



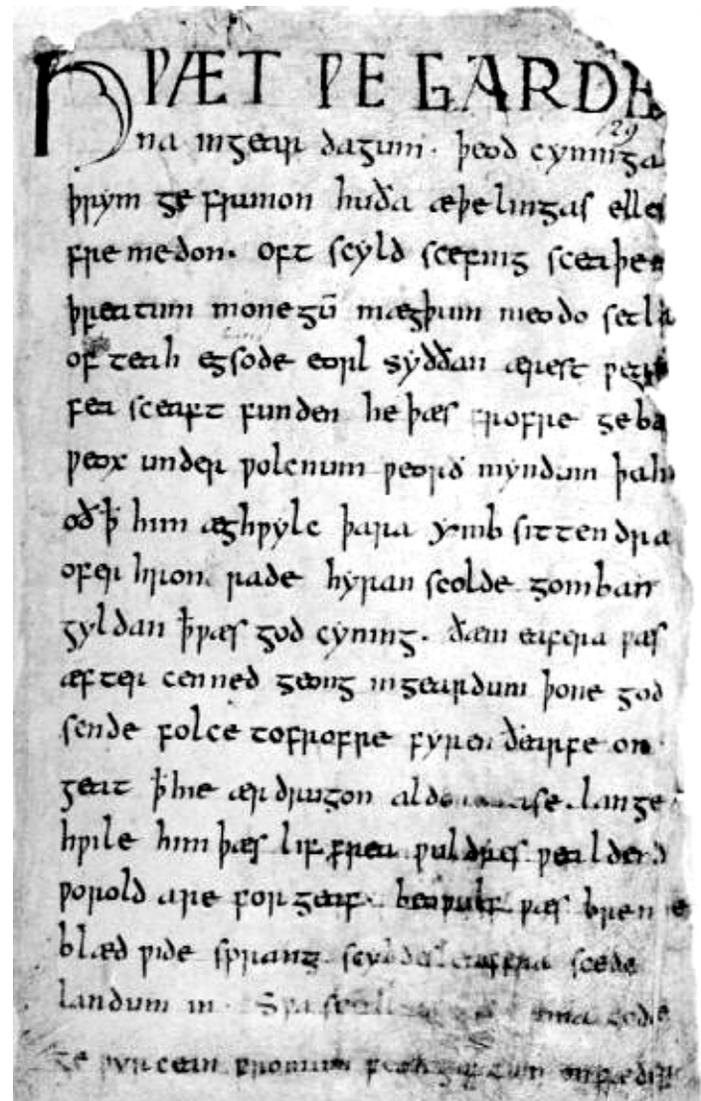
# BEOWULF

Translated by Gummere

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First page of the Cotton-Vitellius A.xv manuscript  
containing the text of Beowulf

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**Introduction**

**B**eowulf was written in England but is set in Scandinavia. It is an epic poem told in historical perspective; a story of epic events of great people of a heroic past. Although the author is unknown its themes and subject matter are generally believed to be formed through oral tradition, the passing down of stories by scop (tale singers) and is considered partly historical. Originally thought to be a majority of oral tradition merely transcribed by a literate monk, the author is now understood to be an imaginative poet in his own right, who by taking the pagan elements, the traditional accounts of heroic events and combining them with his own imaginative ingenuity created a completely new work of his own, more unified than the originally oral stories.

The poem is known only from a single manuscript, which is estimated to date from close to AD 1000. Kiernan concluded from a detailed examination of the manuscript that it was the author's own working copy. He has dated the work to the reign of Canute the Great. The poem appears in what is today called the Beowulf manuscript or Nowell Codex (British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv), along with other works. The manuscript is the product of two different scribes transcribing an earlier original, the second scribe taking over at line 1939 of Beowulf.

The spellings in the poem mix the West Saxon and Anglian dialects of Old English, though they are predominantly West Saxon, as are other Old English poems copied at the time. The earliest known owner is the 16th century scholar Laurence Nowell, after whom the manuscript is named, though its official designation is Cotton Vitellius A.XV due to its inclusion in the catalog of Robert Bruce Cotton's holdings in the middle of the 17th century. It suffered damage in the Cotton Library fire at Ashburnham House in 1731.

Icelandic scholar Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin made the first transcription of the manuscript in 1786 and published it in 1815, working under a historical research commission of the Danish government. Since that time, the manuscript has suffered additional decay, and the Thorkelin transcripts remain a prized secondary source for Beowulf scholars. Their accuracy has been called into question, however (e.g., by Chauncey

Brewster Tinker in *The Translations of Beowulf*, a comprehensive survey of 19th century translations and editions of *Beowulf*), and the extent to which the manuscript was actually more readable in Thorkelin's time is unclear. *Beowulf* also on his last battle died after slaying the firebreathing, poison spitting dragon.

The poem as we know it is filled with elements of the Norse legendarium along with Christian statements. It is often assumed that the work was written by a Christian monk, on the grounds that they were the only members of Anglo-Saxon society with access to writing materials. However, the example of King Alfred suggests the possibility of lay authorship.

In historical terms the poem's characters would have been pagans. The poem's narrator, however, places events into a Biblical context, casting Grendel and Grendel's Mother as the kin of Cain and placing monotheistic sentiments into the mouths of his characters. Although there are no direct references to Jesus in the text of the work, there are many indirect references. Also, the book of Genesis serves as a touchstone for the poem, since Grendel and Grendel's mother (due to their heritage) are seen as punished by the Curse and mark of Cain. Scholars disagree as to whether *Beowulf*'s main thematic thrust is pagan or Christian in nature. Of particular note is the description of soldiers' helmets, decorated with boar-carvings, alongside references to God and Christ, such as when *Beowulf* is given up for lost in Grendel's Mere at the ninth hour, which was the time at which Christ dies on the cross in the Bible. This could possibly be evidence of Christian details being placed in the story alongside traditional accounts of ancient Germanic religious practices. However, the lack of a pre-Christian written version of the epic leaves the issue unresolved.

Thus reflecting the above historical context, *Beowulf* depicts a Germanic warrior society, in which the relationship between the leader, or king, and his thanes was of paramount importance. This relationship was defined in terms of provision and service; the thanes defended the interest of the king in return for material provisions: weapons, armor, gold, silver, food, and drinks

Source: Wikipedia

## PRELUDE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE DANISH HOUSE

**L**o, praise of the prowess of people-kings  
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!  
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since erst he lay  
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gifts: a good king he!  
To him an heir was afterward born,  
a son in his halls, whom heaven sent  
to favor the folk, feeling their woe  
that erst they had lacked an earl for leader  
so long a while; the Lord endowed him,  
the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown.  
Famed was this Beowulf: far flew the boast of him,  
son of Scyld, in the Scandian lands.  
So becomes it a youth to quit him well  
with his father's friends, by fee and gift,  
that to aid him, aged, in after days,  
come warriors willing, should war draw nigh,  
liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds  
shall an earl have honor in every clan.

Forth he fared at the fated moment,  
sturdy Scyld to the shelter of God.  
Then they bore him over to ocean's billow,  
loving clansmen, as late he charged them,  
while wielded words the winsome Scyld,  
the leader beloved who long had ruled....  
In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel,  
ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge:  
there laid they down their darling lord

on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings, {0b}  
 by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure  
 fetched from far was freighted with him.  
 No ship have I known so nobly dight  
 with weapons of war and weeds of battle,  
 with breastplate and blade: on his bosom lay  
 a heaped hoard that hence should go  
 far o'er the flood with him floating away.  
 No less these loaded the lordly gifts,  
 thanes' huge treasure, than those had done  
 who in former time forth had sent him  
 sole on the seas, a suckling child.  
 High o'er his head they hoist the standard,  
 a gold-wove banner; let billows take him,  
 gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits,  
 mournful their mood. No man is able  
 to say in sooth, no son of the halls,  
 no hero 'neath heaven, -- who harbored that freight!

## I

**N**ow Beowulf bode in the burg of the Scyldings,  
 leader beloved, and long he ruled  
 in fame with all folk, since his father had gone  
 away from the world, till awoke an heir,  
 haughty Healfdene, who held through life,  
 sage and sturdy, the Scyldings glad.  
 Then, one after one, there woke to him,  
 to the chieftain of clansmen, children four:  
 Heorogar, then Hrothgar, then Halga brave;  
 and I heard that -- was -- 's queen,  
 the Heathoscylling's helpmate dear.  
 To Hrothgar was given such glory of war,  
 such honor of combat, that all his kin  
 obeyed him gladly till great grew his band  
 of youthful comrades. It came in his mind  
 to bid his henchmen a hall uprear,  
 a master mead-house, mightier far

than ever was seen by the sons of earth,  
 and within it, then, to old and young  
 he would all allot that the Lord had sent him,  
 save only the land and the lives of his men.  
 Wide, I heard, was the work commanded,  
 for many a tribe this mid-earth round,  
 to fashion the folkstead. It fell, as he ordered,  
 in rapid achievement that ready it stood there,  
 of halls the noblest: Heorot {1a} he named it  
 whose message had might in many a land.  
 Not reckless of promise, the rings he dealt,  
 treasure at banquet: there towered the hall,  
 high, gabled wide, the hot surge waiting  
 of furious flame. {1b} Nor far was that day  
 when father and son-in-law stood in feud  
 for warfare and hatred that woke again. {1c}  
 With envy and anger an evil spirit  
 endured the dole in his dark abode,  
 that he heard each day the din of revel  
 high in the hall: there harps rang out,  
 clear song of the singer. He sang who knew {1d}  
 tales of the early time of man,  
 how the Almighty made the earth,  
 fairest fields enfolded by water,  
 set, triumphant, sun and moon  
 for a light to lighten the land-dwellers,  
 and braided bright the breast of earth  
 with limbs and leaves, made life for all  
 of mortal beings that breathe and move.  
 So lived the clansmen in cheer and revel  
 a winsome life, till one began  
 to fashion evils, that field of hell.  
 Grendel this monster grim was called,  
 march-riever {1e} mighty, in moorland living,  
 in fen and fastness; fief of the giants  
 the hapless wight a while had kept  
 since the Creator his exile doomed.  
 On kin of Cain was the killing avenged  
 by sovran God for slaughtered Abel.  
 Ill fared his feud, {1f} and far was he driven,  
 for the slaughter's sake, from sight of men.

Of Cain awoke all that woful breed,  
 Etins {1g} and elves and evil-spirits,  
 as well as the giants that warred with God  
 weary while: but their wage was paid them!

## II

**W**ent he forth to find at fall of night  
 that haughty house, and heed wherever  
 the Ring-Danes, outrevelled, to rest had gone.  
 Found within it the atheling band  
 asleep after feasting and fearless of sorrow,  
 of human hardship. Unhallowed wight,  
 grim and greedy, he grasped betimes,  
 wrathful, reckless, from resting-places,  
 thirty of the thanes, and thence he rushed  
 fain of his fell spoil, faring homeward,  
 laden with slaughter, his lair to seek.  
 Then at the dawning, as day was breaking,  
 the might of Grendel to men was known;  
 then after wassail was wail uplifted,  
 loud moan in the morn. The mighty chief,  
 atheling excellent, unblithe sat,  
 labored in woe for the loss of his thanes,  
 when once had been traced the trail of the fiend,  
 spirit accurst: too cruel that sorrow,  
 too long, too loathsome. Not late the respite;  
 with night returning, anew began  
 ruthless murder; he recked no whit,  
 firm in his guilt, of the feud and crime.  
 They were easy to find who elsewhere sought  
 in room remote their rest at night,  
 bed in the bowers, {2a} when that bale was shown,  
 was seen in sooth, with surest token, --  
 the hall-thane's {2b} hate. Such held themselves  
 far and fast who the fiend outran!  
 Thus ruled unrighteous and raged his fill  
 one against all; until empty stood  
 that lordly building, and long it bode so.

Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,  
 sovran of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,  
 boundless cares. There came unhidden  
 tidings true to the tribes of men,  
 in sorrowful songs, how ceaselessly Grendel  
 harassed Hrothgar, what hate he bore him,  
 what murder and massacre, many a year,  
 feud unfading, -- refused consent  
 to deal with any of Daneland's earls,  
 make pact of peace, or compound for gold:  
 still less did the wise men ween to get  
 great fee for the feud from his fiendish hands.  
 But the evil one ambushed old and young  
 death-shadow dark, and dogged them still,  
 lured, or lurked in the livelong night  
 of misty moorlands: men may say not  
 where the haunts of these Hell-Runes {2c} be.  
 Such heaping of horrors the hater of men,  
 lonely roamer, wrought unceasing,  
 harassings heavy. O'er Heorot he lorded,  
 gold-bright hall, in gloomy nights;  
 and ne'er could the prince {2d} approach his throne,  
 -- 'twas judgment of God, -- or have joy in his hall.  
 Sore was the sorrow to Scyldings'-friend,  
 heart-rending misery. Many nobles  
 sat assembled, and searched out counsel  
 how it were best for bold-hearted men  
 against harassing terror to try their hand.  
 Whiles they vowed in their heathen fanes  
 altar-offerings, asked with words {2e}  
 that the slayer-of-souls would succor give them  
 for the pain of their people. Their practice this,  
 their heathen hope; 'twas Hell they thought of  
 in mood of their mind. Almighty they knew not,  
 Doomsman of Deeds and dreadful Lord,  
 nor Heaven's-Helmet heeded they ever,  
 Wielder-of-Wonder. -- Woe for that man  
 who in harm and hatred hales his soul  
 to fiery embraces; -- nor favor nor change  
 awaits he ever. But well for him  
 that after death-day may draw to his Lord,

and friendship find in the Father's arms!

### III

**T**hus seethed unceasing the son of Healfdene  
with the woe of these days; not wisest men  
assuaged his sorrow; too sore the anguish,  
loathly and long, that lay on his folk,  
most baneful of burdens and bales of the night.

This heard in his home Hygelac's thane,  
great among Geats, of Grendel's doings.  
He was the mightiest man of valor  
in that same day of this our life,  
stalwart and stately. A stout wave-walker  
he bade make ready. Yon battle-king, said he,  
far o'er the swan-road he fain would seek,  
the noble monarch who needed men!  
The prince's journey by prudent folk  
was little blamed, though they loved him dear;  
they whetted the hero, and hailed good omens.  
And now the bold one from bands of Geats  
comrades chose, the keenest of warriors  
e'er he could find; with fourteen men  
the sea-wood {3a} he sought, and, sailor proved,  
led them on to the land's confines.  
Time had now flown; {3b} afloat was the ship,  
boat under bluff. On board they climbed,  
warriors ready; waves were churning  
sea with sand; the sailors bore  
on the breast of the bark their bright array,  
their mail and weapons: the men pushed off,  
on its willing way, the well-braced craft.  
Then moved o'er the waters by might of the wind  
that bark like a bird with breast of foam,  
till in season due, on the second day,  
the curved prow such course had run  
that sailors now could see the land,  
sea-cliffs shining, steep high hills,  
headlands broad. Their haven was found,

their journey ended. Up then quickly  
the Weders' {3c} clansmen climbed ashore,  
anchored their sea-wood, with armor clashing  
and gear of battle: God they thanked  
or passing in peace o'er the paths of the sea.  
Now saw from the cliff a Scylding clansman,  
a warden that watched the water-side,  
how they bore o'er the gangway glittering shields,  
war-gear in readiness; wonder seized him  
to know what manner of men they were.  
Straight to the strand his steed he rode,  
Hrothgar's henchman; with hand of might  
he shook his spear, and spake in parley.  
"Who are ye, then, ye armed men,  
mailed folk, that yon mighty vessel  
have urged thus over the ocean ways,  
here o'er the waters? A warden I,  
sentinel set o'er the sea-march here,  
lest any foe to the folk of Danes  
with harrying fleet should harm the land.  
No aliens ever at ease thus bore them,  
linden-wielders: {3d} yet word-of-leave  
clearly ye lack from clansmen here,  
my folk's agreement. -- A greater ne'er saw I  
of warriors in world than is one of you, --  
yon hero in harness! No henchman he  
worthied by weapons, if witness his features,  
his peerless presence! I pray you, though, tell  
your folk and home, lest hence ye fare  
suspect to wander your way as spies  
in Danish land. Now, dwellers afar,  
ocean-travellers, take from me  
simple advice: the sooner the better  
I hear of the country whence ye came."

## IV

To him the stateliest spake in answer;  
 the warriors' leader his word-hoard unlocked: --  
 "We are by kin of the clan of Geats,  
 and Hygelac's own hearth-fellows we.  
 To folk afar was my father known,  
 noble atheling, Ecgtheow named.  
 Full of winters, he fared away  
 aged from earth; he is honored still  
 through width of the world by wise men all.  
 To thy lord and liege in loyal mood  
 we hasten hither, to Healfdene's son,  
 people-protector: be pleased to advise us!  
 To that mighty-one come we on mickle errand,  
 to the lord of the Danes; nor deem I right  
 that aught be hidden. We hear -- thou knowest  
 if sooth it is -- the saying of men,  
 that amid the Scyldings a scathing monster,  
 dark ill-doer, in dusky nights  
 shows terrific his rage unmatched,  
 hatred and murder. To Hrothgar I  
 in greatness of soul would succor bring,  
 so the Wise-and-Brave {4a} may worst his foes, --  
 if ever the end of ills is fated,  
 of cruel contest, if cure shall follow,  
 and the boiling care-waves cooler grow;  
 else ever afterward anguish-days  
 he shall suffer in sorrow while stands in place  
 high on its hill that house unpeered!"  
 Astride his steed, the strand-ward answered,  
 clansman unquailing: "The keen-souled thane  
 must be skilled to sever and sunder duly  
 words and works, if he well intends.  
 I gather, this band is graciously bent  
 to the Scyldings' master. March, then, bearing  
 weapons and weeds the way I show you.  
 I will bid my men your boat meanwhile  
 to guard for fear lest foemen come, --  
 your new-tarred ship by shore of ocean  
 faithfully watching till once again

it waft o'er the waters those well-loved thanes,  
 -- winding-neck'd wood, -- to Weders' bounds,  
 heroes such as the hest of fate  
 shall succor and save from the shock of war."  
 They bent them to march, -- the boat lay still,  
 fettered by cable and fast at anchor,  
 broad-bosomed ship. -- Then shone the boars {4b}  
 over the cheek-guard; chased with gold,  
 keen and gleaming, guard it kept  
 o'er the man of war, as marched along  
 heroes in haste, till the hall they saw,  
 broad of gable and bright with gold:  
 that was the fairest, 'mid folk of earth,  
 of houses 'neath heaven, where Hrothgar lived,  
 and the gleam of it lightened o'er lands afar.  
 The sturdy shieldsman showed that bright  
 burg-of-the-boldest; bade them go  
 straightway thither; his steed then turned,  
 hardy hero, and hailed them thus: --  
 "'Tis time that I fare from you. Father Almighty  
 in grace and mercy guard you well,  
 safe in your seekings. Seaward I go,  
 'gainst hostile warriors hold my watch."

## V

Stone-bright the street: {5a} it showed the way  
 to the crowd of clansmen. Corselets glistened  
 hand-forged, hard; on their harness bright  
 the steel ring sang, as they strode along  
 in mail of battle, and marched to the hall.  
 There, weary of ocean, the wall along  
 they set their bucklers, their broad shields, down,  
 and bowed them to bench: the breastplates clanged,  
 war-gear of men; their weapons stacked,  
 spears of the seafarers stood together,  
 gray-tipped ash: that iron band  
 was worthily weaponed! -- A warrior proud

asked of the heroes their home and kin.  
 "Whence, now, bear ye burnished shields,  
 harness gray and helmets grim,  
 spears in multitude? Messenger, I,  
 Hrothgar's herald! Heroes so many  
 ne'er met I as strangers of mood so strong.  
 'Tis plain that for prowess, not plunged into exile,  
 for high-hearted valor, Hrothgar ye seek!"  
 Him the sturdy-in-war bespake with words,  
 proud earl of the Weders answer made,  
 hardy 'neath helmet: -- "Hygelac's, we,  
 fellows at board; I am Beowulf named.  
 I am seeking to say to the son of Healfdene  
 this mission of mine, to thy master-lord,  
 the doughty prince, if he deign at all  
 grace that we greet him, the good one, now."  
 Wulfgar spake, the Wendles' chieftain,  
 whose might of mind to many was known,  
 his courage and counsel: "The king of Danes,  
 the Scyldings' friend, I fain will tell,  
 the Breaker-of-Rings, as the boon thou askest,  
 the famed prince, of thy faring hither,  
 and, swiftly after, such answer bring  
 as the doughty monarch may deign to give."  
 Hied then in haste to where Hrothgar sat  
 white-haired and old, his earls about him,  
 till the stout thane stood at the shoulder there  
 of the Danish king: good courtier he!  
 Wulfgar spake to his winsome lord: --  
 "Hither have fared to thee far-come men  
 o'er the paths of ocean, people of Geatland;  
 and the stateliest there by his sturdy band  
 is Beowulf named. This boon they seek,  
 that they, my master, may with thee  
 have speech at will: nor spurn their prayer  
 to give them hearing, gracious Hrothgar!  
 In weeds of the warrior worthy they,  
 methinks, of our liking; their leader most surely,  
 a hero that hither his henchmen has led."

