

BEOOWULF

A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION BY SEAMUS HEANEY

BILINGUAL EDITION



ALSO BY SEAMUS HEANEY

POETRY

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Door into the Dark

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North

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B E O W U L F

A N E W V E R S E T R A N S L A T I O N

S E A M U S H E A N E Y



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In memory of Ted Hughes

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Introduction

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

Again and again and again.

BEOWULF: THE POEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

.....

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

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

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

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

(ll. 3143–55)

ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

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

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

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

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

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

Joseph Brodsky once said that poets' biographies are present in

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The fórtunes of wár fávoured Hróthgar (l. 64)
the highest in the land, would lénd advice (l. 172)
and find friéndship in the Fáther's embráce (l. 188).*

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

*We have héard of those prínces' heróic campáigns (l. 3)
and he cróssed óver into the Lórd's kéeping (l. 27).*

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

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

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

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

S.H.

A Note on Names

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

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

Alfred David

B E O W U L F

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

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

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

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

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

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

wil-gesīþas, þonne wīg cume,
lēode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal
in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.

Him ðā Scyld gewāt tō gescæp-hwīle,
fela-hrōr, fēran on Frēan wære.
Hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,
swæse gesīþas, swā hē selfa bæd,
30 þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga,
lēof land-fruma lange āhte.
Þær æt hýðe stōd hringed-stefna,
īsig ond ūt-fūs, æpelinges fær;
ālēdon þā lēofne þeoden,
bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,
mārne be mæste; þær wæs mādma fela
of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelæded.
Ne hýrde ic cýmlīcor cēol gegyrwan
hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,
40 billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg
mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon
on flōdes æht feor gewītan.
Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,
þeod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,
þe hine æt frumsceafte forð onsendon
ænne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.
Þā gýt hī him āsetton segend gyldenre
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,
gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs geōmor sefa,
50 murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon
secgan tō sōðe, sele-rædende,
hæled under heofenum, hwā þæm hlæste onfēng.
Ðā wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,

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

Shield's fur

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

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.

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

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

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

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

*King Hrothgar
builds Heorot Hall*

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

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

Heorot is threatened

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

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

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

*Grendel attacks
Heorot*

æfter bēor-þege gebūn hæfdon;
 fand þā ðær inne æþelunga gedriht
 swefan æfter symble— sorge ne cūðon,
 120 wonsceaft wera. Wiht unhælo,
 grim ond grædig, gearo sōna wæs,
 rēoc ond rēþe, ond on ræste genam
 þrītig þegna; þanon eft gewāt
 hūde hrēmig tō hām faran,
 mid þære wæl-fylle wīca nēosan.
 Ðā wæs on ūhtan mid ær-dæge
 Grendles gūð-cræft gumum undyrne;
 þā wæs æfter wiste wōp up āhafen,
 micel morgen-swēg. Mære þēoden,
 130 æþeling ær-gōd, unblīde sæt,
 þolode ðrȳð-swȳð, þegn-sorge drēah,
 syðþan hīe þæs lāðan lāst scēawedon
 wergan gāstes. Wæs þæt gewin tō strang,
 lāð ond longsum. Næs hit lengra fyrst,
 ac ymb āne niht eft gefremede
 morð-beala mære ond nō mearn fore,
 fæhðe ond fyrene; wæs tō fæst on þām.
 Þā wæs eād-fynde þe him elles hwær
 gerūmlīcor ræste sōhte,
 140 bed æfter būrum, ðā him gebēacnod wæs,
 gesægd sōðlice sweotolan tācne
 heal-ðegnes hete; hēold hyne syðþan
 fyr ond fæstor sē þām fēonde ætwand.
 Swā rīxode ond wið rihte wan
 āna wið eallum, oðþæt īdel stōd
 hūsa sēlest. Wæs sēo hwīl micel:
 twelf wintra tīd torn geþolode

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
120 and human sorrow. Suddenly then
the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:
greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men
from their resting places and rushed to his lair,
flushed up and inflamed from the raid,
blundering back with the butchered corpses.

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,
130 the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,
humiliated by the loss of his guard,
bewildered and stunned, staring aghast
at the demon's trail, in deep distress.
He was numb with grief, but got no respite
for one night later merciless Grendel
struck again with more gruesome murders.
Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.
It was easy then to meet with a man
shifting himself to a safer distance
140 to bed in the bothies, for who could be blind
to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness
of that hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped
kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

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

*King Hrothgar's
distress and
helplessness*

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

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

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

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

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

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

180 their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts
they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge
of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,
Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,
was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he
who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul
in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;
he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he
who after death can approach the Lord
and find friendship in the Father's embrace.

190 So that troubled time continued, woe
that never stopped, steady affliction
for Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.
There was panic after dark, people endured
raids in the night, riven by the terror.

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

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

210 Fyrst forð gewāt; flota wæs on yðum,
 bāt under beorge. Beornas gearwe
 on stefn stigon — strēamas wundon,
 sund wið sande; secgas bæron
 on bearm nacan beorhte frætwe,
 gūð-searo geatolīc; guman üt scufon,
 weras on wil-sið wudu bundenne.
 Gewāt þā ofer wæg-holm, winde gefȳsed,
 flota fāmī-heals, fugle gelīcost,
 oðþæt ymb ān-tīd ōpres dōgores
 220 wunden-stefna gewaden hæfde,
 þæt ðā līðende land gesāwon,
 brim-clifu blīcan, beorgas stēape,
 sīde sǣ-næssas; þā wæs sund liden,
 ēo-letes æt ende. Þanon up hraðe
 Wedera lēode on wang stigon,
 sǣ-wudu sǣldon —syrca hrysedon,
 gūð-gewædo; Gode þancedon,
 þæs þe him yþ-lāde ēaðe wurdon.
 Þā of wealle geseah weard Scildinga,
 230 sē þe holm-clifu healdan scolde,
 beran ofer bolcan beorhte randas,
 fyrd-searu fūslicu; hine fyrwyt bræc
 mōd-gehygdum, hwæt þā men wæron.
 Gewāt him þā tō waroðe wicge rīdan
 þegn Hrōðgāres, þrymmum cwehte
 mægen-wudu mundum, meþel-wordum frægn:
 “Hwæt syndon gē searo-hæbbendra,
 byrnum werede, þe þus brontne cēol
 ofer lagu-stræte lædan cwōmon,
 240 hider ofer holmas? Ic hwīle wæs

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

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

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

*The Danish coast-
guard challenges the
outsiders*

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

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

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

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

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

*The Geat hero
announces himself
and explains his
mission*

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

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

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

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

*The coast-guard
allows the Geats to
pass*

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

ofer hlēor-bergan: gehroden golde,
 fāh ond fȳ-heard, ferh wearde hēold:
 gūþ-mōd grummon. Guman ōnetton,
 sigon ætsomne, oppæt hȳ sæl timbred,
 geatolīc ond gold-fāh ongyton mihton;
 þæt wæs fore-mærost fold-būendum
 310 receda under roderum, on þæm se rīca bād;
 lixte se lēoma ofer landa fela.
 Him þā hilde-dēor hof mōdigra
 torht getæhte, þæt hīe him tō mihton
 gegnum gangan; gūð-beorna sum
 wicg gewende, word æfter cwæð:
 “Mæl is mē tō fēran. Fæder al-walda
 mid ār-stafum ēowic gehealde
 sīða gesunde! Ic tō sæ wille,
 wið wrāð werod wearde healdan.”
 320 Stræt wæs stān-fāh, stīg wīsode
 gumum ætgædere. Gūð-byrne scān,
 heard, hond-locen, hring-īren scīr
 song in searwum. Þā hī tō sele furðum
 in hyra gryre-geatwum gangan cwōmon,
 setton sæ-mēþe sīde scyldas,
 rondas regn-hearde, wið þæs recedes weal;
 bugon þā tō bence, byrnan hringdon,
 gūð-searo gumena. Gāras stōdon,
 sæ-manna searo, samod ætgædere,
 330 æsc-holt ufan græg; wæs sē īren-þrēat
 wæpnum gewurþad. Þā ðær wlonc hæled
 ōret-mecgas æfter æþelum frægn:
 “Hwanon ferigeað gē fætte scyldas,
 græge syrcan ond grīm-helmas,

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

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

*They arrive at
Heorot*

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

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

340

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

350

Hwearf þā hrædlīce, þær Hrōðgār sæt,
eald ond unhār mid his eorla gedriht;
ēode ellen-rōf, þæt hē for ealrum gestōd
Deniga frēan: cūpe hē duguðe þēaw.

360

Wulfgār maðelode tō his wine-drihtne:
“Hēr syndon geferede, feorran cumene
ofer geofenes begang Gēata lēode;
þone yldestan ōret-mecgas

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

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

*Beowulf announces
his name*

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

*Formalities are
observed*

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

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

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

370

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

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

380

At the door of the hall,

390

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*He declares he will
fight Grendel*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

but God can easily
halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

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

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

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

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

A feast in Heorot

500 From where he crouched at the king's feet,
Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke
contrary words. Beowulf's coming,
his sea-braving, made him sick with envy:
he could not brook or abide the fact
that anyone else alive under heaven
might enjoy greater regard than he did:
"Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca
in a swimming match on the open sea,
risking the water just to prove that you could win?"

*Unferth strikes a
discordant note*

510 It was sheer vanity made you venture out
on the main deep. And no matter who tried,
friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,
neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.
You waded in, embracing water,
taking its measure, mastering currents,
riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,
winter went wild in the waves, but you vied
for seven nights; and then he outswam you,
came ashore the stronger contender.
He was cast up safe and sound one morning

*Unferth's version of
a swimming contest*

520 Donon hē gesōhte swā̅sne ē̅del,
lēof his lēodum, lond Brondinga,
freo̅ðo-burh fægere, þ̅ær hē folc āhte,
burh ond bēagas. Bēot eal wið þ̅ē
sunu Bēanstānes sō̅ðe gelā̅ste.
Donne wēne ic tō þ̅ē wýrsan geþingea,
ð̅eah þ̅ū heaðo-rā̅sa gehw̅ær dohte,
grimre gū̅ðe, gif þ̅ū Grendles dearst
niht-longne fyrst nēan bīdan.”

Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:
530 “Hwæt þ̅ū worn fela, wine mīn Unferð,
bēore druncen ymb Breca n sprā̅ce,
sægdest from his sī̅ðe! Sō̅ð ic talige
þ̅æt ic mere-strengo māran āhte,
earfeþo on ýpum, ðonne ānig oþer man.
Wit þ̅æt gecwā̅don cniht-wesende
ond gebēotedon — wā̅ron bēgen þ̅ā gīt
on geogoð-fēore— þ̅æt wit on gār-secg ūt
aldrum nē̅ðdon; ond þ̅æt geā̅fndon swā
Hā̅fdon swurd nacod, þ̅ā wit on sund rēon,
540 heard on handa; wit unc wið hron-fixas
werian þ̅ōhton; nō hē wiht fram mē
flōd-ýpum feor flēotan meahte,
hraþor on holme, nō ic fram him wolde.
Ðā wit ātsomne on sā̅ wā̅ron
fīf nihta fyrst, oþþæt unc flōd tōdrā̅f,
wado weallende, wedera cealdost,
nīpende niht, ond norþan-wind
heaðo-grim ondhwearf. Hrēo wā̅ron ýþa,
wæs mere-fixa mōd onhrēred.
550 Þ̅ær mē wið lā̅ðum līc-syrce mīn,
heard, hond-locen, helpe gefremede,

520 among the Heathoreams, then made his way
to where he belonged in Bronding country,
home again, sure of his ground
in strongroom and bawn. So Breca made good
his boast upon you and was proved right.
No matter, therefore, how you may have fared
in every bout and battle until now,
this time you'll be worsted; no one has ever
outlasted an entire night against Grendel."

Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:

530 "Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say
about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer
that was doing the talking. The truth is this:
when the going was heavy in those high waves,
I was the strongest swimmer of all.
We'd been children together and we grew up
daring ourselves to outdo each other,
boasting and urging each other to risk
our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.
Each of us swam holding a sword,
540 a naked, hard-proofed blade for protection
against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never
move out farther or faster from me
than I could manage to move from him.
Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on
for five nights, until the long flow
and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,
night falling and winds from the north
drove us apart. The deep boiled up
and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.
550 My armour helped me to hold out;
my hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,

*Beowulf corrects
Unferth*

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

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

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

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

*Beowulf tells of his
ordeal in the sea*

Now I cannot recall
any fight you entered, Unferth,

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

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

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

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

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

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

the men in hall, then handed the cup
first to Hrothgar, their homeland's guardian,
urging him to drink deep and enjoy it
because he was dear to them. And he drank it down
like the warlord he was, with festive cheer.

620 So the Helming woman went on her rounds,
queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,
offering the goblet to all ranks,
treating the household and the assembled troop
until it was Beowulf's turn to take it from her hand.
With measured words she welcomed the Geat
and thanked God for granting her wish
that a deliverer she could believe in would arrive
to ease their afflictions. He accepted the cup,
a daunting man, dangerous in action
630 and eager for it always. He addressed Wealhtheow;
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said:

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

*Beowulf's formal
boast*

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

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

*Hrothgar leaves
Heorot in Beowulf's
keeping*

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

Halfdane's heir had to be away
to his night's rest. He realized
that the demon was going to descend on the hall,
that he had plotted all day, from dawn-light
until darkness gathered again over the world
650 and stealthy night-shapes came stealing forth
under the cloud-murk. The company stood
as the two leaders took leave of each other:
Hrothgar wished Beowulf health and good luck,
named him hall-warden and announced as follows:
"Never, since my hand could hold a shield
have I entrusted or given control
of the Danes' hall to anyone but you.
Ward and guard it, for it is the greatest of houses.
Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame,
660 beware of the enemy. There's nothing you wish for
that won't be yours if you win through alive."

Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.
The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,
left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,
his queen and bedmate. The King of Glory
(as people learned) had posted a lookout
who was a match for Grendel, a guard against monsters,
special protection to the Danish prince.
And the Geat placed complete trust
670 in his strength of limb and the Lord's favour.
He began to remove his iron breast-mail,
took off the helmet and handed his attendant
the patterned sword, a smith's masterpiece,
ordering him to keep the equipment guarded.
And before he bedded down, Beowulf,
that prince of goodness, proudly asserted:

*Beowulf renounces
the use of weapons*

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

“When it comes to fighting, I count myself
as dangerous any day as Grendel.
So it won’t be a cutting edge I’ll wield
680 to mow him down, easily as I might.
He has no idea of the arts of war,
of shield or sword-play, although he does possess
a wild strength. No weapons, therefore,
for either this night: unarmed he shall face me
if face me he dares. And may the Divine Lord
in His wisdom grant the glory of victory
to whichever side He sees fit.”

Then down the brave man lay with his bolster
under his head and his whole company
690 of sea-rovers at rest beside him.
None of them expected he would ever see
his homeland again or get back
to his native place and the people who reared him.
They knew too well the way it was before,
how often the Danes had fallen prey
to death in the mead-hall. But the Lord was weaving
a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats.
Through the strength of one they all prevailed;
they would crush their enemy and come through
700 in triumph and gladness. The truth is clear:
Almighty God rules over mankind
and always has.

Then out of the night
came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift;
the hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,
all except one; it was widely understood
that as long as God disallowed it,
the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.

*The Geats await
Grendel's attack*

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

710 Dā cōm of mōre under mist-hleoþum
Grendel gongan, Godes yrre bær,
mynte se mǎn-scaða manna cynnes
sumne besyrwan in sele þām hēan.
Wōd under wolcnum, tō þæs þe hē wīn-reced,
gold-sele gumena gearwost wisse,
fættum fāhne. Ne wæs þæt forma sīð
þæt hē Hrōþgāres hām gesōhte.
Nǣfre hē on aldor-dagum ær nē siþðan
heardran hǣle heal-ðegnas fand.

720 Cōm þā tō recede rinc sīðian
drēamum bedǣled. Duru sōna onarn
fȳr-bendum fæst, syþðan hē hire folmum gehrān:
onbrǣd þā bealo-hȳdig, ðā hē gebolgen wæs,
recedes mūþan. Raþe æfter þon
on fāgne flōr fēond treddode,
ēode yrre-mōd; him of ēagum stōd
ligge gelīcost lēoht unfæger.
Geseah hē in recede rinca manige,
swefan sibbe-gedriht samod ætgædere,
730 mago-rinca hēap. Þā his mōd āhlōg;
mynte þæt hē gedælde, ær þon dæg cwōme,
atol āglǣca, ānra gehwylces
lif wið līce, þā him ālumpen wæs
wist-fylle wēn. Ne wæs þæt wyrd þā gēn,
þæt hē mā mōste manna cynnes
ðicgean ofer þā niht. Ðrȳð-swȳð behēold,
mæg Higelāces, hū se mǎn-scaða
under fær-gripum gefaran wolde.

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

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

Grendel strikes

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

*A Geat warrior
perishes*

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

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

*Beowulf's fight with
Grendel*

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

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

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

*Beowulf's thanes
defend him*

gūð-billa nān grētan nolde,
 ac hē sige-wæpnum forswōren hæfde,
 ecga gehwylcre. Scolde his aldor-gedāl
 on ðām dæge þysses lifes
 earmlic wurðan, ond se ellor-gāst
 on fēonda geweald feor sīðian.
 Ðā þæt onfunde sē þe fela æror
 810 mōdes myrðe manna cynne,
 fyrene gefremede —hē fāg wið God—
 þæt him se līc-homa læstan nolde,
 ac hine se mōdega mæg Hygelāces
 hæfde be honda; wæs gehwæper oðrum
 lifigende lād. Līc-sār gebād
 atol æglāca; him on eaxle wearð
 syn-dolh sweotol; seonowe onsprungon,
 burston bān-locan. Bēowulfe wearð
 gūð-hrēð gyfeþe; scolde Grendel þonan
 820 feorh-sēoc flēon under fen-hleoðu,
 sēcean wyn-lēas wīc; wiste þē geomor,
 þæt his aldres wæs ende gegongen,
 dōgera dæg-rīm. Denum eallum wearð
 æfter þām wæl-rāse willa gelumpen.
 Hæfde þā gefælsod, sē þe ær feorran cōm,
 snotor ond swyð-ferhð, sele Hrōðgāres,
 genered wið nīðe. Niht-weorce gefeh,
 ellen-mærþum. Hæfde Ēast-Denum
 Gēat-mecga lēod gilp gelæsted,
 830 swylce oncypðe ealle gebētte,
 inwid-sorge, þē hīe ær drugon
 ond for þrēa-nýdum þolian scoldon,
 torn unlytel. Þæt wæs tācen sweotol,
 syþðan hilde-dēor hond ālegde,

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

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

*Grendel is defeated,
Beowulf fulfils his
boast*

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

840 Dā wæs on morgen, mīne gefræge,
ymb þā gif-healle gūð-rinc monig;
fērdon folc-togan feorran ond nēan
geond wīd-wegas wundor scēawian,
lāþes lāstas. Nō his lif-gedāl
sārlic þūhte secga ænegum,
þāra þe tūr-lēases trode scēawode,
hū hē wērig-mōd on weg þanon,
nīða ofercumen, on nicera mere,
fæge ond geflȳmed feorh-lāstas bæc.
850 Ðær wæs on blōde brim weallende,
atol yða geswing, eal gemenged,
hāton heolfre, heoro-drēore wēol;
dēað-fæge dēog, siððan drēama lēas
in fen-freoðo feorh ālegde,
hæþene sāwle; þær him hel onfēng.

Panon eft gewiton eald-gesīðas,
swylce geong manig of gomen-wāþe,
fram mere mōdge mēarum rīdan,
beornas on blancum. Ðær wæs Bēowulfes
mārðo mæned; monig oft gecwæð,
þætto sūð nē norð be sām twēonum
860 ofer eormen-grund oþer nænig
under swegles begong sēlra nære
rond-hæbbendra, rīces wyrðra.
Nē hīe hūru wine-drihten wiht ne lōgon,
glædne Hrōðgār, ac þæt wæs gōd cyning.
Hwīlum heaþo-rōfe hlēapan lēton,

shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.

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

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

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

*The morning after:
relief and rejoicings*

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

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

*Hrothgar's minstrel
sings about Beowulf*

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

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

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

870

880

890

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

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

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

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

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

King Heremod
remembered and
contrasted with
Beowulf

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

When Hrothgar arrived at the hall, he spoke,

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

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

King Hrothgar gives thanks for the relief of Heorot and adopts Beowulf "in his heart"

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

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:

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

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

960

“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
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
and arm and shoulder to show he had been here,
a cold comfort for having come among us.
And now he won’t be long for this world.
He has done his worst but the wound will end him.
He is hasped and hooped and hirpling with pain,
limping and looped in it. Like a man outlawed
for wickedness, he must await
the mighty judgement of God in majesty.”

