar with the description of the Geats' noble appearance. Hrothgar recounts hearing of Beowulf's deeds as a hero and how the king once helped save Ecgtheow- Beowulf's father. Hrothgar quickly agrees to let the Geats come to Heorot. Once there, Beowulf greets the Danish king.)*

In webbed links that the smith had woven,  
 The fine-forged mesh of his gleaming mail-shirt,  
 Resolute in his helmet, Beowulf spoke:  
 “Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman,  
 one of his hall-troop. When I was younger,  
 I had great triumphs. Then news of Grendel,  
 Hard to ignore, reached me at home: 410  
 Sailors brought stories of the plight you suffer  
 In this legendary hall, how it lies deserted,  
 Empty and useless once the evening light  
 Hides itself under heaven's dome.  
 So every elder and experienced council man  
 Among my people supported my resolve  
 To come here to you, King Hrothgar,  
 Because all knew of my awesome strength.  
 They had seen me bolstered in the blood of enemies  
 When I battled and bound five beasts, 420  
 Raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea  
 Slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes

And avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it  
 Upon themselves, I devastated them).  
 Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,  
 Settle the outcome in single combat.  
 And so, my request, O king of the Bright-Danes,  
 Dear prince of the Shieldings, friend of the people  
 And their ring of defense, my one request  
 Is that you won't refuse me, who have come this far,                   430  
 The privilege of purifying Heorot,  
 With my own men to help me, and nobody else.  
 I have heard moreover that the monster scorns  
 In his reckless way to use weapons;  
 Therefore, to heighten Hygelac's fame  
 And gladden his heart, I hereby renounce  
 sword and the shelter of the broad shield,  
 the heavy war-board: hand-to-hand  
 is how it will be, a life-and-death  
 fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells                   440  
 must deem it a just judgment by God.  
 If Grendel wins, it will be a gruesome day;  
 He will glut himself on the Geats in the war-hall,  
 Swoop without fear on that flower of manhood  
 As on others before. Then my face wont be there  
 To be covered in death: he will carry me away  
 as he goes to ground, gorged and bloodied;  
 he will run gloating with my raw corpse  
 and feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy,  
 fouling his moor-nest. No need then                   450  
 to lament for long or lay out my body:  
 if the battle takes me, send back

this breast-webbing that Weland fashioned  
 and Hrethel gave me , to Lord Hygelac.  
 Fate goes ever as fate must."

(In answer, Hrothgar recounts the help he gave Beowulf's father by supplying  
 him with enough treasure, a weregild, to avoid war with the Wulfings. Although  
 Hrothgar says that it "bothers him" to have someone else kill Grendel, he knows  
 that Beowulf has his father's debt to pay. A bench is then cleared for Beowulf  
 and his men to enjoy the food and mead of the great hall.)

Then a bench was cleared in that banquet hall  
 So the Geats could have room to be together  
 And at the party sat, proud in their bearing,  
 Strong and stalwart. An attendant stood by  
 With a decorated pitcher, pouring bright  
 Helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,  
 Filling Heorot with the head-clearing voice,  
 Gladdening that great rally of Geats and Danes.

From where he crouched at the king's feet,  
 Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke                   500  
 Contrary words. Beowulf's coming,  
 His sea-braving, made him sick with envy:  
 He could not brook or abide the fact  
 That anyone else alive under heaven  
 Might enjoy greater regard than he did:  
 "Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca  
 in a swimming match on the open sea,  
 risking the water just to prove that you could win?  
 It was sheer vanity made you venture out  
 On the main deep. And no matter who tried,                   510  
 Friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,  
 Neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.

You waded in, embracing water,  
 Taking its measure, mastering currents,  
 Riding on the swells. The ocean swayed,  
 Winter went wild in the waves, but you vied  
 For seven nights; and then he outswam you,  
 Came ashore the stronger contender.  
 He was cast up safe and sound one morning  
 Among the Heathoreams, then made his way 520  
 To where he belonged in Bronding country,  
 Home again, sure of his ground  
 In strongroom and brawn. So Breca made good  
 His boast upon you and was proved right.  
 No matter, therefore, how you may have fared  
 in every bout and battle until now,  
 This time you'll be worsted; no one has ever  
 outlasted an entire night against Grendel."

Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:  
 "Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say 530  
 about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer  
 that was doing the talking. The truth is this:  
 when the going was heavy in those high waves,  
 I was the strongest swimmer of all.  
 We'd been children together and we grew up  
 Daring ourselves to outdo each other,  
 Boasting and urging each other to risk  
 Our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.  
 Each of us swam holding a sword,  
 A naked, hard-proofed blade for protection 540  
 Against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never

Move out farther or faster from me  
 Than I could manage to move from him.  
 Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on  
 For five nights, until the long flow  
 And pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,  
 Night falling and winds from the north  
 drove us apart. The deep boiled up  
 and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.  
 My armour helped me to hold out; 550  
 My hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,  
 A fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,  
 Kept me safe when some ocean creature  
 Pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast  
 And swathed in its grip, I was granted one  
 Final chance: my sword plunged  
 And the ordeal was over. Through my hands,  
 The fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

"Time and again, foul things attacked me,  
 lurking and stalking, but I lashed out, 560  
 gave as good as I got with my sword.  
 My flesh was not for feasting on,  
 There would be no monsters gnawing and gloating  
 Over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.  
 Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping  
 The sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated  
 Like the ocean's leavings. From now on  
 Sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids  
 Were over for good. Light came from the east,  
 Bright guarantee of God, and the waves 570

Went quiet; I could see the headlands  
 And buffeted cliffs. Often, for undanted courage,  
 Fate spares the man it has not already marked.  
 However, it occurred, my sword had killed  
 Nine sea-monsters. Such night-dangers  
 And hard ordeals I have never heard of  
 Nor a man more desolate in surging waves.  
 But worn out as I was, I survived,  
 Came through with my life. The ocean lifted  
 And laid me ashore, I landed safe 580  
 On the coast of Finland.

Now I cannot recall

Any fight you entered, Unferth,  
 That bears comparison. I don't boast when I say  
 That neither you nor Breca were ever much  
 Celebrated for swordsmanship  
 Or for facing danger on the field of battle.  
 You killed your own kith and kin,  
 So for all your cleverness and quick tongue,  
 You will suffer damnation in the depths of hell.  
 That fact is, Unferth, if you were truly 590  
 As keen or courageous as you claim to be,  
 Grendel would never have got away with  
 Such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,  
 Havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere.  
 But he knows he need never be in dread  
 Of your blade making mizzle of his blood  
 Or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter—  
 From the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear.  
 He knows he can trample down you Danes

To his heart's content, humiliate and murder 600  
 Without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.  
 I will show him how Geats shape to kill  
 In the heat of battle. Then whosoever wants to  
 may go bravely to mead, when morning light,  
 Scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south  
 and bring another daybreak to the world."

Then the grey-haired treasure-giver was glad;  
 Far-famed in battle, the prince of Bright Danes  
 And keeper of his people counted on Beowulf,  
 On the warrior's steadfastness and his word. 610

(The feast continues until Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's Queen, comes in and serves mead to the warriors. With the Queen's cup in hand, Beowulf makes a formal boast restating his intention to fight Grendel in a battle to the death. At the end of the feast, Hrothgar leaves Heorot in Beowulf's care, and he again states his intention to fight Grendel bare-handed. Once all the Danes leave, the Geats settle in to sleep in the cursed mead-hall.)

### **Fight with Grendel**

Then out of the night

Came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift;  
 The hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,  
 All except one; it was widely understood  
 That as long as God disallowed it,  
 The fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.  
 One man, however, was in a fighting mood,  
 Awake and on edge, spoiling for action.

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

**\*Moor- an open wasteland**

**\*Bawn- a rocky shoreline**

Mighty and canny,  
 Hygelac's kinsman was keenly watching  
 For the first move the monster would make.  
 Nor did the creature keep him waiting  
 But struck suddenly and started in;  
 He grabbed and mauled a man on his bench, 740  
 Bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood  
 And gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body  
 Utterly lifeless, eaten up  
 Hand and food. Venturing closer,  
 His talon was raised to attack Beowulf  
 Where he lay on the bed; he was bearing in  
 With open claw when the alert hero's  
 Comeback and armlock forestalled him utterly.  
 The captain of evil discovered himself  
 In a handgrip harder than anything 750  
 He had ever encountered in any man  
 On the face of the earth. Every bone in his body  
 Quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.  
 He was desperate to flee to his den and hide  
 With the devil's litter, for in all his days  
 He had never been clamped or cornered like this.  
 Then Hygelac's trusty retainer recalled  
 His bedtime speech, sprang to his feet  
 And got a firm hold. Fingers were bursting,  
 The monster back-tracking, the man overpowering. 760  
 The dread of the land was desperate to escape,  
 To take a roundabout road and flee  
 To his lair in the fens. The latching power  
 In his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip

<p>The terror-monger had taken to Heorot.          And now the timbers trembled and sang,          A hall-session that harrowed every Dane          Inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,          The two contenders crashed through the building.          The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow          Survived the onslaught and kept standing:          It was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame          Braced with the best of blacksmith's work          Inside and out. The story goes          That as the pair struggled, mead-benches were smashed          And sprung off the floor, gold fittings and all.          Before then, no Shielding elder would believe          There was any power of person upon earth          Capable of wrecking their horn-rigged hall          Unless the burning embrace of a fire          Engulf it in flame. Then an extraordinary          Wail arose, and bewildering fear          Came over the Danes. Everyone felt it          Who heard that cry as it echoed off the wall,          A God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,          The howl of the loss, the lament of the hell-serf          Keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,          Manacled tight by the man who of all men          Was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.</p>	<p>770</p> <p>780</p>	<p>Beowulf's warriors worked to defend          Their lord's life, laying about them          As best they could with their ancestral blades.          Stalwart in action, they kept striking out          On every side, seeking to cut          Straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle          There was something that could not have known at the time,          That no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art          Could ever damage their demon opponent.          He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge          Of every weapon. But his going away          Out of this world and the days of his life          Would be agony to him, and his alien spirit          Would travel far into fiend's keeping.</p>	<p>800</p>
<p>But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined          To allow his caller to depart alive:          He did not consider that life of much account          To anyone anywhere. Time and again,</p>	<p>790</p>	<p>Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men          With pain and affliction in former times          And had given offence also to God          Found that his bodily powers failed him.          Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly          Locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived,          He was hateful to the other. The monster's whole          body was in pain, a tremendous wound          Appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split          And the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted          The gory of winning; Grendel was driven          Under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,          To his desolate lair. His days were numbered,          The end of his life was coming over him,          He knew it for certain; and one bloody clash</p>	<p>810</p> <p>820</p>

Had fulfilled the dearest wish of the Danes.

(After the battle, the Danes rejoice. The proof of the victory as they followed the trail of blood to Grendel's swamp where he died in the murky waters. The people rejoiced throughout Denmark, and many raced back and forth telling the mighty deeds of Beowulf- often comparing him to Sigemund the dragon slayer. Hrothgar returned to the hall and adopts Beowulf (symbolically) as a son. He praises the mighty hero and blessings of God. Hrothgar finishes his speech by saying...)

But you have made yourself immortal 953  
By your glorious action. May the God of Ages  
Continues to keep and requite you well."

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

"We have gone through with a glorious endeavour  
and been much favoured in this fight we dared  
against the unknown, Nevertheless,  
if you could have seen the monster himself 960  
where he lay beaten, I would have been better pleased.

My plan was to pounce, pin him down  
In a tight grip and grapple him to death—  
Have him panting for life, powerless and clasped  
In my bare hands, his body in thrall.  
But I couldn't stop him from slipping my hold.  
The Lord allowed it, my lock on him  
Wasn't strong enough, he struggled fiercely  
And broke and ran. Yet he bought his freedom  
At a high price, for he left his hand 970  
and arm and shoulder to show he had been here,  
A cold comfort for having come among us.  
And now he won't be long for this world.

He has done his worst but the wound will end him.

He is hasped and hooped and hirpling with pain,  
Limping and looped in it. Like a man outlawed  
For wickedness, he must await  
The mighty judgment of God in majesty."

There was less tampering and big talk then  
From Unferth the boaster, less of his blather 960  
As the hall-thanes eyed the awful proof  
Of the hero's prowess, the splayed hand  
Up under the eaves. ...

(Hrothgar orders the hall to be restored to its former glory, and soon a victory feast begins. Beowulf and his men are awarded gold, jewels, swords, and armor for their reward. Then a minstrel sings a tale of Hildeburh, a Danish princess, who was married off to an ally of her enemies as part of a truce. In this story, the Danes are in exile after a stalemate battle with the Jutes and Frisians, but they thirst for vengeance. After a year, they attack and kill the king and bring his widow Hildeburh back home to Denmark. This story foreshadows the feud between the Geats and the Swedes.)