## VI

**H**rothgar answered, helmet of Scyldings: --  
 "I knew him of yore in his youthful days;  
 His aged father was Ecgtheow named,  
 to whom, at home, gave Hrethel the Geat  
 his only daughter. Their offspring bold  
 fares hither to seek the steadfast friend.  
 And seamen, too, have said me this, --  
 who carried my gifts to the Geatish court,  
 thither for thanks, -- he has thirty men's  
 heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand,  
 the bold-in-battle. Blessed God  
 out of his mercy this man hath sent  
 to Danes of the West, as I ween indeed,  
 against horror of Grendel. I hope to give  
 the good youth gold for his gallant thought.  
 Be thou in haste, and bid them hither,  
 clan of kinsmen, to come before me;  
 and add this word, -- they are welcome guests  
 to folk of the Danes."  
 [To the door of the hall  
 Wulfgar went] and the word declared: --  
 "To you this message my master sends,  
 East-Danes' king, that your kin he knows,  
 hardy heroes, and hails you all  
 welcome hither o'er waves of the sea!  
 Ye may wend your way in war-attire,  
 and under helmets Hrothgar greet;  
 but let here the battle-shields bide your parley,  
 and wooden war-shafts wait its end."  
 Uprose the mighty one, ringed with his men,  
 brave band of thanes: some bode without,  
 battle-gear guarding, as bade the chief.  
 Then hied that troop where the herald led them,  
 under Heorot's roof: [the hero strode,]  
 hardy 'neath helm, till the hearth he neared.  
 Beowulf spake, -- his breastplate gleamed,  
 war-net woven by wit of the smith: --  
 "Thou Hrothgar, hail! Hygelac's I,  
 kinsman and follower. Fame a plenty

have I gained in youth! These Grendel-deeds  
 I heard in my home-land heralded clear.  
 Seafarers say how stands this hall,  
 of buildings best, for your band of thanes  
 empty and idle, when evening sun  
 in the harbor of heaven is hidden away.  
 So my vassals advised me well, --  
 brave and wise, the best of men, --  
 O sovran Hrothgar, to seek thee here,  
 for my nerve and my might they knew full well.  
 Themselves had seen me from slaughter come  
 blood-flecked from foes, where five I bound,  
 and that wild brood worsted. I' the waves I slew  
 nicors {6a} by night, in need and peril  
 avenging the Weders, {6b} whose woe they sought, --  
 crushing the grim ones. Grendel now,  
 monster cruel, be mine to quell  
 in single battle! So, from thee,  
 thou sovran of the Shining-Danes,  
 Scyldings'-bulwark, a boon I seek, --  
 and, Friend-of-the-folk, refuse it not,  
 O Warriors'-shield, now I've wandered far, --  
 that I alone with my liegemen here,  
 this hardy band, may Heorot purge!  
 More I hear, that the monster dire,  
 in his wanton mood, of weapons recks not;  
 hence shall I scorn -- so Hygelac stay,  
 king of my kindred, kind to me! --  
 brand or buckler to bear in the fight,  
 gold-colored targe: but with gripe alone  
 must I front the fiend and fight for life,  
 foe against foe. Then faith be his  
 in the doom of the Lord whom death shall take.  
 Fain, I ween, if the fight he win,  
 in this hall of gold my Geatish band  
 will he fearless eat, -- as oft before, --  
 my noblest thanes. Nor need'st thou then  
 to hide my head; {6c} for his shall I be,  
 dyed in gore, if death must take me;  
 and my blood-covered body he'll bear as prey,  
 ruthless devour it, the roamer-lonely,

with my life-blood redden his lair in the fen:  
 no further for me need'st food prepare!  
 To Hygelac send, if Hild {6d} should take me,  
 best of war-weeds, warding my breast,  
 armor excellent, heirloom of Hrethel  
 and work of Wayland. {6e} Fares Wyrð {6f} as she must."

## VII

**H**rothgar spake, the Scyldings'-helmet: --  
 "For fight defensive, Friend my Beowulf,  
 to succor and save, thou hast sought us here.  
 Thy father's combat {7a} a feud enkindled  
 when Heatholaf with hand he slew  
 among the Wylfings; his Weder kin  
 for horror of fighting feared to hold him.  
 Fleeing, he sought our South-Dane folk,  
 over surge of ocean the Honor-Scyldings,  
 when first I was ruling the folk of Danes,  
 wielded, youthful, this widespread realm,  
 this hoard-hold of heroes. Heorogar was dead,  
 my elder brother, had breathed his last,  
 Healfdene's bairn: he was better than I!  
 Straightway the feud with fee {7b} I settled,  
 to the Wylfings sent, o'er watery ridges,  
 treasures olden: oaths he {7c} swore me.  
 Sore is my soul to say to any  
 of the race of man what ruth for me  
 in Heorot Grendel with hate hath wrought,  
 what sudden harrings. Hall-folk fail me,  
 my warriors wane; for Wyrð hath swept them  
 into Grendel's grasp. But God is able  
 this deadly foe from his deeds to turn!  
 Boasted full oft, as my beer they drank,  
 earls o'er the ale-cup, armed men,  
 that they would bide in the beer-hall here,  
 Grendel's attack with terror of blades.  
 Then was this mead-house at morning tide

dyed with gore, when the daylight broke,  
 all the boards of the benches blood-besprinkled,  
 gory the hall: I had heroes the less,  
 doughty dear-ones that death had reft.  
 -- But sit to the banquet, unbind thy words,  
 hardy hero, as heart shall prompt thee."

Gathered together, the Geatish men  
 in the banquet-hall on bench assigned,  
 sturdy-spirited, sat them down,  
 hardy-hearted. A henchman attended,  
 carried the carven cup in hand,  
 served the clear mead. Oft minstrels sang  
 blithe in Heorot. Heroes revelled,  
 no dearth of warriors, Weder and Dane.

## VIII

**U**nferth spake, the son of Ecglaf,  
 who sat at the feet of the Scyldings' lord,  
 unbound the battle-runes. {8a} -- Beowulf's quest,  
 sturdy seafarer's, sorely galled him;  
 ever he envied that other men  
 should more achieve in middle-earth  
 of fame under heaven than he himself. --  
 "Art thou that Beowulf, Breca's rival,  
 who emulous swam on the open sea,  
 when for pride the pair of you proved the floods,  
 and wantonly dared in waters deep  
 to risk your lives? No living man,  
 or lief or loath, from your labor dire  
 could you dissuade, from swimming the main.  
 Ocean-tides with your arms ye covered,  
 with strenuous hands the sea-streets measured,  
 swam o'er the waters. Winter's storm  
 rolled the rough waves. In realm of sea  
 a sennight strove ye. In swimming he topped thee,  
 had more of main! Him at morning-tide

billows bore to the Battling Reamas,  
 whence he hied to his home so dear  
 beloved of his liegemen, to land of Brondings,  
 fastness fair, where his folk he ruled,  
 town and treasure. In triumph o'er thee  
 Beanstan's bairn {8b} his boast achieved.  
 So ween I for thee a worse adventure  
 -- though in buffet of battle thou brave hast been,  
 in struggle grim, -- if Grendel's approach  
 thou darst await through the watch of night!"

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "What a deal hast uttered, dear my Unferth,  
 drunken with beer, of Breca now,  
 told of his triumph! Truth I claim it,  
 that I had more of might in the sea  
 than any man else, more ocean-endurance.  
 We twain had talked, in time of youth,  
 and made our boast, -- we were merely boys,  
 striplings still, -- to stake our lives  
 far at sea: and so we performed it.  
 Naked swords, as we swam along,  
 we held in hand, with hope to guard us  
 against the whales. Not a whit from me  
 could he float afar o'er the flood of waves,  
 haste o'er the billows; nor him I abandoned.  
 Together we twain on the tides abode  
 five nights full till the flood divided us,  
 churning waves and chillest weather,  
 darkling night, and the northern wind  
 ruthless rushed on us: rough was the surge.  
 Now the wrath of the sea-fish rose apace;  
 yet me 'gainst the monsters my mailed coat,  
 hard and hand-linked, help afforded, --  
 battle-sark braided my breast to ward,  
 garnished with gold. There grasped me firm  
 and haled me to bottom the hated foe,  
 with grimmest gripe. 'Twas granted me, though,  
 to pierce the monster with point of sword,  
 with blade of battle: huge beast of the sea  
 was whelmed by the hurly through hand of mine.

## IX

**M**e thus often the evil monsters  
 thronging threatened. With thrust of my sword,  
 the darling, I dealt them due return!  
 Nowise had they bliss from their booty then  
 to devour their victim, vengeful creatures,  
 seated to banquet at bottom of sea;  
 but at break of day, by my brand sore hurt,  
 on the edge of ocean up they lay,  
 put to sleep by the sword. And since, by them  
 on the fathomless sea-ways sailor-folk  
 are never molested. -- Light from east,  
 came bright God's beacon; the billows sank,  
 so that I saw the sea-cliffs high,  
 windy walls. For Wyrð oft saveth  
 earl undoomed if he doughty be!  
 And so it came that I killed with my sword  
 nine of the nicors. Of night-fought battles  
 ne'er heard I a harder 'neath heaven's dome,  
 nor adrift on the deep a more desolate man!  
 Yet I came unharmed from that hostile clutch,  
 though spent with swimming. The sea upbore me,  
 flood of the tide, on Finnish land,  
 the welling waters. No wise of thee  
 have I heard men tell such terror of falchions,  
 bitter battle. Breca ne'er yet,  
 not one of you pair, in the play of war  
 such daring deed has done at all  
 with bloody brand, -- I boast not of it! --  
 though thou wast the bane {9a} of thy brethren dear,  
 thy closest kin, whence curse of hell  
 awaits thee, well as thy wit may serve!  
 For I say in sooth, thou son of Ecglaf,  
 never had Grendel these grim deeds wrought,  
 monster dire, on thy master dear,  
 in Heorot such havoc, if heart of thine  
 were as battle-bold as thy boast is loud!  
 But he has found no feud will happen;  
 from sword-clash dread of your Danish clan  
 he vaunts him safe, from the Victor-Scyldings.

He forces pledges, favors none  
 of the land of Danes, but lustily murders,  
 fights and feasts, nor feud he dreads  
 from Spear-Dane men. But speedily now  
 shall I prove him the prowess and pride of the Geats,  
 shall bid him battle. Blithe to mead  
 go he that listeth, when light of dawn  
 this morrow morning o'er men of earth,  
 ether-robed sun from the south shall beam!"  
 Joyous then was the Jewel-giver,  
 hoar-haired, war-brave; help awaited  
 the Bright-Danes' prince, from Beowulf hearing,  
 folk's good shepherd, such firm resolve.  
 Then was laughter of liegemen loud resounding  
 with winsome words. Came Wealhtheow forth,  
 queen of Hrothgar, heedful of courtesy,  
 gold-decked, greeting the guests in hall;  
 and the high-born lady handed the cup  
 first to the East-Danes' heir and warden,  
 bade him be blithe at the beer-carouse,  
 the land's beloved one. Lustily took he  
 banquet and beaker, battle-famed king.

Through the hall then went the Helmings' Lady,  
 to younger and older everywhere  
 carried the cup, till come the moment  
 when the ring-graced queen, the royal-hearted,  
 to Beowulf bore the beaker of mead.  
 She greeted the Geats' lord, God she thanked,  
 in wisdom's words, that her will was granted,  
 that at last on a hero her hope could lean  
 for comfort in terrors. The cup he took,  
 hardy-in-war, from Wealhtheow's hand,  
 and answer uttered the eager-for-combat.  
 Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "This was my thought, when my thanes and I  
 bent to the ocean and entered our boat,  
 that I would work the will of your people  
 fully, or fighting fall in death,  
 in fiend's gripe fast. I am firm to do  
 an earl's brave deed, or end the days

of this life of mine in the mead-hall here."  
 Well these words to the woman seemed,  
 Beowulf's battle-boast. -- Bright with gold  
 the stately dame by her spouse sat down.  
 Again, as erst, began in hall  
 warriors' wassail and words of power,  
 the proud-band's revel, till presently  
 the son of Healfdene hastened to seek  
 rest for the night; he knew there waited  
 fight for the fiend in that festal hall,  
 when the sheen of the sun they saw no more,  
 and dusk of night sank darkling nigh,  
 and shadowy shapes came striding on,  
 wan under welkin. The warriors rose.  
 Man to man, he made harangue,  
 Hrothgar to Beowulf, bade him hail,  
 let him wield the wine hall: a word he added: --  
 "Never to any man erst I trusted,  
 since I could heave up hand and shield,  
 this noble Dane-Hall, till now to thee.  
 Have now and hold this house unpeered;  
 remember thy glory; thy might declare;  
 watch for the foe! No wish shall fail thee  
 if thou bidest the battle with bold-won life."

## X

**T**hen Hrothgar went with his hero-train,  
 defence-of-Scyldings, forth from hall;  
 fain would the war-lord Wealhtheow seek,  
 couch of his queen. The King-of-Glory  
 against this Grendel a guard had set,  
 so heroes heard, a hall-defender,  
 who warded the monarch and watched for the monster.  
 In truth, the Geats' prince gladly trusted  
 his mettle, his might, the mercy of God!  
 Cast off then his corselet of iron,  
 helmet from head; to his henchman gave, --

choicest of weapons, -- the well-chased sword,  
 bidding him guard the gear of battle.  
 Spake then his Vaunt the valiant man,  
 Beowulf Geat, ere the bed be sought: --  
 "Of force in fight no feebler I count me,  
 in grim war-deeds, than Grendel deems him.  
 Not with the sword, then, to sleep of death  
 his life will I give, though it lie in my power.  
 No skill is his to strike against me,  
 my shield to hew though he hardy be,  
 bold in battle; we both, this night,  
 shall spurn the sword, if he seek me here,  
 unweaponed, for war. Let wisest God,  
 sacred Lord, on which side soever  
 doom decree as he deemeth right."  
 Reclined then the chieftain, and cheek-pillows held  
 the head of the earl, while all about him  
 seamen hardy on hall-beds sank.  
 None of them thought that thence their steps  
 to the folk and fastness that fostered them,  
 to the land they loved, would lead them back!  
 Full well they wist that on warriors many  
 battle-death seized, in the banquet-hall,  
 of Danish clan. But comfort and help,  
 war-weal weaving, to Weder folk  
 the Master gave, that, by might of one,  
 over their enemy all prevailed,  
 by single strength. In sooth 'tis told  
 that highest God o'er human kind  
 hath wielded ever! -- Thro' wan night striding,  
 came the walker-in-shadow. Warriors slept  
 whose hest was to guard the gabled hall, --  
 all save one. 'Twas widely known  
 that against God's will the ghostly ravager  
 him {10a} could not hurl to haunts of darkness;  
 wakeful, ready, with warrior's wrath,  
 bold he bided the battle's issue.

## XI

Then from the moorland, by misty crags,  
 with God's wrath laden, Grendel came.  
 The monster was minded of mankind now  
 sundry to seize in the stately house.  
 Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there,  
 gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned,  
 flashing with fretwork. Not first time, this,  
 that he the home of Hrothgar sought, --  
 yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,  
 such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!  
 To the house the warrior walked apace,  
 parted from peace; {11a} the portal opened,  
 though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had struck it,  
 and baleful he burst in his blatant rage,  
 the house's mouth. All hastily, then,  
 o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on,  
 ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes  
 fearful flashes, like flame to see.

He spied in hall the hero-band,  
 kin and clansmen clustered asleep,  
 hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart;  
 for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,  
 savage, to sever the soul of each,  
 life from body, since lusty banquet  
 waited his will! But Wyrð forbade him  
 to seize any more of men on earth  
 after that evening. Eagerly watched  
 Hygelac's kinsman his cursed foe,  
 how he would fare in fell attack.  
 Not that the monster was minded to pause!  
 Straightway he seized a sleeping warrior  
 for the first, and tore him fiercely asunder,  
 the bone-frame bit, drank blood in streams,  
 swallowed him piecemeal: swiftly thus  
 the lifeless corse was clear devoured,  
 e'en feet and hands. Then farther he hied;  
 for the hardy hero with hand he grasped,  
 felt for the foe with fiendish claw,

for the hero reclining, -- who clutched it boldly,  
 prompt to answer, propped on his arm.  
 Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils  
 that never he met in this middle-world,  
 in the ways of earth, another wight  
 with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,  
 sorrowed in soul, -- none the sooner escaped!  
 Fain would he flee, his fastness seek,  
 the den of devils: no doings now  
 such as oft he had done in days of old!  
 Then bethought him the hardy Hygelac-thane  
 of his boast at evening: up he bounded,  
 grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked.  
 The fiend made off, but the earl close followed.  
 The monster meant -- if he might at all --  
 to fling himself free, and far away  
 fly to the fens, -- knew his fingers' power  
 in the gripe of the grim one. Gruesome march  
 to Heorot this monster of harm had made!  
 Din filled the room; the Danes were bereft,  
 castle-dwellers and clansmen all,  
 earls, of their ale. Angry were both  
 those savage hall-guards: the house resounded.  
 Wonder it was the wine-hall firm  
 in the strain of their struggle stood, to earth  
 the fair house fell not; too fast it was  
 within and without by its iron bands  
 craftily clamped; though there crashed from sill  
 many a mead-bench -- men have told me --  
 gay with gold, where the grim foes wrestled.  
 So well had weened the wisest Scyldings  
 that not ever at all might any man  
 that bone-decked, brave house break asunder,  
 crush by craft, -- unless clasp of fire  
 in smoke engulfed it. -- Again uprose  
 din redoubled. Danes of the North  
 with fear and frenzy were filled, each one,  
 who from the wall that wailing heard,  
 God's foe sounding his grisly song,  
 cry of the conquered, clamorous pain  
 from captive of hell. Too closely held him

he who of men in might was strongest  
in that same day of this our life.

## XII

**N**otin any wise would the earls'-defence {12a}  
suffer that slaughterous stranger to live,  
useless deeming his days and years  
to men on earth. Now many an earl  
of Beowulf brandished blade ancestral,  
fain the life of their lord to shield,  
their praised prince, if power were theirs;  
never they knew, -- as they neared the foe,  
hardy-hearted heroes of war,  
aiming their swords on every side  
the accursed to kill, -- no keenest blade,  
no farest of falchions fashioned on earth,  
could harm or hurt that hideous fiend!  
He was safe, by his spells, from sword of battle,  
from edge of iron. Yet his end and parting  
on that same day of this our life  
woful should be, and his wandering soul  
far off flit to the fiends' domain.  
Soon he found, who in former days,  
harmful in heart and hated of God,  
on many a man such murder wrought,  
that the frame of his body failed him now.  
For him the keen-souled kinsman of Hygelac  
held in hand; hateful alive  
was each to other. The outlaw dire  
took mortal hurt; a mighty wound  
showed on his shoulder, and sinews cracked,  
and the bone-frame burst. To Beowulf now  
the glory was given, and Grendel thence  
death-sick his den in the dark moor sought,  
noisome abode: he knew too well  
that here was the last of life, an end  
of his days on earth. -- To all the Danes

by that bloody battle the boon had come.  
From ravage had rescued the roving stranger  
Hrothgar's hall; the hardy and wise one  
had purged it anew. His night-work pleased him,  
his deed and its honor. To Eastern Danes  
had the valiant Geat his vaunt made good,  
all their sorrow and ills assuaged,  
their bale of battle borne so long,  
and all the dole they erst endured  
pain a-plenty. -- 'Twas proof of this,  
when the hardy-in-fight a hand laid down,  
arm and shoulder, -- all, indeed,  
of Grendel's gripe, -- 'neath the gabled roof.