980

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

īren ær-gōd, þæt ðæs āhlæcan
990 blōdge beadu-folme onberan wolde.
 Ðā wæs hāten hreþe Heort innanweard
folmum gefrætwod; fela þāra wæs,
wera ond wīfa, þe þæt wīn-reced,
gest-sele gyredon. Gold-fāg scinon
web æfter wāgum, wundor-sīona fela
secga gehwylcum þāra þe on swylc starað.
Wæs þæt beorhte bold tōbrocen swīðe,
eal inneward īren-bendum fæst,
heorras tōhlidene; hrōf āna genæs
1000 ealles ansund, þē se āglæca
fyren-dædum fāg on flēam gewand,
aldres orwēna. Nō þæt yðe byð
tō beflēonne —fremme sē þe wille—
ac gesēcan sceal sāwl-berendra
nȳde genȳdde, niþða bearna,
grund-būendra gearwe stōwe,
þær his līc-homa, leger-bedde fæst,
swefep æfter symle.

 Þā wæs sāl ond mæl
þæt tō healle gang Healfdenes sunu;
1010 wolde self cyning symbol þicgan.
Ne gefrægen ic þā mægþe mārān weorode
ymb hyra sinc-gyfan sēl gebæran.
Bugon þā tō bence blæd-āgande,
fylle gefægon; fægere geþægon
medo-ful manig māgas þāra,
swīð-hicgende, on sele þām hēan,
Hrōðgār ond Hroþulf. Heorot innan wæs
frēondum āfyllid; nalles fācen-stafas

that could cut his brutal, blood-caked claw.

990

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

*The damaged hall
repaired*

1000

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

A victory feast

1010

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

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

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

pāra þe mid Bēowulfe brim-lāde tēah,
on þære medu-bence mǣpðum gesealde,
yrfe-lāfe, ond þone ænne heht
golde forgyldan, þone ðe Grendel ær
māne ācwealde, swā hē hyra mā wolde,
nefne him wītig God wyrd forstōde
ond ðæs mannes mōd. Metod eallum wēold
gumena cynnes, swā hē nū gīt dēð.
Forþan bið andgit æghwær sēlest,
1060 ferhðes fore-þanc. Fela sceal gebīdan
lēofes ond lāpes, sē þe longe hēr
on ðyssum win-dagum worolde brūceð.

Þær wæs sang ond swēg samod ætgædere
fore Healfdenes hilde-wīsan,
gomen-wudu grēted, gid oft wrecen,
ðonne heal-gamen Hrōþgāres scop
æfter medo-bence mǣnan scolde:—
Finnes eaferum, ðā hīe se fār beगत,
hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga,
1070 in Frēs-wæle feallan scolde.

Nē hūru Hildeburh herian þorfte
eotena trēowe; unsynnum wearð
beloren lēofum æt þām lind-plegan
bearnum ond brōðrum; hīe on gebyrd hruron
gāre wunde; þæt wæs geōmuru ides.

and risked the voyage received a bounty,
some treasured possession. And compensation,
a price in gold, was settled for the Geat
Grendel had cruelly killed earlier—
as he would have killed more, had not mindful God
and one man's daring prevented that doom.
Past and present, God's will prevails.
Hence, understanding is always best
and a prudent mind. Whoever remains
1060 for long here in this earthly life
will enjoy and endure more than enough.

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

*Another performance
by the minstrel*

1070

Hildeburh

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

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

Nalles hōlinga Hōces dohtor
meotodsceaft bemearn, syþðan morgen cōm,
ðā hēo under swegle gesēon meahte
morþor-bealo māga, þær hēo ær mæste hēold
1080 worolde wynne. Wīg ealle fornam
Finnes þegnas, nemne fēaum ānum,
þæt hē ne mehte on þæm meðel-stede
wīg Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,
nē þā wēa-lāfe wīge forþringan,
þēodnes ðegne; ac hig him geþingo budon,
þæt hīe him oðer flet eal gerýmdon,
healle ond hēah-setl, þæt hīe healfre geweald
wið eotena bearn āgan mōston,
1090 ond æt feoh-gyftum Folcwaldan sunu
dōgra gehwylce Dene weorþode,
Hengestes hēap hringum wenede
efne swā swīðe, sinc-gestrēonum

Hoc's daughter—
 how could she not
lament her fate
 when morning came
and the light broke
 on her murdered dears?
And so farewell
 delight on earth,
1080 war carried away
 Finn's troop of thanes,
all but a few.
 How then could Finn
hold the line
 or fight on
to the end with Hengest,
 how save
the rump of his force
 from that enemy chief?
So a truce was offered
 as follows: first
separate quarters
 to be cleared for the Danes,
hall and throne
 to be shared with the Frisians.
Then, second:
 every day
at the dole-out of gifts
 Finn, son of Focwald,
1090 should honour the Danes,
 bestow with an even
hand to Hengest
 and Hengest's men
the wrought-gold rings,

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

fættan goldes, swā hē Frēsena cyn
on bēor-sele byldan wolde.

Ðā hīe getruwedon on twā healfa
fæste frioðu-wære. Fin Hengeste
elne unflitme āðum benemde
þæt hē þā wēa-lāfe weotena dōme
ārum hēolde, þæt ðær ænig mon

1100

wordum nē worcum wære ne bræce,
nē þurh inwit-searo æfre gemænden,
ðēah hīe hira bēag-gyfan banan folgedon
ðēoden-lēase, þā him swā geþearfod wæs;
gyf þonne Frȳsna hwylc frēcnen spræce
ðæs morþor-hetes myndgiend wære,
þonne hit sweordes ecg syððan scolde.

 Āð wæs geæfned, ond icge gold
āhæfen of horde: Here-Scyldinga

bounty to match
the measure he gave
his own Frisians —
to keep morale
in the beer-hall high.
Both sides then
sealed their agreement.
With oaths to Hengest
Finn swore
openly, solemnly,
that the battle survivors
would be guaranteed
honour and status.
No infringement
by word or deed,
1100 no provocation
would be permitted.
Their own ring-giver
after all
was dead and gone,
they were leaderless,
in forced allegiance
to his murderer.
So if any Frisian
stirred up bad blood
with insinuations
or taunts about this,
the blade of the sword
would arbitrate it.
A funeral pyre
was then prepared,
effulgent gold
brought out from the hoard.

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

The bodies of the slain burnt on the pyre

betst beado-rinca wæs on bæl gearu.
1110 Æt þæt̅m āde wæs ēþ-gesȳne
swāt-fāh syrce, swȳn eal-gylden,
eofer īren-heard, æþeling manig
wundum āwyrded; sume on wæle crungon.
Hēt ðā Hildeburh æt Hnæfes āde
hire selfre sunu sweolode befæstan,
bān-fatu bæman ond on bæl dōn.
Earme on eaxle ides gnornode,
geōmrode giddum. Gūð-rinc āstāh;
wand tō wolcnum wæl-fȳra mæst,
1120 hlynode for hlāwe; hafelan mul-ton,
bēn-geato burston, ðonne blōd ætspranc,
lāð-bite līces. Līg ealle forswalg,
gāsta gīfrost, þāra ðe þær gūð fornam
bēga folces; wæs hira blāð scacen.

*The pride and prince
of the Shieldings lay
awaiting the flame.*

1110 *Everywhere
there were blood-plastered
coats of mail.*

*The pyre was heaped
with boar-shaped helmets
forged in gold,
with the gashed corpses
of well-born Danes —
many had fallen.*

*Then Hildeburh
ordered her own
son's body
be burnt with Hnaef's,
the flesh on his bones
to sputter and blaze
beside his uncle's.*

*The woman wailed
and sang keens,
the warrior went up.*

1120 *Carcass flame
swirled and fumed,
they stood round the burial
mound and howled
as heads melted,
crusted gashes
spattered and ran
bloody matter.*

*The glutton element
flamed and consumed
the dead of both sides.*

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

Their great days were gone.

*Warriors scattered
to homes and forts
all over Friesland,
fewer now, feeling
loss of friends.*

*Hengest stayed,
lived out that whole
resentful, blood-sullen
winter with Finn,
homesick and helpless.*

1130

*No ring-whorled prow
could up then
and away on the sea.
Wind and water
raged with storms,
wave and shingle
were shackled in ice
until another year
appeared in the yard
as it does to this day,
the seasons constant,
the wonder of light
coming over us.*

*Then winter was gone,
earth's lap grew lovely,
longing woke
in the cooped-up exile
for a voyage home—*

1140

*but more for vengeance,
some way of bringing
things to a head:
his sword arm hankered*

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

Spring comes

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

to greet the Jutes.

So he did not balk
once Hunlafing
placed on his lap
Dazzle-the-Duel,
the best sword of all,
whose edges Jutes
knew only too well.
Thus blood was spilled,
the gallant Finn
slain in his home
after Guthlaf and Oslaf
back from their voyage
made old accusation:
the brutal ambush,
the fate they had suffered,
all blamed on Finn.

1150

The wildness in them
had to brim over.
The hall ran red
with blood of enemies.
Finn was cut down,
the queen brought away
and everything
the Shieldings could find
inside Finn's walls —
the Frisian king's
gold collars and gemstones —
swept off to the ship.
Over sea-lanes then
back to Daneland
the warrior troop
bore that lady home.

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

Lēoð wæs āsungen,

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

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

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

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

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

Him wæs ful boren ond frēond-laþu
wordum bewægned, ond wunden gold
ēstum geēawed, earm-rēade twā,
hrægl ond hringas, heals-bēaga mæst
þāra þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe.
Nænigne ic under swegle sēlran hýrde
hord-māððum hæleþa, syþðan Hāma ætwæg
tō þēre byrhtan byrig Brōsinga mene,
1200 sigle ond sinc-fæt; searo-nīðas flēah
Eormenrīces; gecēas ēcne rād.
Pone hring hæfde Higelāc Gēata,
nefa Swertinges, nýhstan sīðe,
sīðþan hē under segne sinc ealgode,
wæl-rēaf werede; hyne wyrd fornam,
syþðan hē for wlenco wēan āhsode,
fāhðe tō Frýsum. Hē þā frætwe wæg,
eorclan-stānas ofer yða ful,
rīce þēoden; hē under rande gecranc.