### ***Grendel's Mother***

(After the celebration, men once again stay in Heorot. However, Grendel's Mother will come, and for one them, this will be his last night on earth. She is an outcast because of her ancestor Cain who killed his own brother. The family of Cain has become monsters. Seeking vengeance for her son's death, she attacks Heorot and kills just one man- Hrothgar's closest friend and advisor. In his grief over the loss of his friend, Hrothgar describes where Grendel's Mother lives to Beowulf. The old king will ask for one more favor.)

"A few miles from here  
a frost stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
above a mere; the overhanging bank  
is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.

At night there, something uncanny happens:

The water burns. And the mere bottom  
Has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
The hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
Will turn to face them with firm-set horns  
And die in the wood rather than dive  
Beneath its surface. That is no good place.

1370

When the wind blows up and stormy weather  
Makes clouds scud and the skies weep,

Out of its depths a dirty surge  
Is pitched towards the heavens. Now help depends  
Again on you and on you alone.

The gap of danger where the demon waits  
Is still unknown to you. Seek it if you dare.  
I will compensate you for settling the feud  
As I did the last time with lavish wealth,  
Coffers of coiled gold, if you come back.”

1380

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better  
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.  
For every one of us, living in this world  
Means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
Win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
That will be his best and only bulwark.  
So arise, my lord, and let us immediately  
Set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.

1390

I guarantee you: she will not get away,

Not to dens under ground nor upland groves

Nor the ocean floor. She'll have nowhere to flee to.

Endure your trouble to-day. Bear up

And be the man I expect you to be.”

(A war party is quickly formed, and they track Grendel's Mother to the fen where she lives. To the astonishment of the party, it is marked by the head of Hrothgar's slain friend; the blood from the severed head stirs up all kinds of sea monsters near the shore. Beowulf kills one with an arrow and brings it ashore allowing all to see the type of monsters that await him in the water. Unferth, too afraid to go into the water, gives Beowulf a mighty sword named Hrunting. Beowulf also dresses for battle with chain-mail, shield, and helmet. Beowulf reminds Hrothgar of his earlier words about the death of a warrior.)

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats

1492

Was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:

Without more ado, he dived into the heaving  
Depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day  
Before he could see the solid bottom.

Quickly the one who haunted those waters,  
Who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds  
For a hundred seasons, sensed a human  
Observing her outlandish lair from above.

1500

So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him  
In her brutal grip, but his body, for all that,  
Remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail  
Saved him on the outside. Her savage talons  
Failed to rip the web of his warshirt.  
Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish swimmer  
Carried the ring-mailed prince to her court  
So that for all his courage he could never use  
The weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde

Came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts  
 Who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail  
 In a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man  
 Could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole  
 And yet the water did not work against him  
 Because the hall-roofing held off  
 The force of the current; then he saw a firelight,  
 A glam and flare-up, a glimmer or brightness.

1510

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

1520

Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about  
 His name and fame: he never lost heart.  
 Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away.  
 The keep, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel  
 Was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely  
 On the might of his arm. So must a man do  
 Who intends to gain enduring glory  
 In a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought.  
 Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight

1530

With Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder  
 And laid about him in a battle frenzy:  
 He pitched his killer opponent to the floor  
 But she rose quickly and retaliated,  
 Grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.  
 The sure-footed fighter felt daunted,  
 The strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.  
 So she pounced upon him and pulled out  
 A broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge  
 Her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail  
 On Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,  
 Turned the edge and tip of the blade.  
 The son of Ecgtheow would have surely perished  
 And the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth  
 Had the strong links and locks of his war-gear  
 Not helped to save him: holy God  
 Decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,  
 The Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance  
 Once Beowulf got back up on his feet.

1540

1550

Then he saw a blade that boded well,  
 A sword in her armoury, and ancient heirloom  
 From the days of giants, and ideal weapon,  
 One that any warrior would envy,  
 But so huge and heavy of itself  
 Only Beowulf could wield it in a battle.  
 So the Shielding's hero, hard-pressed and enraged,  
 Took a firm hold of the hilt and swung  
 The blade in an arc, a resolute blow  
 That bit deep into her neck-bone

1560

And severed it entirely, toppling the doomed  
House of her flesh; she fell to the floor.  
The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was elated.