## XIII

**M**any at morning, as men have told me,  
warriors gathered the gift-hall round,  
folk-leaders faring from far and near,  
o'er wide-stretched ways, the wonder to view,  
trace of the traitor. Not troublous seemed  
the enemy's end to any man  
who saw by the gait of the graceless foe  
how the weary-hearted, away from thence,  
baffled in battle and banned, his steps  
death-marked dragged to the devils' mere.  
Bloody the billows were boiling there,  
turbid the tide of tumbling waves  
horribly seething, with sword-blood hot,  
by that doomed one dyed, who in den of the moor  
laid forlorn his life adown,  
his heathen soul, and hell received it.  
Home then rode the hoary clansmen  
from that merry journey, and many a youth,  
on horses white, the hardy warriors,  
back from the mere. Then Beowulf's glory  
eager they echoed, and all averred  
that from sea to sea, or south or north,

there was no other in earth's domain,  
under vault of heaven, more valiant found,  
of warriors none more worthy to rule!  
(On their lord beloved they laid no slight,  
gracious Hrothgar: a good king he!)  
From time to time, the tried-in-battle  
their gray steeds set to gallop amain,  
and ran a race when the road seemed fair.  
From time to time, a thane of the king,  
who had made many vaunts, and was mindful of verses,  
stored with sagas and songs of old,  
bound word to word in well-knit rime,  
welded his lay; this warrior soon  
of Beowulf's quest right cleverly sang,  
and artfully added an excellent tale,  
in well-ranged words, of the warlike deeds  
he had heard in saga of Sigemund.  
Strange the story: he said it all, --  
the Waelsing's wanderings wide, his struggles,  
which never were told to tribes of men,  
the feuds and the frauds, save to Fitela only,  
when of these doings he deigned to speak,  
uncle to nephew; as ever the twain  
stood side by side in stress of war,  
and multitude of the monster kind  
they had felled with their swords. Of Sigemund grew,  
when he passed from life, no little praise;  
for the doughty-in-combat a dragon killed  
that herded the hoard: {13a} under hoary rock  
the atheling dared the deed alone  
fearful quest, nor was Fitela there.  
Yet so it befell, his falchion pierced  
that wondrous worm, -- on the wall it struck,  
best blade; the dragon died in its blood.  
Thus had the dread-one by daring achieved  
over the ring-hoard to rule at will,  
himself to pleasure; a sea-boat he loaded,  
and bore on its bosom the beaming gold,  
son of Waels; the worm was consumed.  
He had of all heroes the highest renown  
among races of men, this refuge-of-warriors,

for deeds of daring that decked his name  
since the hand and heart of Heremod  
grew slack in battle. He, swiftly banished  
to mingle with monsters at mercy of foes,  
to death was betrayed; for torrents of sorrow  
had lamed him too long; a load of care  
to earls and athelings all he proved.  
Oft indeed, in earlier days,  
for the warrior's wayfaring wise men mourned,  
who had hoped of him help from harm and bale,  
and had thought their sovran's son would thrive,  
follow his father, his folk protect,  
the hoard and the stronghold, heroes' land,  
home of Scyldings. -- But here, thanes said,  
the kinsman of Hygelac kinder seemed  
to all: the other {13b} was urged to crime!  
And afresh to the race, {13c} the fallow roads  
by swift steeds measured! The morning sun  
was climbing higher. Clansmen hastened  
to the high-built hall, those hardy-minded,  
the wonder to witness. Warden of treasure,  
crowned with glory, the king himself,  
with stately band from the bride-bower strode;  
and with him the queen and her crowd of maidens  
measured the path to the mead-house fair.

#### XIV

**H**rothgar spake, -- to the hall he went,  
stood by the steps, the steep roof saw,  
garnished with gold, and Grendel's hand: --  
"For the sight I see to the Sovran Ruler  
be speedy thanks! A throng of sorrows  
I have borne from Grendel; but God still works  
wonder on wonder, the Warden-of-Glory.  
It was but now that I never more  
for woes that weighed on me waited help  
long as I lived, when, laved in blood,

stood sword-gore-stained this stateliest house, --  
widespread woe for wise men all,  
who had no hope to hinder ever  
foes infernal and fiendish sprites  
from havoc in hall. This hero now,  
by the Wielder's might, a work has done  
that not all of us erst could ever do  
by wile and wisdom. Lo, well can she say  
whoso of women this warrior bore  
among sons of men, if still she liveth,  
that the God of the ages was good to her  
in the birth of her bairn. Now, Beowulf, thee,  
of heroes best, I shall heartily love  
as mine own, my son; preserve thou ever  
this kinship new: thou shalt never lack  
wealth of the world that I wield as mine!  
Full oft for less have I largess showered,  
my precious hoard, on a punier man,  
less stout in struggle. Thyself hast now  
fulfilled such deeds, that thy fame shall endure  
through all the ages. As ever he did,  
well may the Wielder reward thee still!"  
Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
"This work of war most willingly  
we have fought, this fight, and fearlessly dared  
force of the foe. Fain, too, were I  
hadst thou but seen himself, what time  
the fiend in his trappings tottered to fall!  
Swiftly, I thought, in strongest gripe  
on his bed of death to bind him down,  
that he in the hent of this hand of mine  
should breathe his last: but he broke away.  
Him I might not -- the Maker willed not --  
hinder from flight, and firm enough hold  
the life-destroyer: too sturdy was he,  
the ruthless, in running! For rescue, however,  
he left behind him his hand in pledge,  
arm and shoulder; nor aught of help  
could the cursed one thus procure at all.  
None the longer liveth he, loathsome fiend,  
sunk in his sins, but sorrow holds him

tightly grasped in gripe of anguish,  
in baleful bonds, where bide he must,  
evil outlaw, such awful doom  
as the Mighty Maker shall mete him out."

More silent seemed the son of Ecglaf {14a}  
in boastful speech of his battle-deeds,  
since athelings all, through the earl's great prowess,  
beheld that hand, on the high roof gazing,  
foeman's fingers, -- the forepart of each  
of the sturdy nails to steel was likest, --  
heathen's "hand-spear," hostile warrior's  
claw uncanny. 'Twas clear, they said,  
that him no blade of the brave could touch,  
how keen soever, or cut away  
that battle-hand bloody from baneful foe.

## XV

**T**here was hurry and hest in Heorot now  
for hands to bedeck it, and dense was the throng  
of men and women the wine-hall to cleanse,  
the guest-room to garnish. Gold-gay shone the hangings  
that were wove on the wall, and wonders many  
to delight each mortal that looks upon them.  
Though braced within by iron bands,  
that building bright was broken sorely; {15a}  
rent were its hinges; the roof alone  
held safe and sound, when, seared with crime,  
the fiendish foe his flight essayed,  
of life despairing. -- No light thing that,  
the flight for safety, -- essay it who will!  
Forced of fate, he shall find his way  
to the refuge ready for race of man,  
for soul-possessors, and sons of earth;  
and there his body on bed of death  
shall rest after revel.  
Arrived was the hour

when to hall proceeded Healfdene's son:  
 the king himself would sit to banquet.  
 Ne'er heard I of host in haughtier throng  
 more graciously gathered round giver-of-rings!  
 Bowed then to bench those bearers-of-glory,  
 fain of the feasting. Featly received  
 many a mead-cup the mighty-in-spirit,  
 kinsmen who sat in the sumptuous hall,  
 Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Heorot now  
 was filled with friends; the folk of Scyldings  
 ne'er yet had tried the traitor's deed.  
 To Beowulf gave the bairn of Healfdene  
 a gold-wove banner, guerdon of triumph,  
 broidered battle-flag, breastplate and helmet;  
 and a splendid sword was seen of many  
 borne to the brave one. Beowulf took  
 cup in hall: {15b} for such costly gifts  
 he suffered no shame in that soldier throng.  
 For I heard of few heroes, in heartier mood,  
 with four such gifts, so fashioned with gold,  
 on the ale-bench honoring others thus!  
 O'er the roof of the helmet high, a ridge,  
 wound with wires, kept ward o'er the head,  
 lest the relict-of-files {15c} should fierce invade,  
 sharp in the strife, when that shielded hero  
 should go to grapple against his foes.  
 Then the earls'-defence {15d} on the floor {15e} bade lead  
 coursers eight, with carven head-gear,  
 adown the hall: one horse was decked  
 with a saddle all shining and set in jewels;  
 'twas the battle-seat of the best of kings,  
 when to play of swords the son of Healfdene  
 was fain to fare. Ne'er failed his valor  
 in the crush of combat when corpses fell.  
 To Beowulf over them both then gave  
 the refuge-of-Ingwines right and power,  
 o'er war-steeds and weapons: wished him joy of them.  
 Manfully thus the mighty prince,  
 hoard-guard for heroes, that hard fight repaid  
 with steeds and treasures contemned by none  
 who is willing to say the sooth aright.

## XVI

**A**nd the lord of earls, to each that came  
 with Beowulf over the briny ways,  
 an heirloom there at the ale-bench gave,  
 precious gift; and the price {16a} bade pay  
 in gold for him whom Grendel erst  
 murdered, -- and fain of them more had killed,  
 had not wisest God their Wyrð averted,  
 and the man's {16b} brave mood. The Maker then  
 ruled human kind, as here and now.  
 Therefore is insight always best,  
 and forethought of mind. How much awaits him  
 of lief and of loath, who long time here,  
 through days of warfare this world endures!

Then song and music mingled sounds  
 in the presence of Healfdene's head-of-armies {16c}  
 and harping was heard with the hero-lay  
 as Hrothgar's singer the hall-joy woke  
 along the mead-seats, making his song  
 of that sudden raid on the sons of Finn. {16d}  
 Healfdene's hero, Hnaef the Scylding,  
 was fated to fall in the Frisian slaughter. {16e}  
 Hildeburh needed not hold in value  
 her enemies' honor! {16f} Innocent both  
 were the loved ones she lost at the linden-play,  
 bairn and brother, they bowed to fate,  
 stricken by spears; 'twas a sorrowful woman!  
 None doubted why the daughter of Hoc  
 bewailed her doom when dawning came,  
 and under the sky she saw them lying,  
 kinsmen murdered, where most she had kenned  
 of the sweets of the world! By war were swept, too,  
 Finn's own liegemen, and few were left;  
 in the parleying-place {16g} he could ply no longer  
 weapon, nor war could he wage on Hengest,  
 and rescue his remnant by right of arms  
 from the prince's thane. A pact he offered:  
 another dwelling the Danes should have,  
 hall and high-seat, and half the power

should fall to them in Frisian land;  
 and at the fee-gifts, Folcwald's son  
 day by day the Danes should honor,  
 the folk of Hengest favor with rings,  
 even as truly, with treasure and jewels,  
 with fretted gold, as his Frisian kin  
 he meant to honor in ale-hall there.  
 Pact of peace they plighted further  
 on both sides firmly. Finn to Hengest  
 with oath, upon honor, openly promised  
 that woful remnant, with wise-men's aid,  
 nobly to govern, so none of the guests  
 by word or work should warp the treaty, {16h}  
 or with malice of mind bemoan themselves  
 as forced to follow their fee-giver's slayer,  
 lordless men, as their lot ordained.  
 Should Frisian, moreover, with foeman's taunt,  
 that murderous hatred to mind recall,  
 then edge of the sword must seal his doom.

Oaths were given, and ancient gold  
 heaped from hoard. -- The hardy Scylding,  
 battle-thane best, {16i} on his balefire lay.  
 All on the pyre were plain to see  
 the gory sark, the gilded swine-crest,  
 boar of hard iron, and athelings many  
 slain by the sword: at the slaughter they fell.  
 It was Hildeburh's hest, at Hnaef's own pyre  
 the bairn of her body on brands to lay,  
 his bones to burn, on the balefire placed,  
 at his uncle's side. In sorrowful dirges  
 bewept them the woman: great wailing ascended.  
 Then wound up to welkin the wildest of death-fires,  
 roared o'er the hillock: {16j} heads all were melted,  
 gashes burst, and blood gushed out  
 from bites {16k} of the body. Balefire devoured,  
 greediest spirit, those spared not by war  
 out of either folk: their flower was gone.

## XVII

Then hastened those heroes their home to see,  
 friendless, to find the Frisian land,  
 houses and high burg. Hengest still  
 through the death-dyed winter dwelt with Finn,  
 holding pact, yet of home he minded,  
 though powerless his ring-decked prow to drive  
 over the waters, now waves rolled fierce  
 lashed by the winds, or winter locked them  
 in icy fetters. Then fared another  
 year to men's dwellings, as yet they do,  
 the sunbright skies, that their season ever  
 duly await. Far off winter was driven;  
 fair lay earth's breast; and fain was the rover,  
 the guest, to depart, though more gladly he pondered  
 on wreaking his vengeance than roaming the deep,  
 and how to hasten the hot encounter  
 where sons of the Frisians were sure to be.  
 So he escaped not the common doom,  
 when Hun with "Lafing," the light-of-battle,  
 best of blades, his bosom pierced:  
 its edge was famed with the Frisian earls.  
 On fierce-heart Finn there fell likewise,  
 on himself at home, the horrid sword-death;  
 for Guthlaf and Oslaf of grim attack  
 had sorrowing told, from sea-ways landed,  
 mourning their woes. {17a} Finn's wavering spirit  
 bode not in breast. The burg was reddened  
 with blood of foemen, and Finn was slain,  
 king amid clansmen; the queen was taken.  
 To their ship the Scylding warriors bore  
 all the chattels the chieftain owned,  
 whatever they found in Finn's domain  
 of gems and jewels. The gentle wife  
 o'er paths of the deep to the Danes they bore,  
 led to her land.  
 The lay was finished,  
 the gleeman's song. Then glad rose the revel;  
 bench-joy brightened. Bearers draw  
 from their "wonder-vats" wine. Comes Wealhtheow forth,

under gold-crown goes where the good pair sit,  
 uncle and nephew, true each to the other one,  
 kindred in amity. Unferth the spokesman  
 at the Scylding lord's feet sat: men had faith in his spirit,  
 his keenness of courage, though kinsmen had found him  
 unsure at the sword-play. The Scylding queen spoke:  
 "Quaff of this cup, my king and lord,  
 breaker of rings, and blithe be thou,  
 gold-friend of men; to the Geats here speak  
 such words of mildness as man should use.  
 Be glad with thy Geats; of those gifts be mindful,  
 or near or far, which now thou hast.

Men say to me, as son thou wishest  
 yon hero to hold. Thy Heorot purged,  
 jewel-hall brightest, enjoy while thou canst,  
 with many a largess; and leave to thy kin  
 folk and realm when forth thou goest  
 to greet thy doom. For gracious I deem  
 my Hrothulf, {17b} willing to hold and rule  
 nobly our youths, if thou yield up first,  
 prince of Scyldings, thy part in the world.  
 I ween with good he will well requite  
 offspring of ours, when all he minds  
 that for him we did in his helpless days  
 of gift and grace to gain him honor!"  
 Then she turned to the seat where her sons wereplaced,  
 Hrethric and Hrothmund, with heroes' bairns,  
 young men together: the Geat, too, sat there,  
 Beowulf brave, the brothers between.

## XVIII

**A** cup she gave him, with kindly greeting  
 and winsome words. Of wunden gold,  
 she offered, to honor him, arm-jewels twain,  
 corselet and rings, and of collars the noblest  
 that ever I knew the earth around.

Ne'er heard I so mighty, 'neath heaven's dome,  
 a hoard-gem of heroes, since Hama bore  
 to his bright-built burg the Brisings' necklace,  
 jewel and gem casket. -- Jealousy fled he,  
 Eormenric's hate: chose help eternal.  
 Hygelac Geat, grandson of Swerting,  
 on the last of his raids this ring bore with him,  
 under his banner the booty defending,  
 the war-spoil warding; but Wyrð o'erwhelmed him  
 what time, in his daring, dangers he sought,  
 feud with Frisians. Fairest of gems  
 he bore with him over the beaker-of-waves,  
 sovran strong: under shield he died.  
 Fell the corpse of the king into keeping of Franks,  
 gear of the breast, and that gorgeous ring;  
 weaker warriors won the spoil,  
 after gripe of battle, from Geatland's lord,  
 and held the death-field.  
 Din rose in hall.  
 Wealhtheow spake amid warriors, and said: --  
 "This jewel enjoy in thy jocund youth,  
 Beowulf lov'd, these battle-weeds wear,  
 a royal treasure, and richly thrive!  
 Preserve thy strength, and these striplings here  
 counsel in kindness: requital be mine.  
 Hast done such deeds, that for days to come  
 thou art famed among folk both far and near,  
 so wide as washeth the wave of Ocean  
 his windy walls. Through the ways of life  
 prosper, O prince! I pray for thee  
 rich possessions. To son of mine  
 be helpful in deed and uphold his joys!  
 Here every earl to the other is true,  
 mild of mood, to the master loyal!  
 Thanes are friendly, the throng obedient,  
 liegemen are revelling: list and obey!"  
 Went then to her place. -- That was proudest of feasts;  
 flowed wine for the warriors. Wyrð they knew not,  
 destiny dire, and the doom to be seen  
 by many an earl when eve should come,  
 and Hrothgar homeward hasten away,

royal, to rest. The room was guarded  
by an army of earls, as erst was done.  
They bared the bench-boards; abroad they spread  
beds and bolsters. -- One beer-carouser  
in danger of doom lay down in the hall. --

At their heads they set their shields of war,  
bucklers bright; on the bench were there  
over each atheling, easy to see,  
the high battle-helmet, the haughty spear,  
the corselet of rings. 'Twas their custom so  
ever to be for battle prepared,  
at home, or harrying, which it were,  
even as oft as evil threatened  
their sovran king. -- They were clansmen good.

## XIX

**T**hen sank they to sleep. With sorrow one bought  
his rest of the evening, -- as offtime had happened  
when Grendel guarded that golden hall,  
evil wrought, till his end drew nigh,  
slaughter for sins. 'Twas seen and told  
how an avenger survived the fiend,  
as was learned afar. The livelong time  
after that grim fight, Grendel's mother,  
monster of women, mourned her woe.  
She was doomed to dwell in the dreary waters,  
cold sea-courses, since Cain cut down  
with edge of the sword his only brother,  
his father's offspring: outlawed he fled,  
marked with murder, from men's delights  
warded the wilds. -- There woke from him  
such fate-sent ghosts as Grendel, who,  
war-wolf horrid, at Heorot found  
a warrior watching and waiting the fray,  
with whom the grisly one grappled amain.  
But the man remembered his mighty power,

the glorious gift that God had sent him,  
in his Maker's mercy put his trust  
for comfort and help: so he conquered the foe,  
felled the fiend, who fled abject,  
reft of joy, to the realms of death,  
mankind's foe. And his mother now,  
gloomy and grim, would go that quest  
of sorrow, the death of her son to avenge.  
To Heorot came she, where helmeted Danes  
slept in the hall. Too soon came back  
old ills of the earls, when in she burst,  
the mother of Grendel. Less grim, though, that terror,  
e'en as terror of woman in war is less,  
might of maid, than of men in arms  
when, hammer-forged, the falchion hard,  
sword gore-stained, through swine of the helm,  
crested, with keen blade carves amain.  
Then was in hall the hard-edge drawn,  
the swords on the settles, {19a} and shields a-many  
firm held in hand: nor helmet minded  
nor harness of mail, whom that horror seized.  
Haste was hers; she would hie afar  
and save her life when the liegemen saw her.  
Yet a single atheling up she seized  
fast and firm, as she fled to the moor.  
He was for Hrothgar of heroes the dearest,  
of trusty vassals betwixt the seas,  
whom she killed on his couch, a clansman famous,  
in battle brave. -- Nor was Beowulf there;  
another house had been held apart,  
after giving of gold, for the Geat renowned. --  
Uproar filled Heorot; the hand all had viewed,  
blood-flecked, she bore with her; bale was returned,  
dole in the dwellings: 'twas dire exchange  
where Dane and Geat were doomed to give  
the lives of loved ones. Long-tried king,  
the hoary hero, at heart was sad  
when he knew his noble no more lived,  
and dead indeed was his dearest thane.  
To his bower was Beowulf brought in haste,  
dauntless victor. As daylight broke,

along with his earls the atheling lord,  
 with his clansmen, came where the king abode  
 waiting to see if the Wielder-of-All  
 would turn this tale of trouble and woe.  
 Strode o'er floor the famed-in-strife,  
 with his hand-companions, -- the hall resounded, --  
 wishing to greet the wise old king,  
 Ingwines' lord; he asked if the night  
 had passed in peace to the prince's mind.