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

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

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

The cup was carried to him, kind words
spoken in welcome and a wealth of wrought gold
graciously bestowed: two arm bangles,
a mail-shirt and rings, and the most resplendent
torque of gold I ever heard tell of
anywhere on earth or under heaven.

1200 There was no hoard like it since Hama snatched
the Brosings' neck-chain and bore it away
with its gems and settings to his shining fort,
away from Eormenric's wiles and hatred,
and thereby ensured his eternal reward.
Hygelac the Geat, grandson of Swerting,
wore this neck-ring on his last raid;
at bay under his banner, he defended the booty,
treasure he had won. Fate swept him away
because of his proud need to provoke
a feud with the Frisians. He fell beneath his shield,
in the same gem-crusted, kingly gear
he had worn when he crossed the frothing wave-vat.

1210 So the dead king fell into Frankish hands.
They took his breast-mail, also his neck-torque,
and punier warriors plundered the slain
when the carnage ended; Geat corpses
covered the field.

Applause filled the hall.

Then Wealhtheow pronounced in the presence of the
company:

"Take delight in this torque, dear Beowulf,
wear it for luck and wear also this mail

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

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

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

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

Bedtime in Heorot

1250 þearf gesælde; wæs sēo þeod tilu.
 Sigon þā tō slæpe. Sum sære angeald
 æfen-ræste, swā him ful oft gelamp
 siþðan gold-sele Grendel warode,
 unriht æfnde, oppæt ende becwōm,
 swylt æfter synnum. Þæt gesyne wearþ,
 wīd-cūþ werum, þætte wrecend þā gýt
 lifde æfter lāpum, lange þrāge,
 æfter gūð-ceare. Grendles mōdor,
 1260 ides, āglāc-wīf yrmþe gemunde,
 sē þe wæter-egesan wunian scolde,
 cealde strēamas, siþðan Cain wearð
 tō ecg-banan āngan brēþer,
 fæderen-mæge; hē þā fāg gewāt,
 morþre gemearcod, man-drēam flēon,
 wēsten warode. Þanon wōc fela
 geōscaft-gāsta; wæs þāra Grendel sum
 heoro-wearh hetelic, sē æt Heorote fand
 wæccendne wer wīges bīdan.
 Þær him āglāca ætgræpe wearð;
 1270 hwæpre hē gemunde mægenes strenge,
 gim-fæste gife, ðe him God sealde,
 ond him tō An-waldan āre gelyfde,
 frōfre ond fultum; ðy hē þone fēond oferwōm,
 gehnægde helle-gāst. Þā hē hēan gewāt,
 drēame bedæled dēaþ-wīc sēon,
 man-cynnes fēond. Ond his mōdor þā gýt
 gifre ond galg-mōd gegān wolde
 sorh-fulne sīð, sunu dēoð wrecan.
 Cōm þā tō Heorote, ðær Hring-Dene
 1280 geond þæt sæld swāfun. Þā ðær sōna wearð

1250

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

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

*Another threat is
lurking in the night*

1280

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

*Grendel's mother
attacks*

edhwyrft eorlum siþðan inne fealh
Grendles mōdor. Wæs se gryre læssa
efne swā micle, swā bið mægþa cræft,
wīg-gryre wīfes, be wæþned-men
þonne heoru bunden, hamere geþuren,
sweord swāte fāh swīn ofer helme,
ecgum dyhttig, andweard scireð.
Ðā wæs on healle heard-ecg togen,
sweord ofer setlum, sīd-rand manig
hafen handa fæst; helm ne gemunde,
byrnan sīde, þā hine se brōga angeat.

1290

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

1300

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

a great reversal, once Grendel's mother
attacked and entered. Her onslaught was less
only by as much as an amazon warrior's
strength is less than an armed man's
when the hefted sword, its hammered edge
and gleaming blade slathered in blood,
razes the sturdy boar-ridge off a helmet.
Then in the hall, hard-honed swords
were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield
1290 lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets
or woven mail when they woke in terror.

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

Beowulf was elsewhere.

1300 Earlier, after the award of the treasure,
the Geat had been given another lodging.
There was uproar in Heorot. She had snatched their
trophy,
Grendel's bloodied hand. It was a fresh blow
to the afflicted bawn. The bargain was hard,
both parties having to pay
with the lives of friends. And the old lord,
the grey-haired warrior, was heartsore and weary
when he heard the news: his highest-placed adviser,
his dearest companion, was dead and gone.

1310 Hraþe wæs tō būre Bēowulf fetod,
 sigor-ēadig secg. Samod ær-dæge
 ēode eorla sum, æþele cempa,
 self mid gesīðum, þær se snotera hād,
 hwæpre him Al-walda æfre wille
 æfter wēa-spelle wyrpe gefremman.
 Gang ðā æfter flōre fyrd-wyrðe man
 mid his hand-scale —heal-wudu dynede—
 þæt hē þone wīsan wordum nægde,
 frēan Ingwina; frægn gif him wære,
 1320 æfter nēod-laðe, niht getæse.
 Hrōðgār mapelode, helm Scyldinga:
 “Ne frīn þū æfter sælum; sorh is genīwod
 Denigea lēodum. Dēad is Æschere,
 Yrmenlāfes yldra brōþor,
 mīn rūn-wita ond mīn ræd-bora,
 eaxl-gestealla, ðonne wē on orlege
 hafelan weredon, þonne hniton fēþan,
 eoferas cnysedan. Swylc scolde eorl wesan,
 æðeling ær-gōd, swylc Æschere wæs!
 1330 Wearð him on Heorote tō hand-banan
 wæl-gæst wæfre; ic ne wāt hwæder
 atol æse wlanc eft-sīðas tēah,
 fylle gefrægnod. Hēo þā fāhðe wræc,
 þē þū gystran niht Grendel cwealdest
 þurh hāstne hād heardum clammum,
 forþan hē tō lange lēode mīne
 wanode ond wyrde. Hē æt wīge gecrang
 ealdres scyldig; ond nū oþer cwōm
 mihtig mǣn-scaða, wolde hyre mæg wrecan,
 1340 gē feor hafað fāhðe gestæled,
 þæs þe þincean mæg þegne monegum,

1310

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

*Beowulf is
 summoned*

1320

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

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

1330

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

1340

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

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

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

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

*The country people's
tales about the
monsters*

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

The haunted mere

ponon yð-geblond up āstigeð
 won tō wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ
 lāð gewidru, oðþæt lyft ðrysmæþ,
 roderas rēotað. Nū is se ræd gelang
 eft æt þē ānum. Eard gīt ne const,
 frēcne stōwe, ðær þū findan miht
 fela-sinnigne secg; sēc gif þū dyrre.
 1380 Ic þē þā fæhðe fēo lēanige,
 eald-gestrēonum, swā ic ær dyde,
 wundini golde, gyf þy on weg cymest.”
 Bēowulf mæpelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:
 “Ne sorga, snotor guma! Sēltre bið æghwæm
 þæt hē his frēond wrece, þonne hē fela murne.
 Ūre æghwylc sceal ende gebīdan
 worolde lifes; wyrce sē þe mōte
 dōmes ær dēaþe; þæt bið driht-guman
 unlifgendum æfter sēlest.
 1390 Ārīs, rīces weard, uton hraþe fēran,
 Grendles māgan gang scēawigan!
 Ic hit þē gehāte: nō hē on helm losað,
 nē on foldan fæþm, nē on fyr-gen-holt,
 nē on gyfenes grund, gā þær hē wille.
 Ðys dōgor þū geþyld hafa
 wēana gehwylces, swā ic þē wēne tō.”
 Āhlēop ðā se gomela, Gode þancode,
 mihtigan Drihtne, þæs se man gespræc.
 Þā wæs Hrōðgāre hors gebæted,
 1400 wicg wunden-feax; wīsa fengel
 geatolīc gende; gum-fēþa stōp
 lind-hæbbendra. Lāstas wæron
 æfter wald-swaþum wīde gesyne,

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

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

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

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

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

1390 So arise, my lord, and let us immediately
set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.
I guarantee you: she will not get away,
not to dens under ground nor upland groves
nor the ocean floor. She’ll have nowhere to flee to.
Endure your troubles to-day. Bear up
and be the man I expect you to be.”

With that the old lord sprang to his feet
and praised God for Beowulf’s pledge.
Then a bit and halter were brought for his horse
with the plaited mane. The wise king mounted
the royal saddle and rode out in style
with a force of shield-bearers. The forest paths
were marked all over with the monster’s tracks,

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

*The expedition to
the mere*

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

her trail on the ground wherever she had gone
across the dark moors, dragging away
the body of that thane, Hrothgar's best
counsellor and overseer of the country.
So the noble prince proceeded undismayed
up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths
1410 and ways where they were forced into single file,
ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.
He went in front with a few men,
good judges of the lie of the land,
and suddenly discovered the dismal wood,
mountain trees growing out at an angle
above grey stones: the bloodshot water
surged underneath. It was a sore blow
to all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,
a hurt to each and every one
1420 of that noble company when they came upon
Aeschere's head at the foot of the cliff.

Everybody gazed as the hot gore
kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn
repeated its notes: the whole party
sat down to watch. The water was infested
with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons
and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,
serpents and wild things such as those that often
surface at dawn to roam the sail-road
1430 and doom the voyage. Down they plunged,
lashing in anger at the loud call
of the battle-bugle. An arrow from the bow
of the Geat chief got one of them
as he surged to the surface: the seasoned shaft
stuck deep in his flank and his freedom in the water

sundes þē sǣnra, ðē hýne swýlt fornam.
Hraeþe wearð on ýðum mid eofer-sprēotum
heoro-hōcyhtum hearde genearwod,
nīða genæged ond on næs togen
1440 wundorlic wæg-bora; weras scēawedon
gryrelīcne gist.

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

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

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

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

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

*Beowulf arms for the
underwater fight*

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

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

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

*Beowulf takes his
leave*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*His sword fails to do
damage*

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

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

*He fights back with
his bare hands*

1560 Then he saw a blade that boded well,
a sword in her armoury, an ancient heirloom
from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,
one that any warrior would envy,

*Beowulf discovers a
mighty sword and
slays his opponent*

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

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

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

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

*He proceeds to
behead Grendel's
corpse*

Immediately the counsellors keeping a lookout

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

*Forebodings of those
on the shore*

1600 The ninth hour of the day arrived.
The brave Shieldings abandoned the cliff-top
and the king went home; but sick at heart,
staring at the mere, the strangers held on.
They wished, without hope, to behold their lord,
Beowulf himself.