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

### ***Beowulf becomes King of the Geats***

(After the battle, Beowulf brings Grendel's head and the giant's sword back to Heorot as tribute to Hrothgar. Beowulf is awarded many more valuables for his bravery, but most importantly Hrothgar teaches Beowulf what it means to be a good king and to respect life. Before the Geats return home, Hrothgar proclaims Beowulf fit to be king of the Geats. Once home in Geatland, Beowulf recounts

his tales and shares his treasure with Hygelac. King Hygelac in turn awards Beowulf with the best sword and treasure that the Geats own. Although Beowulf had at times been poorly regarded, his status as a brave warrior was now set, and he carried himself with valor and restraint- never harming those who were drunken or brawling- until Hygelac is killed in battle. Then...)

The wide kingdom  
Reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well  
For fifty winters, grew old and wise  
As warden of the land  
Until one began 2210  
To dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl  
Form the steep vaults of the stone-roofed barrow  
Where he guarded a hoard; there was a hidden passage  
Unknown to men, but someone managed  
To enter by it and interfere  
With the heathen trove. He had handled and removed  
A gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,  
Though with a thief's wiles he had outwitted  
The sleeping dragon; that drove him into a rage,  
As the people of that country would soon discover. 2220  
  
The intruder who broached the dragon's treasure  
And moved him to wrath had never meant to.  
It was desperation on the part of a slave  
Fleeing the heavy hand of some master,  
Guilt-ridden and on the run,  
Going to ground. But he soon began  
To shake with terror; ..... In shock  
The wretch.....  
.....panicked and ran  
away with the precious ..... 2230  
metalwork. There were many other

heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house,  
 because long ago, with deliberate care,  
 somebody now forgotten  
 had buried the riches of a high-born race  
 in this ancient cache. Death had come  
 and taken them all in times gone by  
 and the only one left to tell their tale,  
 the last of their line, could look forward to nothing  
 but the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his joy  
 in the treasure would be brief. 2240

A newly constructed

Barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland  
 Close to the waves, its entryway secured.  
 Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried  
 All the goods and golden ware  
 Worth preserving. His words were few:  
 "Now, earth, hold what earls once held  
 and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first  
 by honourable men. My own people  
 have been ruined in war; one by one 2250  
 they went down to death, looked their last  
 on sweet life in the hall. I am left with nobody  
 to bear a sword or burnish plated goblets,  
 put a sheen on the cup. The companies have departed.  
 The hard helmet, hasped with gold,  
 Will be stripped of its hoops; and the helmet-shiner  
 Who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps;  
 The coat of mail that came through all fights,  
 Through shield-collapse and cut of sword,  
 Decays with the warrior. Nor many webbed mail 2260

Range far and wide on the warlord's back  
 Beside his mustered troops. No trembling harp,  
 No tuned timber, no tumbling hawk  
 Swerving through the hall, no swift horse  
 Pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter  
 Have emptied the earth of entire peoples."  
 And so he mourned as he moved about the world,  
 Deserted and alone, lamenting his unhappiness  
 Day and night, until death's flood  
 Brimmed up in his heart.

Then and old harrower of the dark 2270

Happened to find the hoard open,  
 The burning one who hunts out barrows,  
 The slick-skinned dragon, threatening the night sky  
 With treamers of fire. People on the farms  
 Are in dread of him. He is driven to hunt out  
 Hoards under ground, to guard heather gold  
 Through age-long vigils, though to little avail.  
 For three centuries, this scourge of the people  
 had stood guard on that stoutly protected  
 underground treasury, until the intruder 2280  
 unleashed its fury; he hurried to his lord  
 with the gold-plated cup and made his plea  
 to be reinstated. Then the vault was rifled,  
 the ring-hoard robbed, and the wretched man  
 had his request granted. His master gazed  
 on that find from the past for the first time.

When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again.  
 He rippled down the rock, writing with anger

when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen  
 too close to his dreaming head. 2290  
 So may a man not marked by fate  
 easily escape exile and woe  
 by the grace of God....

### Beowulf attacks the dragon

(The dragon continues to attack the villages and farms of Geatland; even Beowulf's home, the throne room, is burned to the ground. Beowulf orders an all iron shield to replace his wooden one. In his old age, this is a very dangerous battle, yet Beowulf was too proud to call up a large army. Instead he recalls the glorious battles of his youth- including the fight with Grendel- and the many fights he had as King of the Geats.

And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived  
 every extreme, excelling himself  
 in daring and in danger, until the day arrived  
 When he had to come face to face with the dragon. 2400  
 The lord of the Geats took eleven comrades  
 and went in a rage to reconnoiter.  
 ...

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

(Beowulf recounts his childhood and several battles between the Geats and Swedes. In the most recent skirmish, the Swedish king is killed by one of Hygelac's thanes- at the time a peer with Beowulf. This foreshadows the continued strife between the Swedes and the Geats.)