## XX

**H**rothgar spake, helmet-of-Scyldings: --  
 "Ask not of pleasure! Pain is renewed  
 to Danish folk. Dead is Aeschere,  
 of Yrmenlaf the elder brother,  
 my sage adviser and stay in council,  
 shoulder-comrade in stress of fight  
 when warriors clashed and we warded our heads,  
 hewed the helm-boars; hero famed  
 should be every earl as Aeschere was!  
 But here in Heorot a hand hath slain him  
 of wandering death-sprite. I wot not whither, {20a}  
 proud of the prey, her path she took,  
 fain of her fill. The feud she avenged  
 that yesternight, unyieldingly,  
 Grendel in grimmest grasp thou killedst, --  
 seeing how long these liegemen mine  
 he ruined and ravaged. Reft of life,  
 in arms he fell. Now another comes,  
 keen and cruel, her kin to avenge,  
 faring far in feud of blood:  
 so that many a thane shall think, who e'er  
 sorrows in soul for that sharer of rings,  
 this is hardest of heart-bales. The hand lies low  
 that once was willing each wish to please.  
 Land-dwellers here {20b} and liegemen mine,  
 who house by those parts, I have heard relate

that such a pair they have sometimes seen,  
 march-stalkers mighty the moorland haunting,  
 wandering spirits: one of them seemed,  
 so far as my folk could fairly judge,  
 of womankind; and one, accursed,  
 in man's guise trod the misery-track  
 of exile, though huger than human bulk.  
 Grendel in days long gone they named him,  
 folk of the land; his father they knew not,  
 nor any brood that was born to him  
 of treacherous spirits. Untrod is their home;  
 by wolf-cliffs haunt they and windy headlands,  
 fenways fearful, where flows the stream  
 from mountains gliding to gloom of the rocks,  
 underground flood. Not far is it hence  
 in measure of miles that the mere expands,  
 and o'er it the frost-bound forest hanging,  
 sturdily rooted, shadows the wave.  
 By night is a wonder weird to see,  
 fire on the waters. So wise lived none  
 of the sons of men, to search those depths!  
 Nay, though the heath-rover, harried by dogs,  
 the horn-proud hart, this holt should seek,  
 long distance driven, his dear life first  
 on the brink he yields ere he brave the plunge  
 to hide his head: 'tis no happy place!  
 Thence the welter of waters washes up  
 wan to welkin when winds bestir  
 evil storms, and air grows dusk,  
 and the heavens weep. Now is help once more  
 with thee alone! The land thou knowst not,  
 place of fear, where thou findest out  
 that sin-flecked being. Seek if thou dare!  
 I will reward thee, for waging this fight,  
 with ancient treasure, as erst I did,  
 with winding gold, if thou winnest back."

## XXI

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow:  
 "Sorrow not, sage! It beseems us better  
 friends to avenge than fruitlessly mourn them.  
 Each of us all must his end abide  
 in the ways of the world; so win who may  
 glory ere death! When his days are told,  
 that is the warrior's worthiest doom.  
 Rise, O realm-warder! Ride we anon,  
 and mark the trail of the mother of Grendel.  
 No harbor shall hide her -- heed my promise! --  
 enfolding of field or forested mountain  
 or floor of the flood, let her flee where she will!  
 But thou this day endure in patience,  
 as I ween thou wilt, thy woes each one."  
 Leaped up the graybeard: God he thanked,  
 mighty Lord, for the man's brave words.  
 For Hrothgar soon a horse was saddled  
 wave-maned steed. The sovran wise  
 stately rode on; his shield-armed men  
 followed in force. The footprints led  
 along the woodland, widely seen,  
 a path o'er the plain, where she passed, and trod  
 the murky moor; of men-at-arms  
 she bore the bravest and best one, dead,  
 him who with Hrothgar the homestead ruled.  
 On then went the atheling-born  
 o'er stone-cliffs steep and strait defiles,  
 narrow passes and unknown ways,  
 headlands sheer, and the haunts of the Nicors.  
 Foremost he {21a} fared, a few at his side  
 of the wiser men, the ways to scan,  
 till he found in a flash the forested hill  
 hanging over the hoary rock,  
 a woful wood: the waves below  
 were dyed in blood. The Danish men  
 had sorrow of soul, and for Scyldings all,  
 for many a hero, 'twas hard to bear,  
 ill for earls, when Aeschere's head  
 they found by the flood on the foreland there.

*Beowulf*

Waves were welling, the warriors saw,  
 hot with blood; but the horn sang oft  
 battle-song bold. The band sat down,  
 and watched on the water worm-like things,  
 sea-dragons strange that sounded the deep,  
 and nicors that lay on the ledge of the ness --  
 such as oft essay at hour of morn  
 on the road-of-sails their ruthless quest, --  
 and sea-snakes and monsters. These started away,  
 swollen and savage that song to hear,  
 that war-horn's blast. The warden of Geats,  
 with bolt from bow, then balked of life,  
 of wave-work, one monster, amid its heart  
 went the keen war-shaft; in water it seemed  
 less doughty in swimming whom death had seized.  
 Swift on the billows, with boar-spears well  
 hooked and barbed, it was hard beset,  
 done to death and dragged on the headland,  
 wave-roamer wondrous. Warriors viewed  
 the grisly guest.  
 Then girt him Beowulf  
 in martial mail, nor mourned for his life.  
 His breastplate broad and bright of hues,  
 woven by hand, should the waters try;  
 well could it ward the warrior's body  
 that battle should break on his breast in vain  
 nor harm his heart by the hand of a foe.  
 And the helmet white that his head protected  
 was destined to dare the deeps of the flood,  
 through wave-whirl win: 'twas wound with chains,  
 decked with gold, as in days of yore  
 the weapon-smith worked it wondrously,  
 with swine-forms set it, that swords nowise,  
 brandished in battle, could bite that helm.  
 Nor was that the meanest of mighty helps  
 which Hrothgar's orator offered at need:  
 "Hrunting" they named the hilted sword,  
 of old-time heirlooms easily first;  
 iron was its edge, all etched with poison,  
 with battle-blood hardened, nor blenched it at fight  
 in hero's hand who held it ever,

on paths of peril prepared to go  
 to folkstead {21b} of foes. Not first time this  
 it was destined to do a daring task.  
 For he bore not in mind, the bairn of Ecglaf  
 sturdy and strong, that speech he had made,  
 drunk with wine, now this weapon he lent  
 to a stouter swordsman. Himself, though, durst not  
 under welter of waters wager his life  
 as loyal liegeman. So lost he his glory,  
 honor of earls. With the other not so,  
 who girded him now for the grim encounter.

## XXII

**B**eowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "Have mind, thou honored offspring of Healfdene  
 gold-friend of men, now I go on this quest,  
 sovrán wise, what once was said:  
 if in thy cause it came that I  
 should lose my life, thou wouldst loyal bide  
 to me, though fallen, in father's place!  
 Be guardian, thou, to this group of my thanes,  
 my warrior-friends, if War should seize me;  
 and the goodly gifts thou gavest me,  
 Hrothgar beloved, to Hygelac send!  
 Geatland's king may ken by the gold,  
 Hrethel's son see, when he stares at the treasure,  
 that I got me a friend for goodness famed,  
 and joyed while I could in my jewel-bestower.  
 And let Unferth wield this wondrous sword,  
 earl far-honored, this heirloom precious,  
 hard of edge: with Hrunting I  
 seek doom of glory, or Death shall take me."

After these words the Weder-Geat lord  
 boldly hastened, biding never  
 answer at all: the ocean floods  
 closed o'er the hero. Long while of the day

fled ere he felt the floor of the sea.

Soon found the fiend who the flood-domain  
 sword-hungry held these hundred winters,  
 greedy and grim, that some guest from above,  
 some man, was raiding her monster-realm.  
 She grasped out for him with grisly claws,  
 and the warrior seized; yet scathed she not  
 his body hale; the breastplate hindered,  
 as she strove to shatter the sark of war,  
 the linked harness, with loathsome hand.  
 Then bore this brine-wolf, when bottom she touched,  
 the lord of rings to the lair she haunted  
 whiles vainly he strove, though his valor held,  
 weapon to wield against wondrous monsters  
 that sore beset him; sea-beasts many  
 tried with fierce tusks to tear his mail,  
 and swarmed on the stranger. But soon he marked  
 he was now in some hall, he knew not which,  
 where water never could work him harm,  
 nor through the roof could reach him ever  
 fangs of the flood. Firelight he saw,  
 beams of a blaze that brightly shone.  
 Then the warrior was ware of that wolf-of-the-deep,  
 mere-wife monstrous. For mighty stroke  
 he swung his blade, and the blow withheld not.  
 Then sang on her head that seemly blade  
 its war-song wild. But the warrior found  
 the light-of-battle {22a} was loath to bite,  
 to harm the heart: its hard edge failed  
 the noble at need, yet had known of old  
 strife hand to hand, and had helmets cloven,  
 doomed men's fighting-gear. First time, this,  
 for the gleaming blade that its glory fell.  
 Firm still stood, nor failed in valor,  
 heedful of high deeds, Hygelac's kinsman;  
 flung away fretted sword, featly jewelled,  
 the angry earl; on earth it lay  
 steel-edged and stiff. His strength he trusted,  
 hand-gripe of might. So man shall do  
 whenever in war he weens to earn him

lasting fame, nor fears for his life!  
 Seized then by shoulder, shrank not from combat,  
 the Geatish war-prince Grendel's mother.  
 Flung then the fierce one, filled with wrath,  
 his deadly foe, that she fell to ground.  
 Swift on her part she paid him back  
 with grisly grasp, and grappled with him.  
 Spent with struggle, stumbled the warrior,  
 fiercest of fighting-men, fell adown.  
 On the hall-guest she hurled herself, hent her short sword,  
 broad and brown-edged, {22b} the bairn to avenge,  
 the sole-born son. -- On his shoulder lay  
 braided breast-mail, barring death,  
 withstanding entrance of edge or blade.  
 Life would have ended for Ecgtheow's son,  
 under wide earth for that earl of Geats,  
 had his armor of war not aided him,  
 battle-net hard, and holy God  
 wielded the victory, wisest Maker.  
 The Lord of Heaven allowed his cause;  
 and easily rose the earl erect.

### XXIII

**M**id the battle-gear saw he a blade triumphant,  
 old-sword of Eotens, with edge of proof,  
 warriors' heirloom, weapon unmatched,  
 -- save only 'twas more than other men  
 to bandy-of-battle could bear at all --  
 as the giants had wrought it, ready and keen.  
 Seized then its chain-hilt the Scyldings' chieftain,  
 bold and battle-grim, brandished the sword,  
 reckless of life, and so wrathfully smote  
 that it gripped her neck and grasped her hard,  
 her bone-rings breaking: the blade pierced through  
 that fated-one's flesh: to floor she sank.  
 Bloody the blade: he was blithe of his deed.  
 Then blazed forth light. 'Twas bright within

as when from the sky there shines unclouded  
 heaven's candle. The hall he scanned.  
 By the wall then went he; his weapon raised  
 high by its hilts the Hygelac-thane,  
 angry and eager. That edge was not useless  
 to the warrior now. He wished with speed  
 Grendel to guerdon for grim raids many,  
 for the war he waged on Western-Danes  
 oftener far than an only time,  
 when of Hrothgar's hearth-companions  
 he slew in slumber, in sleep devoured,  
 fifteen men of the folk of Danes,  
 and as many others outward bore,  
 his horrible prey. Well paid for that  
 the wrathful prince! For now prone he saw  
 Grendel stretched there, spent with war,  
 spoiled of life, so scathed had left him  
 Heorot's battle. The body sprang far  
 when after death it endured the blow,  
 sword-stroke savage, that severed its head.  
 Soon, {23a} then, saw the sage companions  
 who waited with Hrothgar, watching the flood,  
 that the tossing waters turbid grew,  
 blood-stained the mere. Old men together,  
 hoary-haired, of the hero spake;  
 the warrior would not, they weened, again,  
 proud of conquest, come to seek  
 their mighty master. To many it seemed  
 the wolf-of-the-waves had won his life.  
 The ninth hour came. The noble Scyldings  
 left the headland; homeward went  
 the gold-friend of men. {23b} But the guests sat on,  
 stared at the surges, sick in heart,  
 and wished, yet weened not, their winsome lord  
 again to see.

Now that sword began,  
 from blood of the fight, in battle-droppings, {23c}  
 war-blade, to wane: 'twas a wondrous thing  
 that all of it melted as ice is wont  
 when frosty fetters the Father loosens,

unwinds the wave-bonds, wielding all  
 seasons and times: the true God he!  
 Nor took from that dwelling the duke of the Geats  
 save only the head and that hilt withal  
 blazoned with jewels: the blade had melted,  
 burned was the bright sword, her blood was so hot,  
 so poisoned the hell-sprite who perished within there.  
 Soon he was swimming who safe saw in combat  
 downfall of demons; up-dove through the flood.  
 The clashing waters were cleansed now,  
 waste of waves, where the wandering fiend  
 her life-days left and this lapsing world.  
 Swam then to strand the sailors'-refuge,  
 sturdy-in-spirit, of sea-booty glad,  
 of burden brave he bore with him.  
 Went then to greet him, and God they thanked,  
 the thane-band choice of their chieftain blithe,  
 that safe and sound they could see him again.  
 Soon from the hardy one helmet and armor  
 deftly they doffed: now drowsed the mere,  
 water 'neath welkin, with war-blood stained.  
 Forth they fared by the footpaths thence,  
 merry at heart the highways measured,  
 well-known roads. Courageous men  
 carried the head from the cliff by the sea,  
 an arduous task for all the band,  
 the firm in fight, since four were needed  
 on the shaft-of-slaughter {23d} strenuously  
 to bear to the gold-hall Grendel's head.  
 So presently to the palace there  
 foemen fearless, fourteen Geats,  
 marching came. Their master-of-clan  
 mighty amid them the meadow-ways trod.  
 Strode then within the sovran thane  
 fearless in fight, of fame renowned,  
 hardy hero, Hrothgar to greet.  
 And next by the hair into hall was borne  
 Grendel's head, where the henchmen were drinking,  
 an awe to clan and queen alike,  
 a monster of marvel: the men looked on.

## XXIV

**B**eowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "Lo, now, this sea-booty, son of Healfdene,  
 Lord of Scyldings, we've lustily brought thee,  
 sign of glory; thou seest it here.  
 Not lightly did I with my life escape!  
 In war under water this work I essayed  
 with endless effort; and even so  
 my strength had been lost had the Lord not shielded me.  
 Not a whit could I with Hrunting do  
 in work of war, though the weapon is good;  
 yet a sword the Sovran of Men vouchsafed me  
 to spy on the wall there, in splendor hanging,  
 old, gigantic, -- how oft He guides  
 the friendless wight! -- and I fought with that brand,  
 felling in fight, since fate was with me,  
 the house's wardens. That war-sword then  
 all burned, bright blade, when the blood gushed o'er it,  
 battle-sweat hot; but the hilt I brought back  
 from my foes. So avenged I their fiendish deeds  
 death-fall of Danes, as was due and right.  
 And this is my hest, that in Heorot now  
 safe thou canst sleep with thy soldier band,  
 and every thane of all thy folk  
 both old and young; no evil fear,  
 Scyldings' lord, from that side again,  
 aught ill for thy earls, as erst thou must!"  
 Then the golden hilt, for that gray-haired leader,  
 hoary hero, in hand was laid,  
 giant-wrought, old. So owned and enjoyed it  
 after downfall of devils, the Danish lord,  
 wonder-smiths' work, since the world was rid  
 of that grim-souled fiend, the foe of God,  
 murder-marked, and his mother as well.  
 Now it passed into power of the people's king,  
 best of all that the oceans bound  
 who have scattered their gold o'er Scandia's isle.  
 Hrothgar spake -- the hilt he viewed,  
 heirloom old, where was etched the rise  
 of that far-off fight when the floods o'erwhelmed,

raging waves, the race of giants  
 (fearful their fate!), a folk estranged  
 from God Eternal: whence guerdon due  
 in that waste of waters the Wielder paid them.  
 So on the guard of shining gold  
 in runic staves it was rightly said  
 for whom the serpent-traced sword was wrought,  
 best of blades, in bygone days,  
 and the hilt well wound. -- The wise-one spake,  
 son of Healfdene; silent were all: --  
 "Lo, so may he say who sooth and right  
 follows 'mid folk, of far times mindful,  
 a land-warden old, {24a} that this earl belongs  
 to the better breed! So, borne aloft,  
 thy fame must fly, O friend my Beowulf,  
 far and wide o'er folksteads many. Firmly thou  
 shalt all maintain,  
 mighty strength with mood of wisdom. Love of  
 mine will I assure thee,  
 as, awhile ago, I promised; thou shalt prove a stay  
 in future,  
 in far-off years, to folk of thine,  
 to the heroes a help. Was not Heremod thus  
 to offspring of Ecgwela, Honor-Scyldings,  
 nor grew for their grace, but for grisly slaughter,  
 for doom of death to the Danishmen.

He slew, wrath-swollen, his shoulder-comrades,  
 companions at board! So he passed alone,  
 chieftain haughty, from human cheer.  
 Though him the Maker with might endowed,  
 delights of power, and uplifted high  
 above all men, yet blood-fierce his mind,  
 his breast-hoard, grew, no bracelets gave he  
 to Danes as was due; he endured all joyless  
 strain of struggle and stress of woe,  
 long feud with his folk. Here find thy lesson!  
 Of virtue advise thee! This verse I have said for thee,  
 wise from lapsed winters. Wondrous seems  
 how to sons of men Almighty God  
 in the strength of His spirit sendeth wisdom,

estate, high station: He swayeth all things.  
 Whiles He letteth right lustily fare  
 the heart of the hero of high-born race, --  
 in seat ancestral assigns him bliss,  
 his folk's sure fortress in fee to hold,  
 puts in his power great parts of the earth,  
 empire so ample, that end of it  
 this wanter-of-wisdom weeneth none.  
 So he waxes in wealth, nowise can harm him  
 illness or age; no evil cares  
 shadow his spirit; no sword-hate threatens  
 from ever an enemy: all the world  
 wends at his will, no worse he knoweth,  
 till all within him obstinate pride  
 waxes and wakes while the warden slumbers,  
 the spirit's sentry; sleep is too fast  
 which masters his might, and the murderer nears,  
 stealthily shooting the shafts from his bow!

## XXV

**U**nder harness his heart then is hit indeed  
 by sharpest shafts; and no shelter avails  
 from foul behest of the hellish fiend. {25a}  
 Him seems too little what long he possessed.  
 Greedy and grim, no golden rings  
 he gives for his pride; the promised future  
 forgets he and spurns, with all God has sent him,  
 Wonder-Wielder, of wealth and fame.  
 Yet in the end it ever comes  
 that the frame of the body fragile yields,  
 fated falls; and there follows another  
 who joyously the jewels divides,  
 the royal riches, nor recks of his forebear.  
 Ban, then, such baleful thoughts, Beowulf dearest,  
 best of men, and the better part choose,  
 profit eternal; and temper thy pride,  
 warrior famous! The flower of thy might

lasts now a while: but ere long it shall be  
 that sickness or sword thy strength shall minish,  
 or fang of fire, or flooding billow,  
 or bite of blade, or brandished spear,  
 or odious age; or the eyes' clear beam  
 wax dull and darken: Death even thee  
 in haste shall o'erwhelm, thou hero of war!  
 So the Ring-Danes these half-years a hundred I ruled,  
 wielded 'neath welkin, and warded them bravely  
 from mighty-ones many o'er middle-earth,  
 from spear and sword, till it seemed for me  
 no foe could be found under fold of the sky.  
 Lo, sudden the shift! To me seated secure  
 came grief for joy when Grendel began  
 to harry my home, the hellish foe;  
 for those ruthless raids, unresting I suffered  
 heart-sorrow heavy. Heaven be thanked,  
 Lord Eternal, for life extended  
 that I on this head all hewn and bloody,  
 after long evil, with eyes may gaze!  
 -- Go to the bench now! Be glad at banquet,  
 warrior worthy! A wealth of treasure  
 at dawn of day, be dealt between us!"  
 Glad was the Geats' lord, going betimes  
 to seek his seat, as the Sage commanded.  
 Afresh, as before, for the famed-in-battle,  
 for the band of the hall, was a banquet dight  
 nobly anew. The Night-Helm darkened  
 dusk o'er the drinkers.  
 The doughty ones rose:  
 for the hoary-headed would hasten to rest,  
 aged Scylding; and eager the Geat,  
 shield-fighter sturdy, for sleeping yearned.  
 Him wander-weary, warrior-guest  
 from far, a hall-thane heralded forth,  
 who by custom courtly cared for all  
 needs of a thane as in those old days  
 warrior-wanderers wont to have.  
 So slumbered the stout-heart. Stately the hall  
 rose gabled and gilt where the guest slept on  
 till a raven black the rapture-of-heaven {25b}

blithe-heart boded. Bright came flying  
 shine after shadow. The swordsmen hastened,  
 athelings all were eager homeward  
 forth to fare; and far from thence  
 the great-hearted guest would guide his keel.  
 Bade then the hardy-one Hrunting be brought  
 to the son of Ecglaf, the sword bade him take,  
 excellent iron, and uttered his thanks for it,  
 quoth that he counted it keen in battle,  
 "war-friend" winsome: with words he slandered not  
 edge of the blade: 'twas a big-hearted man!  
 Now eager for parting and armed at point  
 warriors waited, while went to his host  
 that Darling of Danes. The doughty atheling  
 to high-seat hastened and Hrothgar greeted.