Meanwhile, the sword
began to wilt into gory icicles,
to slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,
the way it all melted as ice melts
when the Father eases the fetters off the frost
and unravels the water-ropes. He who wields power
over time and tide: He is the true Lord.

*The sword blade
melts*

1610 The Geat captain saw treasure in abundance
but carried no spoils from those quarters
except for the head and the inlaid hilt
embossed with jewels; its blade had melted
and the scrollwork on it burnt, so scalding was the blood
of the poisonous fiend who had perished there.
Then away he swam, the one who had survived
the fall of his enemies, flailing to the surface.

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

1620 The wide water, the waves and pools
were no longer infested once the wandering fiend

oflēt lif-dagas ond þās lānan gesceaft.
 Cōm þā tō lande lid-manna helm
 swið-mōd swymman, sǣ-lāce gefeah,
 mægen-byrþenne þāra þe hē him mid hæfde.
 Eodon him þā tōgēanes, Gode þancodon,
 ðrȳðlic þegna hēap, þēodnes gefēgon,
 þæs þe hī hyne gesundne gesēon mōston.
 Ðā wæs of þām hrōran helm ond byrne
 1630 lungre ālȳsed. Lagu drūsade,
 wæter under wolcnum, wæl-drēore fāg.
 Fērdon forð þonon fēþe-lāstum,
 ferhþum fāgne, fold-weg mǣton,
 cūþe strǣte; cyning-balde men
 from þām holm-clife hafelan bāron
 earfoðlice heora æghwæþrum
 fela-mōdigra. Fēower scoldon
 on þām wæl-stenge weorcum geferian
 tō þām gold-sele Grendles hēafod,
 1640 oþðæt semninga tō sele cōmon
 frome, fyrd-hwate fēower-tȳne
 Gēata gongan; gum-dryhten mid
 mōdig on gemonge meodo-wongas træd.
 Ðā cōm in gān ealdor ðegna,
 dǣd-cēne mon dōme gewurþad,
 hæle hilde-dēor, Hrōðgār grētan.
 Þā wæs be feaxe on flet boren
 Grendles hēafod, þær guman druncon,
 egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid;
 1650 wlite-sēon wrætlic weras on sāwon.
 Bēowulf maþelode, beam Ecgþēowes:

let go of her life and this unreliable world.
The seafarers' leader made for land,
resolutely swimming, delighted with his prize,
the mighty load he was lugging to the surface.
His thanes advanced in a troop to meet him,
thanking God and taking great delight
in seeing their prince back safe and sound.
Quickly the hero's helmet and mail-shirt
1630 were loosed and unlaced. The lake settled,
clouds darkened above the bloodshot depths.

With high hearts they headed away
along footpaths and trails through the fields,
roads that they knew, each of them wrestling
with the head they were carrying from the lakeside cliff,
men kingly in their courage and capable
of difficult work. It was a task for four
to hoist Grendel's head on a spear
and bear it under strain to the bright hall.
1640 But soon enough they neared the place,
fourteen Geats in fine fettle,
striding across the outlying ground
in a delighted throng around their leader.

In he came then, the thane's commander,
the arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:
his courage was proven, his glory was secure.
Grendel's head was hauled by the hair,
dragged across the floor where the people were drinking,
a horror for both queen and company to behold.
1650 They stared in awe. It was an astonishing sight.

*He displays
Grendel's head
in Heorot*

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hrothgar spoke; he examined the hilt,
that relic of old times. It was engraved all over
and showed how war first came into the world
and the flood destroyed the tribe of giants.
They suffered a terrible severance from the Lord;
the Almighty made the waters rise,
drowned them in the deluge for retribution.
In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards
there were rune-markings correctly incised,
stating and recording for whom the sword
had been first made and ornamented
with its scrollworked hilt. Then everyone hushed
as the son of Halfdane spoke this wisdom.

“A protector of his people, pledged to uphold
truth and justice and to respect tradition,
is entitled to affirm that this man
was born to distinction. Beowulf, my friend,
your fame has gone far and wide,
you are known everywhere. In all things you are even-
tempered,
prudent and resolute. So I stand firm by the promise of
friendship
we exchanged before. Forever you will be
your people's mainstay and your own warriors'
helping hand.

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

*Hrothgar's address
to Beowulf*

*He contrasts
Beowulf with King
Heremod*

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

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

1720 He vented his rage on men he caroused with,
killed his own comrades, a pariah king
who cut himself off from his own kind,
even though Almighty God had made him
eminent and powerful and marked him from the start
for a happy life. But a change happened,
he grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings
to honour the Danes. He suffered in the end
for having plagued his people for so long:
his life lost happiness.

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

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

*Hrothgar's discourse
on the dangers of
power*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*A feast. The warriors
rest*

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

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

fūse tō farenne; wolde feor þanon
cuma collen-ferhð cēoles nēosan.
Heht þā se hearda Hrunting beran
sunu Ecglāfes, heht his sweord niman,
lēoflic īren; sægde him þæs lēanes þanc,
1810 cwæð, hē þone gūð-wine gōdne tealde,
wīg-cræftigne, nales wordum lōg
mēces ecge: þæt wæs mōdig secg.
Ond þā sīð-frome, searwum gearwe
wīgend wæron; ēode weorð Denum
æpeling tō yppan, þær se oþer wæs,
hæle hilde-dēor Hrōðgār grētte.

Bēowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:
“Nū wē sǣ-līðend secgan wyllað,
feorran cumene, þæt wē fundiaþ
1820 Higelāc sēcan. Wæron hēr tela,
willum bewenede; þū ūs wēl dohtest.
Gif ic þonne on eorþan ōwihte mæg
þīnre mōd-lufan māran tilian,
gumena dryhten, ðonne ic gýt dyde,
gūð-geweorca, ic bēo gearo sōna.
Gif ic þæt gefricge ofer flōða begang,
þæt þec ymb-sittend egesan þýwað,
swā þec hetende hwīlum dydon,
ic ðē þūsenda þegna bringe,
1830 hæleþa tō helpe. Ic on Higelāc wāt,
Gēata dryhten, þēah ðe hē geong sý,
folces hyrde, þæt hē mec fremman wile
wordum ond weorcum, þæt ic þē wēl herige
ond þē tō gēoce gār-holt bere,
mægenes fultum, þær ðē bið manna þearf.
Gif him þonne Hreþric to hofum Geata

was beckoning the nobles; and the bold voyager
longed to be aboard his distant boat.

Then that stalwart fighter ordered Hrunting
to be brought to Unferth, and bade Unferth
take the sword and thanked him for lending it.

1810 He said he had found it a friend in battle
and a powerful help; he put no blame
on the blade's cutting edge. He was a considerate man.

And there the warriors stood in their war-gear,
eager to go, while their honoured lord
approached the platform where the other sat.
The undaunted hero addressed Hrothgar.

*Beowulf and his
band prepare to
depart*

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

"Now we who crossed the wide sea
have to inform you that we feel a desire

1820 to return to Hygelac. Here we have been welcomed
and thoroughly entertained. You have treated us well.
If there is any favour on earth I can perform
beyond deeds of arms I have done already,
anything that would merit your affections more,
I shall act, my lord, with alacrity.

If ever I hear from across the ocean
that people on your borders are threatening battle
as attackers have done from time to time,

1830 I shall land with a thousand thanes at my back
to help your cause. Hygelac may be young
to rule a nation, but this much I know
about the king of the Geats: he will come to my aid
and want to support me by word and action
in your hour of need, when honour dictates
that I raise a hedge of spears around you.
Then if Hrethric should think about travelling

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

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

1840

Hrothgar spoke and answered him:
"The Lord in His wisdom sent you those words
and they came from the heart. I have never heard
so young a man make truer observations.

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

1850

You are strong in body and mature in mind,
impressive in speech. If it should come to pass
that Hrethel's descendant dies beneath a spear,
if deadly battle or the sword blade or disease
fells the prince who guards your people
and you are still alive, then I firmly believe
the seafaring Geats won't find a man
worthier of acclaim as their king and defender
than you, if only you would undertake
the lordship of your homeland. My liking for you
deepens with time, dear Beowulf.

1860

What you have done is to draw two peoples,
the Geat nation and us neighbouring Danes,
into shared peace and a pact of friendship
in spite of hatreds we have harboured in the past.
For as long as I rule this far-flung land
treasures will change hands and each side will treat
the other with gifts; across the gannet's bath,
over the broad sea, whorled prows will bring
presents and tokens. I know your people
are beyond reproach in every respect,
steadfast in the old way with friend or foe."

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

*Gifts presented,
farewells taken*

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

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

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

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

*The Geats march
back to the shore*

ofer Hrōðgāres hord-gestrēonum.

1900 Hē þām bāt-wearde bunden golde
swurd gesealde, þæt hē syðþan wæs
on meodu-bence māþme þy weorþra,
yrfe-lāfe. Gewāt him on naca,
drēfan dēop wæter, Dena land ofgeaf.
Pā wæs be mæste mere-hræglasum,
segl sāle fæst; sund-wudu þunede;
nō þær wēg-flotan wind ofer yðum
sīdes getwæfde. Sæ-genga fōr,
flēat fāmig-heals forð ofer yðe,
1910 bunden-stefna ofer brim-strēamas,
þæt hīe Gēata clifu ongitan meahton,
cūþe næssas; cēol up geþrang
lyft-geswenced, on lande stōd.

Hraþe wæs æt holme bȳð-weard geara,
sē þe ær lange tīd lēofra manna
fūs æt faroðe feor wlātode.
Sælde tō sande sīd-fæþme scip
oncer-bendum fæst, þy læs hym yþa ðrym
wudu wynsuman forwrecan meahte.
1920 Hēt þā up beran æþelings gestrēon,
frætwe ond fæt-gold; næs him feor þanon
tō gesēcenne sines bryttan,
Higelāc Hrēþling, þær æt hām wunað
selfa mid gesīðum sǣ-wealle nēah.

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

above Hrothgar's riches in the loaded hold.