Beowulf spoke, made a formal boast 2510  
 for the last time: "I risked my life  
 often when I was young. Now I am old,  
 but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight  
 for the glory of winning, if the evil one will only  
 abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open."

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

"Men at arms, remain here on the barrow,  
 safe in your armour, to see which one of us 2530  
 is better in the end at bearing wounds  
 in a deadly fray. This fight is not yours,  
 nor is it up to any man except me  
 to measure his strength against the monster

or to prove his worth. I shall win the gold  
by my courage, or else mortal combat,  
doom of battle, will bear your lord away.”

Then he drew himself up beside his shield.  
The fabled warrior in his warshirt and helmet  
trusted in his own strength entirely 2540  
and went under the crag. No coward path.  
Hard by the rock-face that hale veteran,  
a good man who had gone repeatedly  
into combat and danger and come through,  
saw a stone arch and a gushing stream  
that burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting  
a deadly heat. It would be hard to survive  
unscathed near the hoard, to hold firm  
against the dragon in those flaming depths.  
Then he gave a shout. The lord of the Geats 2550  
unburdened his breast and broke out  
in a storm of anger. Under grey stone  
his voice challenged and resounded clearly.  
Hate was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized  
a human voice, the time was over  
for peace and parleying. Pouring forth  
in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster  
burst from the rock. There was a rumble under ground.  
Down there in the barrow, Beowulf the warrior  
lifted his shield: the outlandish thing 2560  
writhed and convulsed and viciously  
turned on the king, whose keen-edged sword,  
an heirloom inherited by the ancient right,

was already in his hand. Roused to a fury,  
each antagonist struck terror in the other.  
Unyielding, the lord of his people loomed  
by his tall shield, sure of his ground,  
while the serpent looped and unleashed itself.  
Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing  
and racing towards its fate. Yet his shield defended 2570  
the renowned leader’s life and limb  
for a shorter time than he meant it to:  
that final day was the first time  
when Beowulf fought and fate denied him  
glory in battle. So the king of the Geats  
raised his hand and struck hard  
at the enameled scales, but scarcely cut through:  
the blade flashed and slashed yet the blow  
was far less powerful than the hard-pressed king  
had need of at that moment. The mound-keeper 2580  
went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames  
when he felt the stroke, battle-fire  
billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled  
of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,  
infallible before that day,  
failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have.  
For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing  
to have to give ground like that and go  
unwillingly to inhabit another home  
in a place beyond; so every man must yield 2590  
the leasehold of his days.

Before long

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

His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,  
 a well-regarded Shylfing [ Swedish ] warrior...  
     ... And now the youth  
 was to enter the line of battle with his lord,  
 his first time to be tested as a fighter.  
 His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade  
 would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered  
 as soon as they came together in combat. 2630

Sad at heart, addressing his companions,  
 Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:  
 "I remember that time when mead was flowing,  
 how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,  
 promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,  
 make good the gift of the war-gear,  
 those swords and helmets, as and when  
 his need required it. He picked us out  
 from the army deliberately, honoured us and judged us  
 fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts— 2640

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

After those words, a wildness rose

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

Inspired again

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

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

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

He left the head alone, but his fighting hand  
 was burned when he came to his kinsman's aid.  
 He lunged at the enemy lower down  
 so that his decorated sword sank into its belly 2700  
 and the flames grew weaker.

Once again the king

gathered his strength and drew a stabbing knife  
 he carried on his belt, sharpened for battle.  
 He stuck it deep into the dragon's flank.  
 Beowulf dealt it a deadly wound.  
 They had killed the enemy, courage quelled his life;  
 that pair of kinsmen, partners in nobility,  
 had destroyed the foe. So every man should act,  
 be at hand when needed; but now, for the king,  
 this would be the last of his many labours 2710  
 and triumphs in the world.

Then the wound

dealt by the ground –burner earlier began  
 to scald and swell; Beowulf discovered  
 deadly poison suppurating inside him,  
 surges of nausea, and so, in his wisdom,  
 the prince realized his state and struggled  
 towards a seat on the rampart. He steadied his gaze  
 on those gigantic stones, saw how the earthwork  
 was braced with arches built over columns.  
 And now that thane unequalled for goodness 2720  
 with his own hands washed his lord's wounds,  
 swabbed the weary prince with water,  
 bathed him clean, unbuckled his helmet.