## XXVI

**B**eowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "Lo, we seafarers say our will,  
 far-come men, that we fain would seek  
 Hygelac now. We here have found  
 hosts to our heart: thou hast harbored us well.  
 If ever on earth I am able to win me  
 more of thy love, O lord of men,  
 aught anew, than I now have done,  
 for work of war I am willing still!  
 If it come to me ever across the seas  
 that neighbor foemen annoy and fright thee, --  
 as they that hate thee ere while have used, --  
 thousands then of thanes I shall bring,  
 heroes to help thee. Of Hygelac I know,  
 ward of his folk, that, though few his years,  
 the lord of the Geats will give me aid  
 by word and by work, that well I may serve thee,  
 wielding the war-wood to win thy triumph  
 and lending thee might when thou lackest men.  
 If thy Hrethric should come to court of Geats,

a sovran's son, he will surely there  
 find his friends. A far-off land  
 each man should visit who vaunts him brave."  
 Him then answering, Hrothgar spake: --  
 "These words of thine the wisest God  
 sent to thy soul! No sager counsel  
 from so young in years e'er yet have I heard.  
 Thou art strong of main and in mind art wary,  
 art wise in words! I ween indeed  
 if ever it hap that Hrethel's heir  
 by spear be seized, by sword-grim battle,  
 by illness or iron, thine elder and lord,  
 people's leader, -- and life be thine, --  
 no seemlier man will the Sea-Geats find  
 at all to choose for their chief and king,  
 for hoard-guard of heroes, if hold thou wilt  
 thy kinsman's kingdom! Thy keen mind pleases me  
 the longer the better, Beowulf loved!

Thou hast brought it about that both our peoples,  
 sons of the Geat and Spear-Dane folk,  
 shall have mutual peace, and from murderous strife,  
 such as once they waged, from war refrain.  
 Long as I rule this realm so wide,  
 let our hoards be common, let heroes with gold  
 each other greet o'er the gannet's-bath,  
 and the ringed-prow bear o'er rolling waves  
 tokens of love. I trow my landfolk  
 towards friend and foe are firmly joined,  
 and honor they keep in the olden way."  
 To him in the hall, then, Healfdene's son  
 gave treasures twelve, and the trust-of-earls  
 bade him fare with the gifts to his folk beloved,  
 hale to his home, and in haste return.  
 Then kissed the king of kin renowned,  
 Scyldings' chieftain, that choicest thane,  
 and fell on his neck. Fast flowed the tears  
 of the hoary-headed. Heavy with winters,  
 he had chances twain, but he clung to this, {26a} --  
 that each should look on the other again,  
 and hear him in hall. Was this hero so dear to him.

his breast's wild billows he banned in vain;  
 safe in his soul a secret longing,  
 locked in his mind, for that loved man  
 burned in his blood. Then Beowulf strode,  
 glad of his gold-gifts, the grass-plot o'er,  
 warrior blithe. The wave-roamer bode  
 riding at anchor, its owner awaiting.  
 As they hastened onward, Hrothgar's gift  
 they lauded at length. -- 'Twas a lord unpeered,  
 every way blameless, till age had broken  
 -- it spareth no mortal -- his splendid might.

## XXVII

**C**ame now to ocean the ever-courageous  
 hardy henchmen, their harness bearing,  
 woven war-sarks. The warden marked,  
 trusty as ever, the earl's return.  
 From the height of the hill no hostile words  
 reached the guests as he rode to greet them;  
 but "Welcome!" he called to that Weder clan  
 as the sheen-mailed spoilers to ship marched on.  
 Then on the strand, with steeds and treasure  
 and armor their roomy and ring-dight ship  
 was heavily laden: high its mast  
 rose over Hrothgar's hoarded gems.  
 A sword to the boat-guard Beowulf gave,  
 mounted with gold; on the mead-bench since  
 he was better esteemed, that blade possessing,  
 heirloom old. -- Their ocean-keel boarding,  
 they drove through the deep, and Daneland left.  
 A sea-cloth was set, a sail with ropes,  
 firm to the mast; the flood-timbers moaned; {27a}  
 nor did wind over billows that wave-swimmer blow  
 across from her course. The craft sped on,  
 foam-necked it floated forth o'er the waves,  
 keel firm-bound over briny currents,  
 till they got them sight of the Geatish cliffs,

home-known headlands. High the boat,  
 stirred by winds, on the strand updrove.  
 Helpful at haven the harbor-guard stood,  
 who long already for loved companions  
 by the water had waited and watched afar.  
 He bound to the beach the broad-bosomed ship  
 with anchor-bands, lest ocean-billows  
 that trusty timber should tear away.  
 Then Beowulf bade them bear the treasure,  
 gold and jewels; no journey far  
 was it thence to go to the giver of rings,  
 Hygelac Hrethling: at home he dwelt  
 by the sea-wall close, himself and clan.  
 Haughty that house, a hero the king,  
 high the hall, and Hygd {27b} right young,  
 wise and wary, though winters few  
 in those fortress walls she had found a home,  
 Haereth's daughter. Nor humble her ways,  
 nor grudged she gifts to the Geatish men,  
 of precious treasure. Not Thryth's pride showed she,  
 folk-queen famed, or that fell deceit.  
 Was none so daring that durst make bold  
 (save her lord alone) of the liegemen dear  
 that lady full in the face to look,  
 but forged fetters he found his lot,  
 bonds of death! And brief the respite;  
 soon as they seized him, his sword-doom was spoken,  
 and the burnished blade a baleful murder  
 proclaimed and closed. No queenly way  
 for woman to practise, though peerless she,  
 that the weaver-of-peace {27c} from warrior dear  
 by wrath and lying his life should reave!  
 But Hemming's kinsman hindered this. --  
 For over their ale men also told  
 that of these folk-horrors fewer she wrought,  
 onslaughts of evil, after she went,  
 gold-decked bride, to the brave young prince,  
 atheling haughty, and Offa's hall  
 o'er the fallow flood at her father's bidding  
 safely sought, where since she prospered,  
 royal, throned, rich in goods,

fain of the fair life fate had sent her,  
 and leal in love to the lord of warriors.  
 He, of all heroes I heard of ever  
 from sea to sea, of the sons of earth,  
 most excellent seemed. Hence Offa was praised  
 for his fighting and feeing by far-off men,  
 the spear-bold warrior; wisely he ruled  
 over his empire. Eomer woke to him,  
 help of heroes, Hemming's kinsman,  
 Grandson of Garmund, grim in war.

## XXVIII

**H**astened the hardy one, henchmen with him,  
 sandy strand of the sea to tread  
 and widespread ways. The world's great candle,  
 sun shone from south. They strode along  
 with sturdy steps to the spot they knew  
 where the battle-king young, his burg within,  
 slayer of Ongentheow, shared the rings,  
 shelter-of-heroes. To Hygelac  
 Beowulf's coming was quickly told, --  
 that there in the court the clansmen's refuge,  
 the shield-companion sound and alive,  
 hale from the hero-play homeward strode.  
 With haste in the hall, by highest order,  
 room for the rovers was readily made.  
 By his sovrán he sat, come safe from battle,  
 kinsman by kinsman. His kindly lord  
 he first had greeted in gracious form,  
 with manly words. The mead dispensing,  
 came through the high hall Haereth's daughter,  
 winsome to warriors, wine-cup bore  
 to the hands of the heroes. Hygelac then  
 his comrade fairly with question plied  
 in the lofty hall, sore longing to know  
 what manner of sojourn the Sea-Geats made.  
 "What came of thy quest, my kinsman Beowulf,

when thy yearnings suddenly swept thee yonder  
 battle to seek o'er the briny sea,  
 combat in Heorot? Hrothgar couldst thou  
 aid at all, the honored chief,  
 in his wide-known woes? With waves of care  
 my sad heart seethed; I sore mistrusted  
 my loved one's venture: long I begged thee  
 by no means to seek that slaughtering monster,  
 but suffer the South-Danes to settle their feud  
 themselves with Grendel. Now God be thanked  
 that safe and sound I can see thee now!"  
 Beowulf spake, the bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "'Tis known and unhidden, Hygelac Lord,  
 to many men, that meeting of ours,  
 struggle grim between Grendel and me,  
 which we fought on the field where full too many  
 sorrows he wrought for the Scylding-Victors,  
 evils unending. These all I avenged.  
 No boast can be from breed of Grendel,  
 any on earth, for that uproar at dawn,  
 from the longest-lived of the loathsome race  
 in fleshly fold! -- But first I went  
 Hrothgar to greet in the hall of gifts,  
 where Healfdene's kinsman high-renowned,  
 soon as my purpose was plain to him,  
 assigned me a seat by his son and heir.  
 The liegemen were lusty; my life-days never  
 such merry men over mead in hall  
 have I heard under heaven! The high-born queen,  
 people's peace-bringer, passed through the hall,  
 cheered the young clansmen, clasps of gold,  
 ere she sought her seat, to sundry gave.  
 Oft to the heroes Hrothgar's daughter,  
 to earls in turn, the ale-cup tendered, --  
 she whom I heard these hall-companions  
 Freawaru name, when fretted gold  
 she proffered the warriors. Promised is she,  
 gold-decked maid, to the glad son of Froda.  
 Sage this seems to the Scylding's-friend,  
 kingdom's-keeper: he counts it wise  
 the woman to wed so and ward off feud,

store of slaughter. But seldom ever  
 when men are slain, does the murder-spear sink  
 but briefest while, though the bride be fair! {28a}  
 "Nor haply will like it the Heathobard lord,  
 and as little each of his liegemen all,  
 when a thane of the Danes, in that doughty throng,  
 goes with the lady along their hall,  
 and on him the old-time heirlooms glisten  
 hard and ring-decked, Heathobard's treasure,  
 weapons that once they wielded fair  
 until they lost at the linden-play {28b}  
 liegeman leal and their lives as well.  
 Then, over the ale, on this heirloom gazing,  
 some ash-wielder old who has all in mind  
 that spear-death of men, {28c} -- he is stern of mood,  
 heavy at heart, -- in the hero young  
 tests the temper and tries the soul  
 and war-hate wakens, with words like these: --  
 Canst thou not, comrade, ken that sword  
 which to the fray thy father carried  
 in his final feud, 'neath the fighting-mask,  
 dearest of blades, when the Danish slew him  
 and wielded the war-place on Withergild's fall,  
 after havoc of heroes, those hardy Scyldings?  
 Now, the son of a certain slaughtering Dane,  
 proud of his treasure, paces this hall,  
 joys in the killing, and carries the jewel {28d}  
 that rightfully ought to be owned by thee!\_  
 Thus he urges and eggs him all the time  
 with keenest words, till occasion offers  
 that Freawaru's thane, for his father's deed,  
 after bite of brand in his blood must slumber,  
 losing his life; but that liegeman flies  
 living away, for the land he kens.  
 And thus be broken on both their sides  
 oaths of the earls, when Ingeld's breast  
 wells with war-hate, and wife-love now  
 after the care-billows cooler grows.  
 "So {28e} I hold not high the Heathobards' faith  
 due to the Danes, or their during love  
 and pact of peace. -- But I pass from that,

turning to Grendel, O giver-of-treasure,  
 and saying in full how the fight resulted,  
 hand-fray of heroes. When heaven's jewel  
 had fled o'er far fields, that fierce sprite came,  
 night-foe savage, to seek us out  
 where safe and sound we sentried the hall.  
 To Hondscio then was that harassing deadly,  
 his fall there was fated. He first was slain,  
 girded warrior. Grendel on him  
 turned murderous mouth, on our mighty kinsman,  
 and all of the brave man's body devoured.  
 Yet none the earlier, empty-handed,  
 would the bloody-toothed murderer, mindful of bale,  
 outward go from the gold-decked hall:  
 but me he attacked in his terror of might,  
 with greedy hand grasped me. A glove hung by him {28f}  
 wide and wondrous, wound with bands;  
 and in artful wise it all was wrought,  
 by devilish craft, of dragon-skins.  
 Me therein, an innocent man,  
 the fiendish foe was fain to thrust  
 with many another. He might not so,  
 when I all angrily upright stood.  
 'Twere long to relate how that land-destroyer  
 I paid in kind for his cruel deeds;  
 yet there, my prince, this people of thine  
 got fame by my fighting. He fled away,  
 and a little space his life preserved;  
 but there staid behind him his stronger hand  
 left in Heorot; heartsick thence  
 on the floor of the ocean that outcast fell.  
 Me for this struggle the Scyldings'-friend  
 paid in plenty with plates of gold,  
 with many a treasure, when morn had come  
 and we all at the banquet-board sat down.  
 Then was song and glee. The gray-haired Scylding,  
 much tested, told of the times of yore.  
 Whiles the hero his harp bestirred,  
 wood-of-delight; now lays he chanted  
 of sooth and sadness, or said aright  
 legends of wonder, the wide-hearted king;

or for years of his youth he would yearn at times,  
 for strength of old struggles, now stricken with age,  
 hoary hero: his heart surged full  
 when, wise with winters, he wailed their flight.  
 Thus in the hall the whole of that day  
 at ease we feasted, till fell o'er earth  
 another night. Anon full ready  
 in greed of vengeance, Grendel's mother  
 set forth all doleful. Dead was her son  
 through war-hate of Weders; now, woman monstrous  
 with fury fell a foeman she slew,  
 avenged her offspring. From Aeschere old,  
 loyal councillor, life was gone;  
 nor might they e'en, when morning broke,  
 those Danish people, their death-done comrade  
 burn with brands, on balefire lay  
 the man they mourned. Under mountain stream  
 she had carried the corpse with cruel hands.  
 For Hrothgar that was the heaviest sorrow  
 of all that had laden the lord of his folk.  
 The leader then, by thy life, besought me  
 (sad was his soul) in the sea-waves' coil  
 to play the hero and hazard my being  
 for glory of prowess: my guerdon he pledged.  
 I then in the waters -- 'tis widely known --  
 that sea-floor-guardian savage found.  
 Hand-to-hand there a while we struggled;  
 billows welled blood; in the briny hall  
 her head I hewed with a hardy blade  
 from Grendel's mother, -- and gained my life,  
 though not without danger. My doom was not yet.  
 Then the haven-of-heroes, Healfdene's son,  
 gave me in guerdon great gifts of price.

## XXIX

So held this king to the customs old,  
 that I wanted for nought in the wage I gained,  
 the meed of my might; he made me gifts,  
 Healfdene's heir, for my own disposal.  
 Now to thee, my prince, I proffer them all,  
 gladly give them. Thy grace alone  
 can find me favor. Few indeed  
 have I of kinsmen, save, Hygelac, thee!"  
 Then he bade them bear him the boar-head standard,  
 the battle-helm high, and breastplate gray,  
 the splendid sword; then spake in form: --  
 "Me this war-gear the wise old prince,  
 Hrothgar, gave, and his hest he added,  
 that its story be straightway said to thee. --  
 A while it was held by Heorogar king,  
 for long time lord of the land of Scyldings;  
 yet not to his son the sovran left it,  
 to daring Heorowearð, -- dear as he was to him,  
 his harness of battle. -- Well hold thou it all!"  
 And I heard that soon passed o'er the path of this treasure,  
 all apple-fallow, four good steeds,  
 each like the others, arms and horses  
 he gave to the king. So should kinsmen be,  
 not weave one another the net of wiles,  
 or with deep-hid treachery death contrive  
 for neighbor and comrade. His nephew was ever  
 by hardy Hygelac held full dear,  
 and each kept watch o'er the other's weal.  
 I heard, too, the necklace to Hygd he presented,  
 wonder-wrought treasure, which Wealhtheow gave him  
 sovran's daughter: three steeds he added,  
 slender and saddle-gay. Since such gift  
 the gem gleamed bright on the breast of the queen.  
 Thus showed his strain the son of Ecgtheow  
 as a man remarked for mighty deeds  
 and acts of honor. At ale he slew not  
 comrade or kin; nor cruel his mood,  
 though of sons of earth his strength was greatest,  
 a glorious gift that God had sent

the splendid leader. Long was he spurned,  
 and worthless by Geatish warriors held;  
 him at mead the master-of-clans  
 failed full oft to favor at all.  
 Slack and shiftless the strong men deemed him,  
 profitless prince; but payment came,  
 to the warrior honored, for all his woes. --  
 Then the bulwark-of-earls {29a} bade bring within,  
 hardy chieftain, Hrethel's heirloom  
 garnished with gold: no Geat e'er knew  
 in shape of a sword a statelier prize.  
 The brand he laid in Beowulf's lap;  
 and of hides assigned him seven thousand, {29b}  
 with house and high-seat. They held in common  
 land alike by their line of birth,  
 inheritance, home: but higher the king  
 because of his rule o'er the realm itself.

Now further it fell with the flight of years,  
 with harrings horrid, that Hygelac perished, {29c}  
 and Heardred, too, by hewing of swords  
 under the shield-wall slaughtered lay,  
 when him at the van of his victor-folk  
 sought hardy heroes, Heatho-Scilfings,  
 in arms o'erwhelming Hereric's nephew.  
 Then Beowulf came as king this broad  
 realm to wield; and he ruled it well  
 fifty winters, {29d} a wise old prince,  
 warding his land, until One began  
 in the dark of night, a Dragon, to rage.  
 In the grave on the hill a hoard it guarded,  
 in the stone-barrow steep. A strait path reached it,  
 unknown to mortals. Some man, however,  
 came by chance that cave within  
 to the heathen hoard. {29e} In hand he took  
 a golden goblet, nor gave he it back,  
 stole with it away, while the watcher slept,  
 by thievish wiles: for the warden's wrath  
 prince and people must pay betimes!