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

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

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

*They sail from
Denmark*

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

*They arrive at
Hygelac's stronghold*

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

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

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

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

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

1930

Great Queen Modthryth

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

1940

1950

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Hygelac questions
Beowulf*

1990 sǣcce sēcean ofer sealt wæter,
 hilde tō Hiorote? Ac ðū Hrōðgāre
 wīd-cūðne wēan wihte gebēttest,
 mǣrum ðēodne? Ic ðæs mōd-ceare
 sorh-wylmum sēað, sīðe ne truwode
 lēofes mannes. Ic ðē lange bæd,
 þæt ðū þone wæl-gæst wihte ne grētte,
 lēte Sūð-Dene sylfe geweorðan
 gūðe wið Grendel. Gode ic þanc secge,
 þæs ðe ic ðē gesundne gesēon mōste.”
 Bīowulf maðelode, bearn Ecgðīoes:
 2000 “Þæt is undyrne, dryhten Higelāc,
 mǣru gemēting monegum fira,
 hwylc orleg-hwīl uncer Grendles
 wearð on ðām wange, þær hē worna fela
 Sige-Scyldingum sorge gefremede,
 yrmðe tō aldre; ic ðæt eall gewræc,
 swā begylpan ne þearf Grendeles māga
 ænig ofer eorðan ūht-hlem þone,
 sē ðe lengest leofað lāðan cynnes,
 fācne bifongen. Ic ðær furðum cwōm
 2010 tō ðām hring-sele Hrōðgār grētan;
 sōna mē se mǣra mago Healfdenes,
 syððan hē mōd-sefan mīnne cūðe,
 wið his sylfes sunu setl getāhte.
 Weorod wæs on wynne: ne seah ic wīðan feorh
 under heofones hwealf heal-sittendra
 medu-drēam māran. Hwīlum mǣru cwēn,
 friðu-sibb folca, flet eall geonðhwearf,
 bædde byre geonge; oft hīo bēah-wriðan
 secge sealde, ær hīe tō setle gēong;

2020 hwīlum for duguðe dohtor Hrōðgāres
 eorlum on ende ealu-wāge bær,
 þā ic Frēaware flet-sittende
 nemnan hūrde, þær hīo nægled-sinc
 hæleðum sealde. Sīo gehāten is
 geong, gold-hroden, gladum suna Frōdan;
 hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga,
 rīces hyrde, ond þæt ræd talað
 þæt hē mid ðy wīfe wæl-fæhða dæl,
 sæcca gesette. Oft seldan hwær
 2030 æfter lēod-hryre lýtle hwīle
 bon-gār būgeð, þeah sēo brýd duge!
 “Mæg þæs þonne ofþyncan ðeodne Heaðobeardna
 ond þegna gehwām þāra lēoda,
 þonne hē mid fæmnan on flett gæð
 dryht-bearn Dena, duguða biwenede.
 On him gladiað gomelra lāfe,
 heard ond hring-mæl Heaðabeardna gestreōn,
 þenden hīe ðam wæpnum wealdan mōston,
 oððæt hīe forlæddan tō ðām lind-plegan
 2040 swāse gesīðas ond hyra sylfra feorh.
 Þonne cwið æt bēore, sē þe bēah gesyhð,
 eald æsc-wiga, sē ðe eall geman
 gār-cwealm gumena —him bið grim sefa—
 onginneð geōmor-mōð geongum ceman
 þurh hreðra gehygd, hīges cunnian,
 wīg-bealu weccēan, ond þæt word ācwyð:
 “ ‘Meaht ðū, mīn wine, mēce gecnāwan,
 þone þīn fæder tō gefeohte bær
 under here-grīman hindeman sīde,
 2050 dýre īren, þær hyne Dene slōgon,

2020

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

*He foresees the grim
consequence of a
proposed marriage*

2030

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

2040

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

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

2050

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

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

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

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

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

*The tale of the fight
with Grendel
resumed*

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

all roused up, yet still unready
to leave the hall empty-handed;
renowned for his might, he matched himself against me,
wildly reaching. He had this roomy pouch,
a strange accoutrement, intricately strung
and hung at the ready, a rare patchwork
of devilishly fitted dragon-skins.
I had done him no wrong, yet the raging demon
wanted to cram me and many another
2090 into this bag—but it was not to be
once I got to my feet in a blind fury.
It would take too long to tell how I repaid
the terror of the land for every life he took
and so won credit for you, my king,
and for all your people. And although he got away
to enjoy life's sweetness for a while longer,
his right hand stayed behind him in Heorot,
evidence of his miserable overthrow
2100 as he dived into murk on the mere bottom.

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

*Beowulf recalls the
feast in Heorot*

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

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

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

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

*He tells about
Grendel's mother*

“Swā se ðeod-kyning þeawum lyfde;
 nealles ic ðām lēanum forloren hæfde,
 mægnes mēde, ac hē mē māðmas geaf,
 sunu Healfdenes, on mīnne sylfes dōm;
 ðā ic ðē, beorn-cyning, bringan wylle,
 ēstum geȳwan. Gēn is eall æt ðē
 2150 lissa gelong; ic lýt hafo
 hēafod-māga, nefne Hygelāc ðec!”
 Hēt ðā in beran eafor, hēafod-segn,
 heaðo-stēapne helm, hāre byman,
 gūð-sweord geatolīc, gyd æfter wræc:
 “Mē ðis hilde-sceorþ Hrōðgār sealde,
 snotra fengel; sume worde hēt,
 þæt ic his ærest ðē ēst gesægde:
 cwæð þæt hyt hæfde Hiorogār cyning,
 lēod Scyldunga, lange hwīle.
 2160 Nō ðȳ ær suna sīnum syllan wolde,
 hwatum Heorowearde, þeah hē him hold wære,
 brēost-gewædu. Brūc ealles well!”
 Hȳrde ic, þæt þām frætwwum fēower mēaras,
 lungre, gelīce lāst weardode,
 æppel-fealuwe; hē him ēst getēah
 mēara ond māðma. Swā sceal mæg dōn,
 nealles inwit-net oðrum bregdon
 dyrnum cræfte, dēað rēnian
 hond-gesteallan. Hygelāce wæs,
 2170 nīða heardum, nefa swȳðe hold
 ond gehwæðer oðrum hrōpra gemyndig.
 Hȳrde ic þæt hē ðone heals-bēah Hygde gesealde,

“Thus the king acted with due custom.
I was paid and recompensed completely,
given full measure and the freedom to choose
from Hrothgar’s treasures by Hrothgar himself.
These, King Hygelac, I am happy to present
to you as gifts. It is still upon your grace
that all favour depends. I have few kinsmen
who are close, my king, except for your kind self.”

2150

Then he ordered the boar-framed standard to be brought,
the battle-topping helmet, the mail-shirt grey as hoar-frost
and the precious war-sword; and proceeded with his
speech.

*Beowulf presents
Hygelac with the
treasures he has won*

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

2160

Enjoy it well.”

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

2170

I heard he presented Hygd with a gorget,

wrætlicne wundur-māððum, ðone þe him Wealhðeo
geaf,

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Beowulf's exemplary
life is extolled*

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

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

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

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

against the fierce aggression of the Shylfings:
ruthless swordsmen, seasoned campaigners,
they came against him and his conquering nation,
and with cruel force cut him down
so that afterwards

the wide kingdom
reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well
for fifty winters, grew old and wise
as warden of the land

2210

until one began
to dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl
from the steep vaults of a 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 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
metalwork. There were many other
heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house,

2230

*A dragon awakes.
An accidental theft
provokes his wrath*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter
have emptied the earth of entire peoples.”

And so he mourned as he moved about the world,
deserted and alone, lamenting his unhappiness
day and night, until death’s flood
brimmed up in his heart.

2270

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

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

2280

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

*The dragon in
turmoil*

2290

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

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

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

The dragon began to belch out flames
and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow
that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger
would leave nothing alive in his wake.
Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.
Far and near, the Geat nation
bore the brunt of his brutal assaults
and virulent hate. Then back to the hoard
2320 he would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den.
He had swung the land, swathed it in flame,
in fire and burning, and now he felt secure
in the vaults of his barrow; but his trust was unavailing.

*The dragon wreaks
havoc on the Geats*

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

*Beowulf's ominous
feelings about the
dragon*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Beowulf's pride and
prowess sustain him*

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

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

2360

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

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

2370

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

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

2380

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

*Heardred is
implicated in
Swedish feuds and
slain*

hāmes nīosan, syððan Heardrēd læg,
 lēt ðone brego-stōl Bīowulf healdan,
 2390 Gēatum wealdan; þæt wæs gōd cyning.
 Sē ðæs lēod-hryres lēan gemunde
 uferan dōgrum, Eadgilse wearð,
 fēasceaftum frēond; folce gestēpte
 ofer sǣ sīde sunu Ōhteres,
 wigum ond wǣpnum; hē gewræc syððan
 cealdum cear-sīðum, cyning ealdre binēat.
 Swā hē nīða gehwane genesen hæfde,
 slīðra geslyhta, sunu Ecgðīowes,
 ellen-weorca, oð ðone ānne dæg,
 2400 þē hē wið þām wyrme gewegan sceolde.
 Gewāt þā twelfa sum, torne gebolgen,
 dryhten Gēata dracan scēawian.
 Hæfde þā gefrūnen, hwanan sīo fǣhð ārās,
 bealo-nīð biorna; him tō bearme cwōm
 mǣðpum-fæt mǣre þurh ðæs meldan hond.
 Sē wæs on ðām ðrēate þrēottēoða secg,
 sē ðæs orleges ōr onstealde,
 hæft hyge-giōmor, sceolde hēan ðonon
 wong wīsian. Hē ofer willan gīong,
 2410 tō ðæs ðe hē eorð-sele ānne wisse,
 hlǣw under hrūsan holm-wylme nēh,
 yð-gewinne, sē wæs innan full
 wrǣtta ond wīra. Weard unhīore,
 gearo gūð-freca gold-mǣðmas hēold,
 eald under eorðan; næs þæt yðe cēap
 tō gegangenne gumena ænigum.
 Gesæt ðā on næsse nīð-heard cyning

2390

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

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

*Beowulf inherits the
kingship, settles the
feuding*

2400

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

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

2410

The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.

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

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

*Beowulf's
forebodings*

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

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

*An accidental killing
and its sad
consequences for
Hrethel*

*Hrethel's loss
reflected in "The
Father's Lament"*

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

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

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

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

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

þeah ðe oðer his ealdre gebohte,
heardan cēape; Hæðcynne wearð,
Gēata dryhtne, gūð onsæge.
Þā ic on morgne gefrægn mæg oðerne
billes ecgum on bonan stælan,
þær Ongenþeow Eofores nīosað;
gūð-helm tōglād, gomela Scylfing
hrēas heoro-blāc; hond gemunde
fāhðo genōge, feorh-sweng ne oftēah.