## XXX

That way he went with no will of his own,  
 in danger of life, to the dragon's hoard,  
 but for pressure of peril, some prince's thane.  
 He fled in fear the fatal scourge,  
 seeking shelter, a sinful man,  
 and entered in. At the awful sight  
 tottered that guest, and terror seized him;  
 yet the wretched fugitive rallied anon  
 from fright and fear ere he fled away,  
 and took the cup from that treasure-hoard.  
 Of such besides there was store enough,  
 heirlooms old, the earth below,  
 which some earl forgotten, in ancient years,  
 left the last of his lofty race,  
 heedfully there had hidden away,  
 dearest treasure. For death of yore  
 had hurried all hence; and he alone  
 left to live, the last of the clan,  
 weeping his friends, yet wished to bide  
 warding the treasure, his one delight,  
 though brief his respite. The barrow, new-ready,  
 to strand and sea-waves stood anear,  
 hard by the headland, hidden and closed;  
 there laid within it his lordly heirlooms  
 and heaped hoard of heavy gold  
 that warden of rings. Few words he spake:  
 "Now hold thou, earth, since heroes may not,  
 what earls have owned! Lo, erst from thee  
 brave men brought it! But battle-death seized  
 and cruel killing my clansmen all,  
 robbed them of life and a liegeman's joys.  
 None have I left to lift the sword,  
 or to cleanse the carven cup of price,  
 beaker bright. My brave are gone.  
 And the helmet hard, all haughty with gold,  
 shall part from its plating. Polishers sleep  
 who could brighten and burnish the battle-mask;  
 and those weeds of war that were wont to brave  
 over bicker of shields the bite of steel

rust with their bearer. The ringed mail  
 fares not far with famous chieftain,  
 at side of hero! No harp's delight,  
 no glee-wood's gladness! No good hawk now  
 flies through the hall! Nor horses fleet  
 stamp in the burgstead! Battle and death  
 the flower of my race have reft away."  
 Mournful of mood, thus he moaned his woe,  
 alone, for them all, and unblithe wept  
 by day and by night, till death's fell wave  
 o'erwhelmed his heart. His hoard-of-bliss  
 that old ill-doer open found,  
 who, blazing at twilight the barrows haunteth,  
 naked foe-dragon flying by night  
 folded in fire: the folk of earth  
 dread him sore. 'Tis his doom to seek  
 hoard in the graves, and heathen gold  
 to watch, many-wintered: nor wins he thereby!  
 Powerful this plague-of-the-people thus  
 held the house of the hoard in earth  
 three hundred winters; till One aroused  
 wrath in his breast, to the ruler bearing  
 that costly cup, and the king implored  
 for bond of peace. So the barrow was plundered,  
 borne off was booty. His boon was granted  
 that wretched man; and his ruler saw  
 first time what was fashioned in far-off days.  
 When the dragon awoke, new woe was kindled.  
 O'er the stone he snuffed. The stark-heart found  
 footprint of foe who so far had gone  
 in his hidden craft by the creature's head. --  
 So may the doomed easily flee  
 evils and exile, if only he gain  
 the grace of The Wielder! -- That warden of gold  
 o'er the ground went seeking, greedy to find  
 the man who wrought him such wrong in sleep.  
 Savage and burning, the barrow he circled  
 all without; nor was any there,  
 none in the waste... Yet war he desired,  
 was eager for battle. The barrow he entered,  
 sought the cup, and discovered soon

that some one of mortals had searched his treasure,  
 his lordly gold. The guardian waited  
 ill-enduring till evening came;  
 boiling with wrath was the barrow's keeper,  
 and fain with flame the foe to pay  
 for the dear cup's loss. -- Now day was fled  
 as the worm had wished. By its wall no more  
 was it glad to bide, but burning flew  
 folded in flame: a fearful beginning  
 for sons of the soil; and soon it came,  
 in the doom of their lord, to a dreadful end.

## XXXI

**T**hen the baleful fiend its fire belched out,  
 and bright homes burned. The blaze stood high  
 all landsfolk frightening. No living thing  
 would that loathly one leave as aloft it flew.  
 Wide was the dragon's warring seen,  
 its fiendish fury far and near,  
 as the grim destroyer those Geatish people  
 hated and hounded. To hidden lair,  
 to its hoard it hastened at hint of dawn.  
 Folk of the land it had lapped in flame,  
 with bale and brand. In its barrow it trusted,  
 its battling and bulwarks: that boast was vain!

To Beowulf then the bale was told  
 quickly and truly: the king's own home,  
 of buildings the best, in brand-waves melted,  
 that gift-throne of Geats. To the good old man  
 sad in heart, 'twas heaviest sorrow.  
 The sage assumed that his sovran God  
 he had angered, breaking ancient law,  
 and embittered the Lord. His breast within  
 with black thoughts welled, as his wont was never.  
 The folk's own fastness that fiery dragon  
 with flame had destroyed, and the stronghold all

washed by waves; but the warlike king,  
 prince of the Weders, plotted vengeance.  
 Warriors'-bulwark, he bade them work  
 all of iron -- the earl's commander --  
 a war-shield wondrous: well he knew  
 that forest-wood against fire were worthless,  
 linden could aid not. -- Atheling brave,  
 he was fated to finish this fleeting life, {31a}  
 his days on earth, and the dragon with him,  
 though long it had watched o'er the wealth of the hoard! --  
 Shame he reckoned it, sharer-of-rings,  
 to follow the flyer-afar with a host,  
 a broad-flung band; nor the battle feared he,  
 nor deemed he dreadful the dragon's warring,  
 its vigor and valor: ventures desperate  
 he had passed a-plenty, and perils of war,  
 contest-crash, since, conqueror proud,  
 Hrothgar's hall he had wholly purged,  
 and in grapple had killed the kin of Grendel,  
 loathsome breed! Not least was that  
 of hand-to-hand fights where Hygelac fell,  
 when the ruler of Geats in rush of battle,  
 lord of his folk, in the Frisian land,  
 son of Hrethel, by sword-draughts died,  
 by brands down-beaten. Thence Beowulf fled  
 through strength of himself and his swimming power,  
 though alone, and his arms were laden with thirty  
 coats of mail, when he came to the sea!  
 Nor yet might Hetwaras {31b} haughtily boast  
 their craft of contest, who carried against him  
 shields to the fight: but few escaped  
 from strife with the hero to seek their homes!  
 Then swam over ocean Ecgtheow's son  
 lonely and sorrowful, seeking his land,  
 where Hygd made him offer of hoard and realm,  
 rings and royal-seat, reckoning naught  
 the strength of her son to save their kingdom  
 from hostile hordes, after Hygelac's death.  
 No sooner for this could the stricken ones  
 in any wise move that atheling's mind  
 over young Heardred's head as lord

and ruler of all the realm to be:  
 yet the hero upheld him with helpful words,  
 aided in honor, till, older grown,  
 he wielded the Weder-Geats. -- Wandering exiles  
 sought him o'er seas, the sons of Ohtere,  
 who had spurned the sway of the Scylfings'-helmet,  
 the bravest and best that broke the rings,  
 in Swedish land, of the sea-kings' line,  
 haughty hero. {31c} Hence Heardred's end.  
 For shelter he gave them, sword-death came,  
 the blade's fell blow, to bairn of Hygelac;  
 but the son of Ongentheow sought again  
 house and home when Heardred fell,  
 leaving Beowulf lord of Geats  
 and gift-seat's master. -- A good king he!

### XXXII

**T**he fall of his lord he was fain to requite  
 in after days; and to Eadgils he proved  
 friend to the friendless, and forces sent  
 over the sea to the son of Ohtere,  
 weapons and warriors: well repaid he  
 those care-paths cold when the king he slew. {32a}  
 Thus safe through struggles the son of Ecgtheow  
 had passed a plenty, through perils dire,  
 with daring deeds, till this day was come  
 that doomed him now with the dragon to strive.  
 With comrades eleven the lord of Geats  
 swollen in rage went seeking the dragon.  
 He had heard whence all the harm arose  
 and the killing of clansmen; that cup of price  
 on the lap of the lord had been laid by the finder.  
 In the throng was this one thirteenth man,  
 starter of all the strife and ill,  
 care-laden captive; cringing thence  
 forced and reluctant, he led them on  
 till he came in ken of that cavern-hall,

the barrow delved near billowy surges,  
 flood of ocean. Within 'twas full  
 of wire-gold and jewels; a jealous warden,  
 warrior trusty, the treasures held,  
 lurked in his lair. Not light the task  
 of entrance for any of earth-born men!  
 Sat on the headland the hero king,  
 spake words of hail to his hearth-companions,  
 gold-friend of Geats. All gloomy his soul,  
 wavering, death-bound. Wyrð full nigh  
 stood ready to greet the gray-haired man,  
 to seize his soul-hoard, sunder apart  
 life and body. Not long would be  
 the warrior's spirit enwound with flesh.  
 Beowulf spake, the bairn of Ecgtheow: --  
 "Through store of struggles I strove in youth,  
 mighty feuds; I mind them all.  
 I was seven years old when the sovran of rings,  
 friend-of-his-folk, from my father took me,  
 had me, and held me, Hrethel the king,  
 with food and fee, faithful in kinship.  
 Ne'er, while I lived there, he loathlier found me,  
 bairn in the burg, than his birthright sons,  
 Herebeald and Haethcyn and Hygelac mine.  
 For the eldest of these, by unmeet chance,  
 by kinsman's deed, was the death-bed strewn,  
 when Haethcyn killed him with horny bow,  
 his own dear liege laid low with an arrow,  
 missed the mark and his mate shot down,  
 one brother the other, with bloody shaft.  
 A feeless fight, {32b} and a fearful sin,  
 horror to Hrethel; yet, hard as it was,  
 unavenged must the atheling die!  
 Too awful it is for an aged man  
 to bide and bear, that his bairn so young  
 rides on the gallows. A rime he makes,  
 sorrow-song for his son there hanging  
 as rapture of ravens; no rescue now  
 can come from the old, disabled man!  
 Still is he minded, as morning breaks,  
 of the heir gone elsewhere; {32c} another he hopes not

he will bide to see his burg within  
 as ward for his wealth, now the one has found  
 doom of death that the deed incurred.  
 Forlorn he looks on the lodge of his son,  
 wine-hall waste and wind-swept chambers  
 reft of revel. The rider sleepeth,  
 the hero, far-hidden; {32d} no harp resounds,  
 in the courts no wassail, as once was heard.

### XXXIII

**T**hen he goes to his chamber, a grief-song chants  
 alone for his lost. Too large all seems,  
 homestead and house. So the helmet-of-Weders  
 hid in his heart for Herebeald  
 waves of woe. No way could he take  
 to avenge on the slayer slaughter so foul;  
 nor e'en could he harass that hero at all  
 with loathing deed, though he loved him not.  
 And so for the sorrow his soul endured,  
 men's gladness he gave up and God's light chose.  
 Lands and cities he left his sons  
 (as the wealthy do) when he went from earth.  
 There was strife and struggle 'twixt Swede and Geat  
 o'er the width of waters; war arose,  
 hard battle-horror, when Hrethel died,  
 and Ongentheow's offspring grew  
 strife-keen, bold, nor brooked o'er the seas  
 pact of peace, but pushed their hosts  
 to harass in hatred by Hreosnabeorh.  
 Men of my folk for that feud had vengeance,  
 for woful war ('tis widely known),  
 though one of them bought it with blood of his heart,  
 a bargain hard: for Haethcyn proved  
 fatal that fray, for the first-of-Geats.  
 At morn, I heard, was the murderer killed  
 by kinsman for kinsman, {33a} with clash of sword,  
 when Ongentheow met Eofor there.

Wide split the war-helm: wan he fell,  
 hoary Scylfing; the hand that smote him  
 of feud was mindful, nor flinched from the death-blow.  
 -- "For all that he {33b} gave me, my gleaming sword  
 repaid him at war, -- such power I wielded, --  
 for lordly treasure: with land he entrusted me,  
 homestead and house. He had no need  
 from Swedish realm, or from Spear-Dane folk,  
 or from men of the Gifths, to get him help, --  
 some warrior worse for wage to buy!  
 Ever I fought in the front of all,  
 sole to the fore; and so shall I fight  
 while I bide in life and this blade shall last  
 that early and late hath loyal proved  
 since for my doughtiness Daeghrefn fell,  
 slain by my hand, the Hugas' champion.  
 Nor fared he thence to the Frisian king  
 with the booty back, and breast-adornments;  
 but, slain in struggle, that standard-bearer  
 fell, atheling brave. Not with blade was he slain,  
 but his bones were broken by brawny gripe,  
 his heart-waves stilled. -- The sword-edge now,  
 hard blade and my hand, for the hoard shall strive."  
 Beowulf spake, and a battle-vow made  
 his last of all: "I have lived through many  
 wars in my youth; now once again,  
 old folk-defender, feud will I seek,  
 do doughty deeds, if the dark destroyer  
 forth from his cavern come to fight me!"  
 Then hailed he the helmeted heroes all,  
 for the last time greeting his liegemen dear,  
 comrades of war: "I should carry no weapon,  
 no sword to the serpent, if sure I knew  
 how, with such enemy, else my vows  
 I could gain as I did in Grendel's day.  
 But fire in this fight I must fear me now,  
 and poisonous breath; so I bring with me  
 breastplate and board. {33c} From the barrow's keeper  
 no footbreadth flee I. One fight shall end  
 our war by the wall, as Wyrð allots,  
 all mankind's master. My mood is bold

but forbears to boast o'er this battling-flyer.  
 -- Now abide by the barrow, ye breastplate-mailed,  
 ye heroes in harness, which of us twain  
 better from battle-rush bear his wounds.  
 Wait ye the finish. The fight is not yours,  
 nor meet for any but me alone  
 to measure might with this monster here  
 and play the hero. Hardily I  
 shall win that wealth, or war shall seize,  
 cruel killing, your king and lord!"  
 Up stood then with shield the sturdy champion,  
 stayed by the strength of his single manhood,  
 and hardy 'neath helmet his harness bore  
 under cleft of the cliffs: no coward's path!  
 Soon spied by the wall that warrior chief,  
 survivor of many a victory-field  
 where foemen fought with furious clashings,  
 an arch of stone; and within, a stream  
 that broke from the barrow. The brooklet's wave  
 was hot with fire. The hoard that way  
 he never could hope unharmed to near,  
 or endure those deeps, {33d} for the dragon's flame.  
 Then let from his breast, for he burst with rage,  
 the Weder-Geat prince a word outgo;  
 stormed the stark-heart; stern went ringing  
 and clear his cry 'neath the cliff-rocks gray.  
 The hoard-guard heard a human voice;  
 his rage was enkindled. No respite now  
 for pact of peace! The poison-breath  
 of that foul worm first came forth from the cave,  
 hot reek-of-fight: the rocks resounded.  
 Stout by the stone-way his shield he raised,  
 lord of the Geats, against the loathed-one;  
 while with courage keen that coiled foe  
 came seeking strife. The sturdy king  
 had drawn his sword, not dull of edge,  
 heirloom old; and each of the two  
 felt fear of his foe, though fierce their mood.  
 Stoutly stood with his shield high-raised  
 the warrior king, as the worm now coiled  
 together amain: the mailed-one waited.

Now, spire by spire, fast sped and glided  
 that blazing serpent. The shield protected,  
 soul and body a shorter while  
 for the hero-king than his heart desired,  
 could his will have wielded the welcome respite  
 but once in his life! But Wyrð denied it,  
 and victory's honors. -- His arm he lifted  
 lord of the Geats, the grim foe smote  
 with atheling's heirloom. Its edge was turned  
 brown blade, on the bone, and bit more feebly  
 than its noble master had need of then  
 in his baleful stress. -- Then the barrow's keeper  
 waxed full wild for that weighty blow,  
 cast deadly flames; wide drove and far  
 those vicious fires. No victor's glory  
 the Geats' lord boasted; his brand had failed,  
 naked in battle, as never it should,  
 excellent iron! -- 'Twas no easy path  
 that Ecgtheow's honored heir must tread  
 over the plain to the place of the foe;  
 for against his will he must win a home  
 elsewhere far, as must all men, leaving  
 this lapsing life! -- Not long it was  
 ere those champions grimly closed again.  
 The hoard-guard was heartened; high heaved his breast  
 once more; and by peril was pressed again,  
 enfolded in flames, the folk-commander!  
 Nor yet about him his band of comrades,  
 sons of athelings, armed stood  
 with warlike front: to the woods they bent them,  
 their lives to save. But the soul of one  
 with care was cumbered. Kinship true  
 can never be marred in a noble mind!

## XXXIV

Wiglaf his name was, Weohstan's son,  
 linden-thane loved, the lord of Scylfings,  
 Aelfhere's kinsman. His king he now saw  
 with heat under helmet hard oppressed.  
 He minded the prizes his prince had given him,  
 wealthy seat of the Waegmunding line,  
 and folk-rights that his father owned  
 Not long he lingered. The linden yellow,  
 his shield, he seized; the old sword he drew: --  
 as heirloom of Eanmund earth-dwellers knew it,  
 who was slain by the sword-edge, son of Ohtere,  
 friendless exile, erst in fray  
 killed by Weohstan, who won for his kin  
 brown-bright helmet, breastplate ringed,  
 old sword of Eotens, Onela's gift,  
 weeds of war of the warrior-thane,  
 battle-gear brave: though a brother's child  
 had been felled, the feud was unfelt by Onela. {34a}  
 For winters this war-gear Weohstan kept,  
 breastplate and board, till his bairn had grown  
 earlship to earn as the old sire did:  
 then he gave him, mid Geats, the gear of battle,  
 portion huge, when he passed from life,  
 fared aged forth. For the first time now  
 with his leader-lord the liegeman young  
 was bidden to share the shock of battle.  
 Neither softened his soul, nor the sire's bequest  
 weakened in war. {34b} So the worm found out  
 when once in fight the foes had met!  
 Wiglaf spake, -- and his words were sage;  
 sad in spirit, he said to his comrades: --  
 "I remember the time, when mead we took,  
 what promise we made to this prince of ours  
 in the banquet-hall, to our breaker-of-rings,  
 for gear of combat to give him requital,  
 for hard-sword and helmet, if hap should bring  
 stress of this sort! Himself who chose us  
 from all his army to aid him now,  
 urged us to glory, and gave these treasures,

because he counted us keen with the spear  
 and hardy 'neath helm, though this hero-work  
 our leader hoped unhelpt and alone  
 to finish for us, -- folk-defender  
 who hath got him glory greater than all men  
 for daring deeds! Now the day is come  
 that our noble master has need of the might  
 of warriors stout. Let us stride along  
 the hero to help while the heat is about him  
 glowing and grim! For God is my witness  
 I am far more fain the fire should seize  
 along with my lord these limbs of mine! {34c}  
 Unsuiting it seems our shields to bear  
 homeward hence, save here we essay  
 to fell the foe and defend the life  
 of the Weders' lord. I wot 'twere shame  
 on the law of our land if alone the king  
 out of Geatish warriors woe endured  
 and sank in the struggle! My sword and helmet,  
 breastplate and board, for us both shall serve!"  
 Through slaughter-reek strode he to succor his chieftain,  
 his battle-helm bore, and brief words spake: --  
 "Beowulf dearest, do all bravely,  
 as in youthful days of yore thou vowedst  
 that while life should last thou wouldst let no wise  
 thy glory droop! Now, great in deeds,  
 atheling steadfast, with all thy strength  
 shield thy life! I will stand to help thee."  
 At the words the worm came once again,  
 murderous monster mad with rage,  
 with fire-billows flaming, its foes to seek,  
 the hated men. In heat-waves burned  
 that board {34d} to the boss, and the breastplate failed  
 to shelter at all the spear-thane young.  
 Yet quickly under his kinsman's shield  
 went eager the earl, since his own was now  
 all burned by the blaze. The bold king again  
 had mind of his glory: with might his glaive  
 was driven into the dragon's head, --  
 blow nerved by hate. But Naegling {34e} was shivered,  
 broken in battle was Beowulf's sword,

old and gray. 'Twas granted him not  
 that ever the edge of iron at all  
 could help him at strife: too strong was his hand,  
 so the tale is told, and he tried too far  
 with strength of stroke all swords he wielded,  
 though sturdy their steel: they steeled him nought.  
 Then for the third time thought on its feud  
 that folk-destroyer, fire-dread dragon,  
 and rushed on the hero, where room allowed,  
 battle-grim, burning; its bitter teeth  
 closed on his neck, and covered him  
 with waves of blood from his breast that welled.

## XXXV

**T**was now, men say, in his sovran's need  
 that the earl made known his noble strain,  
 craft and keenness and courage enduring.  
 Heedless of harm, though his hand was burned,  
 hardy-hearted, he helped his kinsman.  
 A little lower the loathsome beast  
 he smote with sword; his steel drove in  
 bright and burnished; that blaze began  
 to lose and lessen. At last the king  
 wielded his wits again, war-knife drew,  
 a biting blade by his breastplate hanging,  
 and the Weders'-helm smote that worm asunder,  
 felled the foe, flung forth its life.  
 So had they killed it, kinsmen both,  
 athelings twain: thus an earl should be  
 in danger's day! -- Of deeds of valor  
 this conqueror's-hour of the king was last,  
 of his work in the world. The wound began,  
 which that dragon-of-earth had erst inflicted,  
 to swell and smart; and soon he found  
 in his breast was boiling, baleful and deep,  
 pain of poison. The prince walked on,  
 wise in his thought, to the wall of rock;

then sat, and stared at the structure of giants,  
 where arch of stone and steadfast column  
 upheld forever that hall in earth.  
 Yet here must the hand of the henchman peerless  
 lave with water his winsome lord,  
 the king and conqueror covered with blood,  
 with struggle spent, and unspan his helmet.  
 Beowulf spake in spite of his hurt,  
 his mortal wound; full well he knew  
 his portion now was past and gone  
 of earthly bliss, and all had fled  
 of his file of days, and death was near:  
 "I would fain bestow on son of mine  
 this gear of war, were given me now  
 that any heir should after me come  
 of my proper blood. This people I ruled  
 fifty winters. No folk-king was there,  
 none at all, of the neighboring clans  
 who war would wage me with 'warriors'-friends' {35a}  
 and threat me with horrors. At home I bided  
 what fate might come, and I cared for mine own;  
 feuds I sought not, nor falsely swore  
 ever on oath. For all these things,  
 though fatally wounded, fain am I!  
 From the Ruler-of-Man no wrath shall seize me,  
 when life from my frame must flee away,  
 for killing of kinsmen! Now quickly go  
 and gaze on that hoard 'neath the hoary rock,  
 Wiglaf loved, now the worm lies low,  
 sleeps, heart-sore, of his spoil bereaved.  
 And fare in haste. I would fain behold  
 the gorgeous heirlooms, golden store,  
 have joy in the jewels and gems, lay down  
 softlier for sight of this splendid hoard  
 my life and the lordship I long have held."