2490

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

2500

2510

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beowulf's last boast

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Beowulf's sword
fails him*

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
2600 sorrow welled up: in a man of worth
the claims of kinship cannot be denied.

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

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

*Wiglaf stands by his
lord*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Wiglaf's speech to
the shirkers*

in bīor-sele, ðe ūs ðās bēagas geaf,
 þæt wē him ðā gūð-getāwa gyldan woldon,
 gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,
 helmas ond heard sweord. Ðē hē ūsic on herge gecēas
 tō ðyssum sīð-fate sylfes willum,
 2640 onmunde ūsic mǣrða, ond mē þās mǣðmas geaf,
 þē hē ūsic gār-wīgend gōde tealde,
 hwate helm-berend, þēah ðe hlāford ūs
 þis ellen-weorc āna āðohte
 tō gefremmanne, folces hyrde,
 forðām hē manna mǣst mǣrða gefremede,
 dǣda dollīcra. Nū is sē dæg cumen
 þæt ūre man-dryhten mægenes behōfað,
 gōdra gūð-rinca; wutun gongan tō,
 helpan hild-fruman, þenden hyt sý,
 2650 glēd-egesa grim! God wāt on mec,
 þæt mē is micle lēofre, þæt mīnne līc-haman
 mid mīnne gold-gyfan glēd fæðmie.
 Ne þynceð mē gerysne, þæt wē rondas beren
 eft tō earde, nemne wē æror mægen
 fāne gefyllan, feorh ealgian
 Wedra ðēodnes. Ic wāt geare,
 þæt nǣron eald-gewyrht, þæt hē āna scyle
 Gēata duguðe gnorn þrōwian,
 gesīgan æt sæcce; ūrum sceal sweord ond helm,
 2660 byrne ond beadu-scrūd bām gemǣne.”

Wōd þā þurh þone wæl-rēc, wīg-heafolan bær
 frēan on fultum, fēa worda cwæð:
 “Lēofa Bīowulf, læst eall tela,
 swā ðū on geoguð-fēore geāra gecwæde,
 þæt ðū ne ālǣte be ðē lifigendum
 dōm gedrēosan; scealt nū dǣdum rōf,
 æðeling ān-hýdig, ealle mægene

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

*Wiglaf goes to
Beowulf's aid*

feorh ealgian; ic ðē ful-læstu!”

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

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

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

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

2670

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

*The dragon attacks
again*

2680

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

Another setback

2690

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

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

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

*Wiglaf gets past the
flames and strikes*

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
and the flames grew weaker.

2700

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
and triumphs in the world.

2710

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
with his own hands washed his lord's wounds,
swabbed the weary prince with water,
bathed him clean, unbuckled his helmet.

2720

Beowulf spoke: in spite of his wounds,
mortal wounds, he still spoke
for he well knew his days in the world

*Beowulf delivers the
fatal wound*

*Beowulf senses that
he is near death*

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

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

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

*He thinks back on
his life*

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

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

*Wiglaf enters the
dragon's barrow*

gold glitnian grunde getenge,
wundur on wealle, ond þæs wyrmes denn,
2760 ealdes ūht-flogan, orcas stonda,
fym-manna fatu, feormend-lēase,
hyrstum behrorene. Þær wæs helm monig,
eald ond ōmig, earm-bēaga fela,
searwum gesæled. Sinc ēaðe mæg,
gold on grunde, gum-cynnes gehwone
oferhīgian; hȳde sē ðe wylle!

Swylce hē siomian geseah segn eall-gylden
hēah ofer horde, hond-wundra mæst,
gelocen leoðo-cræftum; of ðām lēoma stōd,
2770 þæt hē þone grund-wong ongitan meakte,
wræte giondwlītan. Næs ðæs wyrmes þær
onsȳn ænig, ac hyne ecg fornam.
Ðā ic on hlāwe gefrægn hord rēafian,
eald enta geweorc āne mannan,
him on bearm hladon bunan ond discas
sylfes dōme; segn ēac genōm,
bēacna beorhtost. Bill ær gescōd
—ecg wæs īren— eald-hlāfordes
þām ðāra mādma mund-bora wæs
2780 longe hwīle, līg-egesas wæg
hātne for horde, hioro-weallende
middel-nihtum, oðþæt hē morðre swealt.
Ār wæs on ofoste, eft-sīðes geom,
frætsum gefyrðred; hyne fyrwet bræc,
hwæðer collen-ferð cwicne gemette
in ðām wong-stede Wedra þēoden
ellen-sīocne, þær hē hine ær forlēt.

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

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

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

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

*He returns with
treasure*

Hē ðā mid þām mǎðmum mǎrne þīoden,
 dryhten sīnne drīorigne fand,
 2790 ealdres æt ende; hē hine eft ongon
 wæteres weorpan, oðþæt wordes ord
 brēost-hord þurhbræc. Þā se beorn gespræc,
 gomel on gιοhðe: —gold scēawode—
 “Ic ðāra frætwa Frēan ealles ðanc,
 Wuldur-cyninge, wordum secge,
 ēcum Dryhtne, þe ic hēr on starie,
 þæs ðe ic mōste mīnum lēodum
 ær swylt-dæge swylc gestrȳnan.
 Nū ic on mǎðma hord mīne bebohte
 2800 frōde feorh-lege, fremmað gēna
 lēoda þearfe! Ne mæg ic hēr leng wasan.
 Hātað heaðo-mǎre hlǣw gewyrcean,
 beorhtne æfter bǣle æt brimes nosan;
 sē scel tō gemyndum mīnum lēodum
 hēah hlīfian on Hrones-nǎsse,
 þæt hit sǣ-līðend syððan hātan
 Bīowulfes biorh, ðā ðe brentingas
 ofer flōda genipu feorran drīfað.”
 Dyde him of healse hring gyldenre
 2810 þīoden þrīst-hȳdig, þegne gesealde,
 geongum gār-wigan, gold-fāhne helm,
 bēah ond byman, hēt hyne brūcan well:
 “Þū eart ende-lāf ūsses cynnes,
 Wǣgmundinga; ealle wyrd forspēon
 mīne mǎgas tō meodscafte,
 eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal.”
 Þæt wæs þām gomelan gingæste word

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

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

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

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

Beowulf's last words

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

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

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

Næs ðā lang tō ðon,

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

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

*The dragon too has
been destroyed*

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

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

Before long

þæt ðā hild-latan holt ofgēfan,
 tȳdre trēow-logan, tȳne ætsomne,
 ðā ne dorston ær dareðum lācan
 on hyra man-dryhtnes miclan þearfe;
 2850 ac hȳ scamiende scyldas bæran,
 gūð-gewædu, þær se gomela læg;
 wlitan on Wīlāf. Hē gewērgad sæt,
 fēðe-cempa, frēan eaxlum nēah;
 wehte hyne wætre, him wiht ne spēow.
 Ne meahte hē on eorðan, ðēah hē ūde wēl,
 on ðām frum-gāre feorh gehealdan,
 nē ðæs Wealdendes wiht oncirran.
 Wolde dōm Godes dædum rædan
 gumena gehwylcum, swā hē nū gēn dēð.
 2860 Þā wæs æt ðām geongan grim andswaru
 ēð-begēte þām ðe ær his elne forlēas.
 Wīglāf maðelode, Wēohstānes sunu,
 sēc sārīg-ferð — seah on unlēofe —:
 “Þæt lā mæg secgan, sē ðe wyle sōð specan,
 þæt se mon-dryhten, sē ēow ðā māðmas geaf,
 ēored-geatwe, þe gē þær on standað,
 þonne hē on ealu-bence oft gesealde
 heal-sittendum helm ond byrnan,
 þēoden his þegnum, swylce hē þryðlīcost
 2870 ōwer feor oððe nēah findan meahte,
 þæt hē gēnunga gūð-gewædu
 wrāðe forwurpe, ðā hyne wīg beget.
 Nealles folc-cyning fyrd-gesteallum
 gylpan þorfte; hwæðre him God ūðe,
 sigora Waldend, þæt hē hyne sylfne gewræc,
 āna mid ecge, þā him wæs elnes þearf.

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

*The battle-dodgers
come back*

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

Wiglaf rebukes them

Ic him lif-wraðe, lýtyle meahte
ætgifan æt gūðe, ond ongan swā þeah
ofer mīn gemet mæg-es helpan.

2880 Symle wæs þý sāmra, þonne ic sweorde drep
ferhð-genīðlan, fýr unswīðor
weōl of gewitte. Wergendra tō lýt
þrong ymbe þeoden, þā hyne sīo þrāg becwōm.
Nū sceal sinc-þego ond swyrd-gifu,
eall ēðel-wyn ēowrum cynne,
lufen ālicgean; lond-rihtes mōt
þære mæg-burge monna æghwylc
īdel hweorfan, syððan æðelingas
feorran gefricgean flēam ēowerne,
2890 dōm-lēasan dæd. Dēað bið sēlla
eorla gehwylcum þonne edwīt-lif!"

Heht ðā þæt heaðo-weorc tō hagan bīodan
up ofer ecg-clif, þær þæt eorl-weorod
morgen-longne dæg mōd-giōmor sæt,
bord-hæbbende, bēga on wēnum,
ende-dōgores ond eft-cymes
lēofes monnes. Lýt swīgode
nīwra spella, sē ðe næs gerād,
ac hē sōðlice sægde ofer ealle:

2900 "Nū is wil-geofa Wedra lēoda,
dryhten Gēata dēað-bedde fæst,
wunað wæl-reste wyrmes dædum:
him on efn ligeð ealdor-gewinna
siex-bennum sēoc; sweorde ne meahte
on ðām āglæcean ænige þinga
wunde gewyrcean. Wīglāf siteð
ofer Bīowulfe, byre Wīhstānes,

There was little I could do to protect his life
in the heat of the fray, yet I found new strength
welling up when I went to help him.

2880

Then my sword connected and the deadly assaults
of our foe grew weaker, the fire coursed
less strongly from his head. But when the worst happened
too few rallied around the prince.

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

2890

*He predicts that
enemies will now
attack the Geats*

Then he ordered the outcome of the fight to be reported
to those camped on the ridge, that crowd of retainers
who had sat all morning, sad at heart,
shield-bearers wondering about
the man they loved: would this day be his last
or would he return? He told the truth
and did not balk, the rider who bore
news to the cliff-top. He addressed them all:

2900

“Now the people’s pride and love,
the lord of the Geats, is laid on his deathbed,
brought down by the dragon’s attack.
Beside him lies the bane of his life,
dead from knife-wounds. There was no way
Beowulf could manage to get the better
of the monster with his sword. Wiglaf sits
at Beowulf’s side, the son of Weohstan,

*A messenger tells the
people that Beowulf
is dead*

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

the living warrior watching by the dead,
keeping weary vigil, holding a wake
for the loved and the loathed.

2910

Now war is looming
over our nation, soon it will be known
to Franks and Frisians, far and wide,
that the king is gone. Hostility has been great
among the Franks since Hygelac sailed forth
at the head of a war-fleet into Friesland:
there the Hetware harried and attacked
and overwhelmed him with great odds.
The leader in his war-gear was laid low,
fell amongst followers; that lord did not favour
his company with spoils. The Merovingian king
has been an enemy to us ever since.

2920

“Nor do I expect peace or pact-keeping
of any sort from the Swedes. Remember:
at Ravenswood, Ongentheow
slaughtered Haethcyn, Hrethel’s son,
when the Geat people in their arrogance
first attacked the fierce Shylfings.
The return blow was quickly struck
by Ohthere’s father. Old and terrible,
he felled the sea-king and saved his own
aged wife, the mother of Onela
and of Ohthere, bereft of her gold rings.
Then he kept hard on the heels of the foe
and drove them, leaderless, lucky to get away,
in a desperate rout into Ravenswood.
His army surrounded the weary remnant
where they nursed their wounds; all through the night
he howled threats at those huddled survivors,

2930

*He foresees wars
with the Franks and
the Frisians*

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

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

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

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

*Hygelac relieved the
besieged Geats*

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

*Ongentheow
withdrew*

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

Ne meahte se snella sunu Wonrēdes
 ealdum ceorle ondslyht giofan,
 ac hē him on hēafde helm ær gescer,
 þæt hē blōde fāh būgan sceolde,
 fēoll on foldan; næs hē fæge þā gīt,
 ac hē hyne gewyrpte, þēah ðe him wund hrine.
 Lēt se hearda Higelāces þegn
 brādne mēce, þā his brōðor læg,
 eald-sweord eotonisc, entiscne helm
 2980 brecan ofer bord-weal; ðā gebēah cyning,
 folces hyrde, wæs in feorh dropen.
 Ðā wæron monige, þe his mæg wriðon,
 ricone ārærdon, ðā him gerȳmed wearð,
 þæt hīe wæl-stōwe wealdan mōston.
 Penden rēafode rinc oðerne,
 nam on Ongendīo īren-byrnan,
 heard swyrd hilted ond his helm somod;
 hāres hyrste Higelāce bær.
 Hē ðām frætsum fēng ond him fægre gehēt
 2990 lēana mid lēodum, ond gelāste swā;
 geald þone gūð-ræs Gēata dryhten,
 Hrēðles eafora, þā hē tō hām becōm,
 Iofore ond Wulfe mid ofer-māðmum;
 sealde hiora gehwæðrum hund þūsenda
 landes ond locenra bēaga —ne ðorfte him ðā lēan
 oðwītan
 mon on middan-gearde— syððan hīe ðā mærdā
 geslōgon;
 ond ðā Iofore forgeaf āngan dohtor,
 hām-weorðunge, hylde tō wedde.
 “Þæt ys sīo fāhðo ond se fēondscipe,
 3000 wæl-nīð wera, ðæs ðe ic wēn hafo,

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

2980 "With his brother down, the undaunted Eofor,
Hygelac's thane, hefted his sword
and smashed murderously at the massive helmet
past the lifted shield. And the king collapsed,
The shepherd of people was sheared of life.

2990 "Many then hurried to help Wulf,
bandaged and lifted him, now that they were left
masters of the blood-soaked battleground.
One warrior stripped the other,
looted Ongentheow's iron mail-coat,
his hard sword-hilt, his helmet too,
and carried the graith to King Hygelac;
he accepted the prize, promised fairly
that reward would come, and kept his word.
For their bravery in action, when they arrived home
Eofor and Wulf were overloaded
by Hrethel's son, Hygelac the Geat,
with gifts of land and linked rings
that were worth a fortune. They had won glory,
so there was no gainsaying his generosity.
And he gave Eofor his only daughter
to bide at home with him, an honour and a bond.

*The victorious Geats
returned home*

3000 "So this bad blood between us and the Swedes,
this vicious feud, I am convinced,

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

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

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

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

*The messenger
predicts that the
Swedes will soon
retaliate*

We must hurry now

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

*With Beowulf gone,
a tragic future
awaits*

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

The whole troop

3010

3020

3030

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

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

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

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

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

3070

Wīglāf maðelode, Wīhstānes sunu:

“Oft sceall eorl monig ānes willan
wræc ādrēogan, swā ūs geworden is.
Ne meahton wē gelæran lēofne þēoden.

3080

rīces hyrde rǣd ænigne,
þæt hē ne grētte gold-weard þone,
lēte hyne licgean þær hē longe wæs,
wīcum wunian oð woruld-ende;
hēold on hēah-gesceap. Hord ys gescēawod,
grimme gegongen; wæs þæt gifede tō swīð.

þē ðone þēod-cyning þyder ontyhte.
Ic wæs þær inne ond þæt eall geondseh,
recedes geatwa, þā mē gerȳmed wæs,
nealles swæslic e sīð ālyfed

3090

inn under eorð-weall. Ic on ofoste gefēng
micle mid mundum mægen-byrðenne
hord-gestrēona, hider ūt ætbær
cyninge mīnum: cwico wæs þā gēna,

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

Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke:

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

*Wiglaf ponders
Beowulf's fate*

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

alive, aware, and in spite of his weakness
he had many requests. He wanted me to greet you
and order the building of a barrow that would crown
the site of his pyre, serve as his memorial,
in a commanding position, since of all men
to have lived and thrived and lorded it on earth
his worth and due as a warrior were the greatest.

*He reports Beowulf's
last wishes*

3100

Now let us again go quickly
and feast our eyes on that amazing fortune
heaped under the wall. I will show the way
and take you close to those coffers packed with rings
and bars of gold. Let a bier be made
and got ready quickly when we come out
and then let us bring the body of our lord,
the man we loved, to where he will lodge
for a long time in the care of the Almighty."

3110

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

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

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

3120

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

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

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

under the God-cursed roof; one raised
a lighted torch and led the way.
No lots were cast for who should loot the hoard
for it was obvious to them that every bit of it
lay unprotected within the vault,
there for the taking. It was no trouble
3130 to hurry to work and haul out
the priceless store. They pitched the dragon
over the cliff-top, let tide's flow
and backwash take the treasure-minder.
Then coiled gold was loaded on a cart
in great abundance, and the grey-haired leader,
the prince on his bier, borne to Hronesness.

The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,
stacked and decked it until it stood four-square,
hung with helmets, heavy war-shields
3140 and shining armour, just as he had ordered.
Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,
mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.
On a height they kindled the hugest of all
funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke
billowed darkly up, the blaze roared
and drowned out their weeping, wind died down
and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,
burning it to the core. They were disconsolate
and wailed aloud for their lord's decease.

3150 A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
with hair bound up, she unburdened herself
of her worst fears, a wild litany
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Beowulf's funeral

*A Geat woman's
dread*

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

Then the Geat people began to construct
a mound on a headland, high and imposing,
a marker that sailors could see from far away,
and in ten days they had done the work.

3160

It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire
they housed inside it, behind a wall
as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.
And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels
and a trove of such things as trespassing men
had once dared to drag from the hoard.
They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,
gold under gravel, gone to earth,
as useless to men now as it ever was.

3170

Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,
chieftain's sons, champions in battle,
all of them distraught, chanting in dirges,
mourning his loss as a man and a king.
They extolled his heroic nature and exploits
and gave thanks for his greatness; which was the proper
thing,

His people lament

for a man should praise a prince whom he holds dear
and cherish his memory when that moment comes
when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.
So the Geat people, his hearth companions,
sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.

3180

They said that of all the kings upon the earth
he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,
kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.

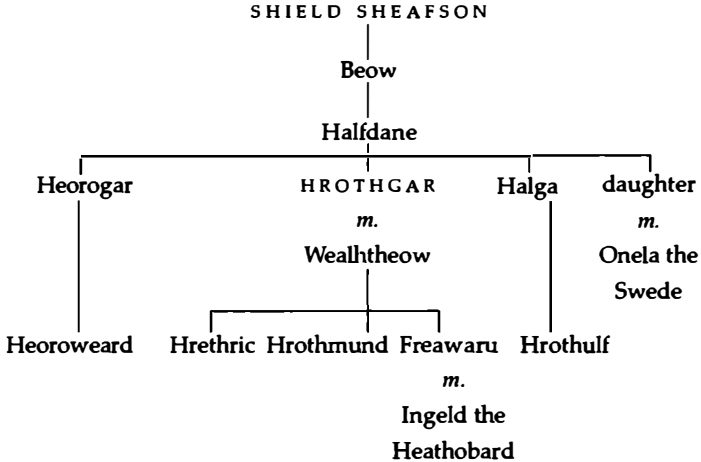
Family Trees

Acknowledgements

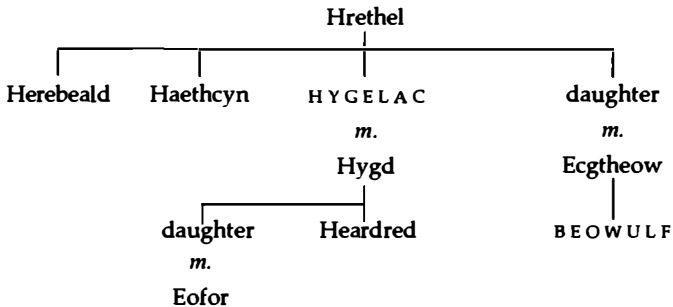
Family Trees

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

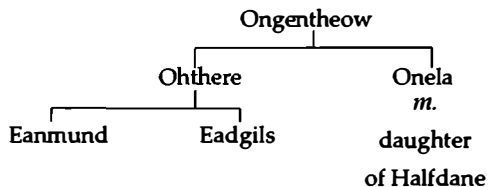
THE DANES or THE SHIELDINGS



THE GEATS



THE SWEDES



Acknowledgements

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

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

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

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

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

S.H.