## XXXVI

I have heard that swiftly the son of Weohstan  
 at wish and word of his wounded king, --  
 war-sick warrior, -- woven mail-coat,  
 battle-sark, bore 'neath the barrow's roof.  
 Then the clansman keen, of conquest proud,  
 passing the seat, {36a} saw store of jewels  
 and glistening gold the ground along;  
 by the wall were marvels, and many a vessel  
 in the den of the dragon, the dawn-flier old:  
 unburnished bowls of bygone men  
 reft of richness; rusty helms  
 of the olden age; and arm-rings many  
 wondrously woven. -- Such wealth of gold,  
 booty from barrow, can burden with pride  
 each human wight: let him hide it who will! --  
 His glance too fell on a gold-wove banner  
 high o'er the hoard, of handiwork noblest,  
 brilliantly brodered; so bright its gleam,  
 all the earth-floor he easily saw  
 and viewed all these vessels. No vestige now  
 was seen of the serpent: the sword had ta'en him.  
 Then, I heard, the hill of its hoard was reft,  
 old work of giants, by one alone;  
 he burdened his bosom with beakers and plate  
 at his own good will, and the ensign took,  
 brightest of beacons. -- The blade of his lord  
 -- its edge was iron -- had injured deep  
 one that guarded the golden hoard  
 many a year and its murder-fire  
 spread hot round the barrow in horror-billows  
 at midnight hour, till it met its doom.  
 Hasted the herald, the hoard so spurred him  
 his track to retrace; he was troubled by doubt,  
 high-souled hero, if haply he'd find  
 alive, where he left him, the lord of Weders,  
 weakening fast by the wall of the cave.  
 So he carried the load. His lord and king  
 he found all bleeding, famous chief  
 at the lapse of life. The liegeman again

plashed him with water, till point of word  
 broke through the breast-hoard. Beowulf spake,  
 sage and sad, as he stared at the gold. --  
 "For the gold and treasure, to God my thanks,  
 to the Wielder-of-Wonders, with words I say,  
 for what I behold, to Heaven's Lord,  
 for the grace that I give such gifts to my folk  
 or ever the day of my death be run!  
 Now I've bartered here for booty of treasure  
 the last of my life, so look ye well  
 to the needs of my land! No longer I tarry.  
 A barrow bid ye the battle-fanned raise  
 for my ashes. 'Twill shine by the shore of the flood,  
 to folk of mine memorial fair  
 on Hrones Headland high uplifted,  
 that ocean-wanderers oft may hail  
 Beowulf's Barrow, as back from far  
 they drive their keels o'er the darkling wave."  
 From his neck he unclasped the collar of gold,  
 valorous king, to his vassal gave it  
 with bright-gold helmet, breastplate, and ring,  
 to the youthful thane: bade him use them in joy.  
 "Thou art end and remnant of all our race  
 the Waegmunding name. For Wyrð hath swept them,  
 all my line, to the land of doom,  
 earls in their glory: I after them go."  
 This word was the last which the wise old man  
 harbored in heart ere hot death-waves  
 of balefire he chose. From his bosom fled  
 his soul to seek the saints' reward.

## XXXVII

It was heavy hap for that hero young  
 on his lord beloved to look and find him  
 lying on earth with life at end,  
 sorrowful sight. But the slayer too,  
 awful earth-dragon, empty of breath,

lay felled in fight, nor, fain of its treasure,  
 could the writhing monster rule it more.  
 For edges of iron had ended its days,  
 hard and battle-sharp, hammers' leaving; {37a}  
 and that flier-afar had fallen to ground  
 hushed by its hurt, its hoard all near,  
 no longer lusty aloft to whirl  
 at midnight, making its merriment seen,  
 proud of its prizes: prone it sank  
 by the handiwork of the hero-king.  
 Forsooth among folk but few achieve,  
 -- though sturdy and strong, as stories tell me,  
 and never so daring in deed of valor, --  
 the perilous breath of a poison-foe  
 to brave, and to rush on the ring-board hall,  
 whenever his watch the warden keeps  
 bold in the barrow. Beowulf paid  
 the price of death for that precious hoard;  
 and each of the foes had found the end  
 of this fleeting life.  
 Befell erelong  
 that the laggards in war the wood had left,  
 trothbreakers, cowards, ten together,  
 fearing before to flourish a spear  
 in the sore distress of their sovran lord.  
 Now in their shame their shields they carried,  
 armor of fight, where the old man lay;  
 and they gazed on Wiglaf. Wearied he sat  
 at his sovran's shoulder, shieldsman good,  
 to wake him with water. {37b} Nowise it availed.  
 Though well he wished it, in world no more  
 could he barrier life for that leader-of-battles  
 nor baffle the will of all-wielding God.  
 Doom of the Lord was law o'er the deeds  
 of every man, as it is to-day.  
 Grim was the answer, easy to get,  
 from the youth for those that had yielded to fear!  
 Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan, --  
 mournful he looked on those men unloved: --  
 "Who sooth will speak, can say indeed  
 that the ruler who gave you golden rings

and the harness of war in which ye stand  
 -- for he at ale-bench often-times  
 bestowed on hall-folk helm and breastplate,  
 lord to liegemen, the likeliest gear  
 which near of far he could find to give, --  
 threw away and wasted these weeds of battle,  
 on men who failed when the foemen came!  
 Not at all could the king of his comrades-in-arms  
 venture to vaunt, though the Victory-Wielder,  
 God, gave him grace that he got revenge  
 sole with his sword in stress and need.  
 To rescue his life, 'twas little that I  
 could serve him in struggle; yet shift I made  
 (hopeless it seemed) to help my kinsman.  
 Its strength ever waned, when with weapon I struck  
 that fatal foe, and the fire less strongly  
 flowed from its head. -- Too few the heroes  
 in throe of contest that thronged to our king!  
 Now gift of treasure and girding of sword,  
 joy of the house and home-delight  
 shall fail your folk; his freehold-land  
 every clansman within your kin  
 shall lose and leave, when lords high-born  
 hear afar of that flight of yours,  
 a fameless deed. Yea, death is better  
 for liegemen all than a life of shame!"

### XXXVIII

**T**hat battle-toil bade he at burg to announce,  
 at the fort on the cliff, where, full of sorrow,  
 all the morning earls had sat,  
 daring shieldsmen, in doubt of twain:  
 would they wail as dead, or welcome home,  
 their lord beloved? Little {38a} kept back  
 of the tidings new, but told them all,  
 the herald that up the headland rode. --  
 "Now the willing-giver to Weder folk

in death-bed lies; the Lord of Geats  
 on the slaughter-bed sleeps by the serpent's deed!  
 And beside him is stretched that slayer-of-men  
 with knife-wounds sick: {38b} no sword availed  
 on the awesome thing in any wise  
 to work a wound. There Wiglaf sitteth,  
 Weohstan's bairn, by Beowulf's side,  
 the living earl by the other dead,  
 and heavy of heart a head-watch {38c} keeps  
 o'er friend and foe. -- Now our folk may look  
 for waging of war when once unhidden  
 to Frisian and Frank the fall of the king  
 is spread afar. -- The strife began  
 when hot on the Hugas {38d} Hygelac fell  
 and fared with his fleet to the Frisian land.  
 Him there the Hetwaras humbled in war,  
 plied with such prowess their power o'erwhelming  
 that the bold-in-battle bowed beneath it  
 and fell in fight. To his friends no wise  
 could that earl give treasure! And ever since  
 the Merowings' favor has failed us wholly.  
 Nor aught expect I of peace and faith  
 from Swedish folk. 'Twas spread afar  
 how Ongentheow reft at Ravenswood  
 Haethcyn Hrethling of hope and life,  
 when the folk of Geats for the first time sought  
 in wanton pride the Warlike-Scylfings.  
 Soon the sage old sire {38e} of Ohtere,  
 ancient and awful, gave answering blow;  
 the sea-king {38f} he slew, and his spouse redeemed,  
 his good wife rescued, though robbed of her gold,  
 mother of Ohtere and Onela.  
 Then he followed his foes, who fled before him  
 sore beset and stole their way,  
 bereft of a ruler, to Ravenswood.

With his host he besieged there what swords had left,  
 the weary and wounded; woes he threatened  
 the whole night through to that hard-pressed throng:  
 some with the morrow his sword should kill,  
 some should go to the gallows-tree

for rapture of ravens. But rescue came  
 with dawn of day for those desperate men  
 when they heard the horn of Hygelac sound,  
 tones of his trumpet; the trusty king  
 had followed their trail with faithful band.

### XXXIX

**T**he bloody swath of Swedes and Geats  
 and the storm of their strife, were seen afar,  
 how folk against folk the fight had wakened.  
 The ancient king with his atheling band  
 sought his citadel, sorrowing much:  
 Ongentheow earl went up to his burg.  
 He had tested Hygelac's hardihood,  
 the proud one's prowess, would prove it no longer,  
 defied no more those fighting-wanderers  
 nor hoped from the seamen to save his hoard,  
 his bairn and his bride: so he bent him again,  
 old, to his earth-walls. Yet after him came  
 with slaughter for Swedes the standards of Hygelac  
 o'er peaceful plains in pride advancing,  
 till Hrethelings fought in the fenced town. {39a}  
 Then Ongentheow with edge of sword,  
 the hoary-bearded, was held at bay,  
 and the folk-king there was forced to suffer  
 Eofor's anger. In ire, at the king  
 Wulf Wonreding with weapon struck;  
 and the chieftain's blood, for that blow, in streams  
 flowed 'neath his hair. No fear felt he,  
 stout old Scylfing, but straightway repaid  
 in better bargain that bitter stroke  
 and faced his foe with fell intent.  
 Nor swift enough was the son of Wonred  
 answer to render the aged chief;  
 too soon on his head the helm was cloven;  
 blood-bedecked he bowed to earth,  
 and fell adown; not doomed was he yet,

and well he waxed, though the wound was sore.  
 Then the hardy Hygelac-thane, {39b}  
 when his brother fell, with broad brand smote,  
 giants' sword crashing through giants'-helm  
 across the shield-wall: sank the king,  
 his folk's old herdsman, fatally hurt.  
 There were many to bind the brother's wounds  
 and lift him, fast as fate allowed  
 his people to wield the place-of-war.  
 But Eofor took from Ongentheow,  
 earl from other, the iron-breastplate,  
 hard sword hilted, and helmet too,  
 and the hoar-chief's harness to Hygelac carried,  
 who took the trappings, and truly promised  
 rich fee 'mid folk, -- and fulfilled it so.  
 For that grim strife gave the Geatish lord,  
 Hrethel's offspring, when home he came,  
 to Eofor and Wulf a wealth of treasure,  
 Each of them had a hundred thousand {39c}  
 in land and linked rings; nor at less price reckoned  
 mid-earth men such mighty deeds!  
 And to Eofor he gave his only daughter  
 in pledge of grace, the pride of his home.

"Such is the feud, the foeman's rage,  
 death-hate of men: so I deem it sure  
 that the Swedish folk will seek us home  
 for this fall of their friends, the fighting-Scylfings,  
 when once they learn that our warrior leader  
 lifeless lies, who land and hoard  
 ever defended from all his foes,  
 furthered his folk's weal, finished his course  
 a hardy hero. -- Now haste is best,  
 that we go to gaze on our Geatish lord,  
 and bear the bountiful breaker-of-rings  
 to the funeral pyre. No fragments merely  
 shall burn with the warrior. Wealth of jewels,  
 gold untold and gained in terror,  
 treasure at last with his life obtained,  
 all of that booty the brands shall take,  
 fire shall eat it. No earl must carry

memorial jewel. No maiden fair  
 shall wreathe her neck with noble ring:  
 nay, sad in spirit and shorn of her gold,  
 oft shall she pass o'er paths of exile  
 now our lord all laughter has laid aside,  
 all mirth and revel. Many a spear  
 morning-cold shall be clasped amain,  
 lifted aloft; nor shall lilt of harp  
 those warriors wake; but the wan-hued raven,  
 fain o'er the fallen, his feast shall praise  
 and boast to the eagle how bravely he ate  
 when he and the wolf were wasting the slain."

So he told his sorrowful tidings,  
 and little {39d} he lied, the loyal man  
 of word or of work. The warriors rose;  
 sad, they climbed to the Cliff-of-Eagles,  
 went, welling with tears, the wonder to view.  
 Found on the sand there, stretched at rest,  
 their lifeless lord, who had lavished rings  
 of old upon them. Ending-day  
 had dawned on the doughty-one; death had seized  
 in woful slaughter the Weders' king.  
 There saw they, besides, the strangest being,  
 loathsome, lying their leader near,  
 prone on the field. The fiery dragon,  
 fearful fiend, with flame was scorched.  
 Reckoned by feet, it was fifty measures  
 in length as it lay. Aloft erewhile  
 it had revelled by night, and anon come back,  
 seeking its den; now in death's sure clutch  
 it had come to the end of its earth-hall joys.  
 By it there stood the stoups and jars;  
 dishes lay there, and dear-decked swords  
 eaten with rust, as, on earth's lap resting,  
 a thousand winters they waited there.  
 For all that heritage huge, that gold  
 of bygone men, was bound by a spell, {39e}  
 so the treasure-hall could be touched by none  
 of human kind, -- save that Heaven's King,  
 God himself, might give whom he would,

Helper of Heroes, the hoard to open, --  
even such a man as seemed to him meet.

## XL

**A** perilous path, it proved, he {40a} trod  
who heinously hid, that hall within,  
wealth under wall! Its watcher had killed  
one of a few, {40b} and the feud was avenged  
in woful fashion. Wondrous seems it,  
what manner a man of might and valor  
oft ends his life, when the earl no longer  
in mead-hall may live with loving friends.  
So Beowulf, when that barrow's warden  
he sought, and the struggle; himself knew not  
in what wise he should wend from the world at last.  
For {40c} princes potent, who placed the gold,  
with a curse to doomsday covered it deep,  
so that marked with sin the man should be,  
hedged with horrors, in hell-bonds fast,  
racked with plagues, who should rob their hoard.  
Yet no greed for gold, but the grace of heaven,  
ever the king had kept in view. {40d}  
Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan: --  
"At the mandate of one, oft warriors many  
sorrow must suffer; and so must we.  
The people's-shepherd showed not aught  
of care for our counsel, king beloved!  
That guardian of gold he should grapple not, urged we,  
but let him lie where he long had been  
in his earth-hall waiting the end of the world,  
the hest of heaven. -- This hoard is ours  
but grievously gotten; too grim the fate  
which thither carried our king and lord.  
I was within there, and all I viewed,  
the chambered treasure, when chance allowed me  
(and my path was made in no pleasant wise)  
under the earth-wall. Eager, I seized

such heap from the hoard as hands could bear  
and hurriedly carried it hither back  
to my liege and lord. Alive was he still,  
still wielding his wits. The wise old man  
spake much in his sorrow, and sent you greetings  
and bade that ye build, when he breathed no more,  
on the place of his balefire a barrow high,  
memorial mighty. Of men was he  
worthiest warrior wide earth o'er  
the while he had joy of his jewels and burg.  
Let us set out in haste now, the second time  
to see and search this store of treasure,  
these wall-hid wonders, -- the way I show you, --  
where, gathered near, ye may gaze your fill  
at broad-gold and rings. Let the bier, soon made,  
be all in order when out we come,  
our king and captain to carry thither  
-- man beloved -- where long he shall bide  
safe in the shelter of sovran God."  
Then the bairn of Weohstan bade command,  
hardy chief, to heroes many  
that owned their homesteads, hither to bring  
firewood from far -- o'er the folk they ruled --  
for the famed-one's funeral. " Fire shall devour  
and wan flames feed on the fearless warrior  
who oft stood stout in the iron-shower,  
when, sped from the string, a storm of arrows  
shot o'er the shield-wall: the shaft held firm,  
featly feathered, followed the barb."  
And now the sage young son of Weohstan  
seven chose of the chieftain's thanes,  
the best he found that band within,  
and went with these warriors, one of eight,  
under hostile roof. In hand one bore  
a lighted torch and led the way.  
No lots they cast for keeping the hoard  
when once the warriors saw it in hall,  
altogether without a guardian,  
lying there lost. And little they mourned  
when they had hastily haled it out,  
dear-bought treasure! The dragon they cast,

the worm, o'er the wall for the wave to take,  
and surges swallowed that shepherd of gems.  
Then the woven gold on a wain was laden --  
countless quite! -- and the king was borne,  
hoary hero, to Hrones-Ness.

## XLI

Then fashioned for him the folk of Geats  
firm on the earth a funeral-pile,  
and hung it with helmets and harness of war  
and breastplates bright, as the boon he asked;  
and they laid amid it the mighty chieftain,  
heroes mourning their master dear.  
Then on the hill that hugest of balefires  
the warriors wakened. Wood-smoke rose  
black over blaze, and blent was the roar  
of flame with weeping (the wind was still),  
till the fire had broken the frame of bones,  
hot at the heart. In heavy mood  
their misery moaned they, their master's death.  
Wailing her woe, the widow {41a} old,  
her hair upbound, for Beowulf's death  
sung in her sorrow, and said full oft  
she dreaded the doleful days to come,  
deaths enow, and doom of battle,  
and shame. -- The smoke by the sky was devoured.  
The folk of the Weders fashioned there  
on the headland a barrow broad and high,  
by ocean-farers far descried:  
in ten days' time their toil had raised it,  
the battle-brave's beacon. Round brands of the pyre  
a wall they built, the worthiest ever  
that wit could prompt in their wisest men.  
They placed in the barrow that precious booty,  
the rounds and the rings they had reft erewhile,  
hardy heroes, from hoard in cave, --  
trusting the ground with treasure of earls,

gold in the earth, where ever it lies  
useless to men as of yore it was.  
Then about that barrow the battle-keen rode,  
atheling-born, a band of twelve,  
lament to make, to mourn their king,  
chant their dirge, and their chieftain honor.  
They praised his earlship, his acts of prowess  
worthily witnessed: and well it is  
that men their master-friend mightily laud,  
heartily love, when hence he goes  
from life in the body forlorn away.

Thus made their mourning the men of Geatland,  
for their hero's passing his hearth-companions:  
quoth that of all the kings of earth,  
of men he was mildest and most beloved,  
to his kin the kindest, keenest for praise.



**Footnotes**

{0a} Not, of course, Beowulf the Great, hero of the epic.

{0b} Kenning for king or chieftain of a comitatus: he breaks off gold from the spiral rings -- often worn on the arm -- and so rewards his followers.

{1a} That is, "The Hart," or "Stag," so called from decorations in the gables that resembled the antlers of a deer. This hall has been carefully described in a pamphlet by Heyne. The building was rectangular, with opposite doors -- mainly west and east -- and a hearth in the middle of the single room. A row of pillars down each side, at some distance from the walls, made a space which was raised a little above the main floor, and was furnished with two rows of seats. On one side, usually south, was the high-seat midway between the doors. Opposite this, on the other raised space, was another seat of honor. At the banquet soon to be described, Hrothgar sat in the south or chief high-seat, and Beowulf opposite to him. The scene for a flying (see below, v.499) was thus very effectively set. Planks on trestles -- the "board" of later English literature -- formed the tables just in front of the long rows of seats, and were taken away after banquets, when the retainers were ready to stretch themselves out for sleep on the benches.

{1b} Fire was the usual end of these halls. See v. 781 below. One thinks of the splendid scene at the end of the Nibelungen, of the Nialssaga, of Saxo's story of Amlethus, and many a less famous instance.

{1c} It is to be supposed that all hearers of this poem knew how Hrothgar's hall was burnt, -- perhaps in the unsuccessful attack made on him by his son-in-law Ingeld.

{1d} A skilled minstrel. The Danes are heathens, as one is told presently; but this lay of beginnings is taken from Genesis.

{1e} A disturber of the border, one who sallies from his haunt in the fen and roams over the country near by. This probably pagan nuisance is now furnished with biblical credentials as a fiend or devil in good standing, so that all Christian Englishmen might read about him. "Grendel" may mean one who grinds and crushes.

{1f} Cain's.

{1g} Giants.

{2a} The smaller buildings within the main enclosure but separate from

- the hall.
- {2b} Grendel.
- {2c} "Sorcerers-of-hell."
- {2d} Hrothgar, who is the "Scyldings'-friend" of 170.
- {2e} That is, in formal or prescribed phrase.
- {3a} Ship.
- {3b} That is, since Beowulf selected his ship and led his men to the harbor.
- {3c} One of the auxiliary names of the Geats.
- {3d} Or: Not thus openly ever came warriors hither; yet...
- {4a} Hrothgar.
- {4b} Beowulf's helmet has several boar-images on it; he is the "man of war"; and the boar-helmet guards him as typical representative of the marching party as a whole. The boar was sacred to Freyr, who was the favorite god of the Germanic tribes about the North Sea and the Baltic. Rude representations of warriors show the boar on the helmet quite as large as the helmet itself.
- {5a} Either merely paved, the strata via of the Romans, or else thought of as a sort of mosaic, an extravagant touch like the reckless waste of gold on the walls and roofs of a hall.
- {6a} The nicor, says Bugge, is a hippopotamus; a walrus, says Ten Brink. But that water-goblin who covers the space from Old Nick of jest to the Neckan and Nix of poetry and tale, is all one needs, and Nicor is a good name for him.
- {6b} His own people, the Geats.
- {6c} That is, cover it as with a face-cloth. "There will be no need of funeral rites."
- {6d} Personification of Battle.
- {6e} The Germanic Vulcan.
- {6f} This mighty power, whom the Christian poet can still revere, has here the general force of "Destiny."
- {7a} There is no irrelevance here. Hrothgar sees in Beowulf's mission a heritage of duty, a return of the good offices which the Danish king rendered to Beowulf's father in time of dire need.
- {7b} Money, for wergild, or man-price.
- {7c} Ecgtheow, Beowulf's sire.
- {8a} "Began the fight."
- {8b} Breca.
- {9a} Murder.
- {10a} Beowulf, -- the "one."
- {11a} That is, he was a "lost soul," doomed to hell.

- {12a} Kenning for Beowulf.
- {13a} "Guarded the treasure."
- {13b} Sc. Heremod.
- {13c} The singer has sung his lays, and the epic resumes its story. The time-relations are not altogether good in this long passage which describes the rejoicings of "the day after"; but the present shift from the riders on the road to the folk at the hall is not very violent, and is of a piece with the general style.
- {14a} Unferth, Beowulf's sometime opponent in the flyting.
- {15a} There is no horrible inconsistency here such as the critics strive and cry about. In spite of the ruin that Grendel and Beowulf had made within the hall, the framework and roof held firm, and swift repairs made the interior habitable. Tapestries were hung on the walls, and willing hands prepared the banquet.
- {15b} From its formal use in other places, this phrase, to take cup in hall, or "on the floor," would seem to mean that Beowulf stood up to receive his gifts, drink to the donor, and say thanks.
- {15c} Kenning for sword.
- {15d} Hrothgar. He is also the "refuge of the friends of Ing," below. Ing belongs to myth.
- {15e} Horses are frequently led or ridden into the hall where folk sit at banquet: so in Chaucer's Squire's tale, in the ballad of King Estmere, and in the romances.
- {16a} Man-price, wergild.
- {16b} Beowulf's.
- {16c} Hrothgar.
- {16d} There is no need to assume a gap in the Ms. As before about Sigemund and Heremod, so now, though at greater length, about Finn and his feud, a lay is chanted or recited; and the epic poet, counting on his readers' familiarity with the story, -- a fragment of it still exists, -- simply gives the headings.
- {16e} The exact story to which this episode refers in summary is not to be determined, but the following account of it is reasonable and has good support among scholars. Finn, a Frisian chieftain, who nevertheless has a "castle" outside the Frisian border, marries Hildeburh, a Danish princess; and her brother, Hnaef, with many other Danes, pays Finn a visit. Relations between the two peoples have been strained before. Something starts the old feud anew; and the visitors are attacked in their quarters. Hnaef is killed; so is a son of Hildeburh. Many fall on both sides. Peace is patched up; a stately funeral is held; and the surviving visitors become in a way vassals or liegemen of Finn, going

back with him to Frisia. So matters rest a while. Hengest is now leader of the Danes; but he is set upon revenge for his former lord, Hnaef. Probably he is killed in feud; but his clansmen, Guthlaf and Oslaf, gather at their home a force of sturdy Danes, come back to Frisia, storm Finn's stronghold, kill him, and carry back their kinswoman Hildeburh.

- {16f} The "enemies" must be the Frisians.  
 {16g} Battlefield. -- Hengest is the "prince's thane," companion of Hnaef. "Folcwald's son" is Finn.  
 {16h} That is, Finn would govern in all honor the few Danish warriors who were left, provided, of course, that none of them tried to renew the quarrel or avenge Hnaef their fallen lord. If, again, one of Finn's Frisians began a quarrel, he should die by the sword.  
 {16i} Hnaef.  
 {16j} The high place chosen for the funeral: see description of Beowulf's funeral-pile at the end of the poem.  
 {16k} Wounds.  
 {17a} That is, these two Danes, escaping home, had told the story of the attack on Hnaef, the slaying of Hengest, and all the Danish woes. Collecting a force, they return to Frisia and kill Finn in his home.  
 {17b} Nephew to Hrothgar, with whom he subsequently quarrels, and elder cousin to the two young sons of Hrothgar and Wealhtheow, -- their natural guardian in the event of the king's death. There is something finely feminine in this speech of Wealhtheow's, apart from its somewhat irregular and irrelevant sequence of topics. Both she and her lord probably distrust Hrothulf; but she bids the king to be of good cheer, and, turning to the suspect, heaps affectionate assurances on his probity. "My own Hrothulf" will surely not forget these favors and benefits of the past, but will repay them to the orphaned boy.  
 {19a} They had laid their arms on the benches near where they slept.  
 {20a} He surmises presently where she is.  
 {20b} The connection is not difficult. The words of mourning, of acute grief, are said; and according to Germanic sequence of thought, inexorable here, the next and only topic is revenge. But is it possible? Hrothgar leads up to his appeal and promise with a skillful and often effective description of the horrors which surround the monster's home and await the attempt of an avenging foe.  
 {21a} Hrothgar is probably meant.  
 {21b} Meeting place.  
 {22a} Kenning for "sword." Hrunting is bewitched, laid under a spell of uselessness, along with all other swords.

- {22b} This brown of swords, evidently meaning burnished, bright, continues to be a favorite adjective in the popular ballads.  
 {23a} After the killing of the monster and Grendel's decapitation.  
 {23b} Hrothgar.  
 {23c} The blade slowly dissolves in blood-stained drops like icicles.  
 {23d} Spear.  
 {24a} That is, "whoever has as wide authority as I have and can remember so far back so many instances of heroism, may well say, as I say, that no better hero ever lived than Beowulf."  
 {25a} That is, he is now undefended by conscience from the temptations (shafts) of the devil.  
 {25b} Kenning for the sun. -- This is a strange role for the raven. He is the warrior's bird of battle, exults in slaughter and carnage; his joy here is a compliment to the sunrise.  
 {26a} That is, he might or might not see Beowulf again. Old as he was, the latter chance was likely; but he clung to the former, hoping to see his young friend again "and exchange brave words in the hall."  
 {27a} With the speed of the boat.  
 {27b} Queen to Hygelac. She is praised by contrast with the antitype, Thryth, just as Beowulf was praised by contrast with Heremod.  
 {27c} Kenning for "wife."  
 {28a} Beowulf gives his uncle the king not mere gossip of his journey, but a statesmanlike forecast of the outcome of certain policies at the Danish court. Talk of interpolation here is absurd. As both Beowulf and Hygelac know, -- and the folk for whom the Beowulf was put together also knew, -- Froda was king of the Heathobards (probably the Langobards, once near neighbors of Angle and Saxon tribes on the continent), and had fallen in fight with the Danes. Hrothgar will set aside this feud by giving his daughter as "peace-weaver" and wife to the young king Ingeld, son of the slain Froda. But Beowulf, on general principles and from his observation of the particular case, foretells trouble. Note:  
 {28b} Play of shields, battle. A Danish warrior cuts down Froda in the fight, and takes his sword and armor, leaving them to a son. This son is selected to accompany his mistress, the young princess Freawaru, to her new home when she is Ingeld's queen. Heedlessly he wears the sword of Froda in hall. An old warrior points it out to Ingeld, and eggs him on to vengeance. At his instigation the Dane is killed; but the murderer, afraid of results, and knowing the land, escapes. So the old feud must break out again.  
 {28c} That is, their disastrous battle and the slaying of their king.

- {28d} The sword.
- {28e} Beowulf returns to his forecast. Things might well go somewhat as follows, he says; sketches a little tragic story; and with this prophecy by illustration returns to the tale of his adventure.
- {28f} Not an actual glove, but a sort of bag.
- {29a} Hygelac.
- {29b} This is generally assumed to mean hides, though the text simply says "seven thousand." A hide in England meant about 120 acres, though "the size of the acre varied."
- {29c} On the historical raid into Frankish territory between 512 and 520 A.D. The subsequent course of events, as gathered from hints of this epic, is partly told in Scandinavian legend.
- {29d} The chronology of this epic, as scholars have worked it out, would make Beowulf well over ninety years of age when he fights the dragon. But the fifty years of his reign need not be taken as historical fact.
- {29e} The text is here hopelessly illegible, and only the general drift of the meaning can be rescued. For one thing, we have the old myth of a dragon who guards hidden treasure. But with this runs the story of some noble, last of his race, who hides all his wealth within this barrow and there chants his farewell to life's glories. After his death the dragon takes possession of the hoard and watches over it. A condemned or banished man, desperate, hides in the barrow, discovers the treasure, and while the dragon sleeps, makes off with a golden beaker or the like, and carries it for propitiation to his master. The dragon discovers the loss and exacts fearful penalty from the people round about.
- {31a} Literally "loan-days," days loaned to man.
- {31b} Chattuarii, a tribe that dwelt along the Rhine, and took part in repelling the raid of (Hygelac) Chocilaicus.
- {31c} Onla, son of Ongentheow, who pursues his two nephews Eanmund and Eadgils to Heardred's court, where they have taken refuge after their unsuccessful rebellion. In the fighting Heardred is killed.
- {32a} That is, Beowulf supports Eadgils against Onela, who is slain by Eadgils in revenge for the "care-paths" of exile into which Onela forced him.
- {32b} That is, the king could claim no wergild, or man-price, from one son for the killing of the other.
- {32c} Usual euphemism for death.
- {32d} Sc. in the grave.
- {33a} Eofor for Wulf. -- The immediate provocation for Eofor in killing "the hoary Scylfing," Ongentheow, is that the latter has just struck Wulf down; but the king, Haethcyn, is also avenged by the blow. See the

- detailed description below.
- {33b} Hygelac.
- {33c} Shield.
- {33d} The hollow passage.
- {34a} That is, although Eanmund was brother's son to Onela, the slaying of the former by Weohstan is not felt as cause of feud, and is rewarded by gift of the slain man's weapons.
- {34b} Both Wiglaf and the sword did their duty. -- The following is one of the classic passages for illustrating the comitatus as the most conspicuous Germanic institution, and its underlying sense of duty, based partly on the idea of loyalty and partly on the practical basis of benefits received and repaid.
- {34c} Sc. "than to bide safely here," -- a common figure of incomplete comparison.
- {34d} Wiglaf's wooden shield.
- {34e} Gering would translate "kinsman of the nail," as both are made of iron.
- {35a} That is, swords.
- {36a} Where Beowulf lay.
- {37a} What had been left or made by the hammer; well-forged.
- {37b} Trying to revive him.
- {38a} Nothing.
- {38b} Dead.
- {38c} Death-watch, guard of honor, "lyke-wake."
- {38d} A name for the Franks.
- {38e} Ongentheow.
- {38f} Haethcyn.
- {39a} The line may mean: till Hrethelings stormed on the hedged shields, -- i.e. the shield-wall or hedge of defensive war -- Hrethelings, of course, are Geats.
- {39b} Eofor, brother to Wulf Wonreding.
- {39c} Sc. "value in" hides and the weight of the gold.
- {39d} Not at all.
- {39e} Laid on it when it was put in the barrow. This spell, or in our days the "curse," either prevented discovery or brought dire ills on the finder and taker.
- {40a} Probably the fugitive is meant who discovered the hoard. Ten Brink and Gering assume that the dragon is meant. "Hid" may well mean here "took while in hiding."
- {40b} That is "one and a few others." But Beowulf seems to be indicated.
- {40c} Ten Brink points out the strongly heathen character of this part of

the epic. Beowulf's end came, so the old tradition ran, from his unwitting interference with spell-bound treasure

{40d} A hard saying, variously interpreted. In any case, it is the somewhat clumsy effort of the Christian poet to tone down the heathenism of his material by an edifying observation.

{41a} Nothing is said of Beowulf's wife in the poem, but Bugge surmises that Beowulf finally accepted Hygd's offer of kingdom and hoard, and, as was usual, took her into the bargain.

## Beowulf and the Creatures of Denmark\*

Bill Cooper (1995)

The *Beowulf* poem survives in a single manuscript copy that was made in ca AD 1000. Moreover, this manuscript (1) is often stated by modern critics to be a copy of a mid-8th century Anglo-Saxon (i.e. Old English) original, now lost. This original is in turn described as an essentially Christian poem. Yet, the continually repeated assertion of the supposedly Christian origins of the poem not only contributes toward a serious misunderstanding of the poem's nature and purpose, but notably fails to take into account the following facts

Firstly, there are no allusions whatever in the poem to any event, person or teaching of the New Testament. This is in sharp contrast to other Anglo-Saxon poems (The Dream of the Rood, and so on) that certainly are Christian in sentiment. There are definite allusions to certain facts and personages contained in the Old Testament, namely to God, the Creation, to Abel and to Cain, but these are no more than those same historical allusions that are to be met with in the other preChristian Anglo-Saxon genealogies and records that we have already studied in chapter 7 of this book. Like those records, and whilst likewise showing a most interesting historical knowledge of certain events and personages that also appear in the Genesis record, the *Beowulf* poem clearly pre-dates any knowledge among the Anglo-Saxons of Christianity *per se*.

In view of this, it is hardly surprising to find that the sentiments of the poem are strongly pagan, extolling the highly questionable virtues of vengeance, the accumulation of plunder and the boasting of and reliance upon human strength and prowess. Allusions are also made to blatantly pagan oaths, sacrifices, sentiments and forms of burial. But there are certainly no exclusively Christian sentiments expressed anywhere in its 3182 lines of text.

Nowhere in the poem is any reference made to the British Isles or to any British (or English) king, personage or historical event. This is simply because this epic poem pre-dates the migration of the Saxons to these isles. And what are we to make of the following passage?:

'fortham **Offa** waes geoflim ond guthum garcene man wide geweorþhod wisdom heold ethel sinne thonon **Eomer** woc haelethum to helpe...' (2)

Which Alexander (see bibliography) translates thus:

'So it was that Offa [i.e. king of the continental Angles], brave with the spear, was spoken of abroad for his wars and his gifts; he governed with wisdom the land of his birth. To him was born Eomer, helper of the heroes...' (3)

The Offa who is mentioned here was the pre-migration ancestor of his 8th century namesake, King Offa of Mercia (AD 757-796), whom we have already met (along with this same ancestor), in the early Saxon genealogies. We have also met Eomer in the same genealogies, where his name is rendered Eomer and where he is, strictly speaking, the grandson, and not the son, of Offa. These ancient genealogies were clearly fresh in the mind of the writer of *Beowulf*, which again tells us something of the times in which the poem was composed. (4)

There is, moreover, no sycophantic dedication of the poem to any Christian Anglo-Saxon English king, not even to that King Offa whose ancestor is immortalised in the poem and under whose auspices some modern scholars suggest the poem was written. Many other scholars would plump for an even later date for the poem, yet the characters in the poem can be historically dated to the late 5th and early 6th centuries, years that long preceded the adoption of Christianity by the Saxons. In other words, the poem belongs very firmly indeed to the pagan times which it describes.

A detailed study of the historical characters contained in the *Beowulf* epic and their relationships to each other, is set out in Appendix 9. But to briefly summarise here, *Beowulf*, the character in whose honour the poem was written, was no mythical figure. His place is firmly set in history. He was born the son of Ecgtheow in AD 495. At the age of seven, in AD 502, he was brought to the court of Hrethel, his maternal grandfather (AD 445-503) who was then king of the Geatingas, a tribe who inhabited what is today southern Sweden (and whose eponymous founder, Geat, also appears in the early genealogies--see chapter 7). After an unpromising and feckless youth, during which years were fought the Geatish/Swedish wars, in particular the Battle of Ravenswood [Hrefnawudu] in the year AD 510, *Beowulf* undertook his celebrated

journey to Denmark, to visit Hrothgar, king of the Danes. This was in AD 515, *Beowulf*'s twentieth year. (This was also the year of his slaying the monster Grendel which we shall examine shortly.) Six years later, in AD 521, *Beowulf*'s uncle, King Hygelac, was slain.

Hygelac himself is known to have lived from AD 475 - 521, having come to the throne of the Geatingas in AD 503, the year of his father Hrethel's death. He is independently mentioned in Gregory of Tour's *Historiae Francorum*, where his name is rendered **Chlocbilaichus**. (5)

There, and in other Latin Frankish sources, (6) he is described as a Danish king (**Chogilaicus Danorum rex**), not a Geat, but this is the same mistake that our own English chroniclers made when they included even the Norwegian Vikings under the generic name of Danes. The *Liber Monstrorum*, however, did correctly allude to him as **rex Getarum**, king of the Geats. Saxo also mentions him as the **Hugletus** who destroyed the Swedish chief Homothus. Homothus, in turn, is the same as that Eanmund who is depicted in line 2612 of the *Beowulf* poem.

On Hygelac's death, *Beowulf* declined the offer to succeed his uncle to the throne of the Geatingas, choosing instead to act as guardian to Hygelac's son, prince Heardred, during the years of Heardred's minority. (Heardred lived from AD 511- 533. He was therefore in his tenth year when he became king.) Heardred, however, was killed by the Swedes in AD 533 (for giving shelter to the Swedish king's nephews--see Appendix 9), and it was in this year that *Beowulf* took over the reins of kingship. *Beowulf* went on to rule his people in peace for fifty years, dying at some 88 years of age in the year AD 583. The manner of his death, though, is particularly relevant to our study, as we shall see.

But first, we must dispel one particular and erroneous notion that has bedeviled studies in this field for years. Since the poem's rediscovery in the early 18th century (although it was brought to the more general attention of scholars in the year 1815 when it was first printed), scholars have insisted on depicting the creatures in their translations of the poem as 'trolls'. The monster Grendel, it is said, was a troll. And the older female who was assumed by the Danes to have been his mother, is likewise called by modern translators a troll-wife.

The word 'troll' is of Nordic origin, and in the fairy-tales of Northern Europe it is supposed to have been a human-like, mischievous and hairy

dwarf who swaps troll children for human children in the middle of the night. For good measure, trolls are sometimes depicted as equally mischievous and hairy giants, some of whom lived under bridges or in caves. Which would be all well and good but for the singular observation that the word 'troll' is entirely absent from the original Anglo-Saxon text of *Beowulf*! The poem is full of expressions that we would call zoological terms, and these relate to all kinds of creatures, (see Appendix 10). But none of them have anything whatever to do with dwarves, giants, trolls or fairies, mischievous or otherwise. And whilst we are on the subject, the monster Grendel preyed on the Danes for twelve long years (AD 503-515). Are we seriously to believe then that these Danish Vikings, whose berserker-warriors struck such fear into the hearts of their neighbours, were themselves for twelve long years rendered helpless with terror by a hairy dwarf; even a 'giant' one? For that is what certain of today's mis-translations of the poem would have us believe.

By the time of his slaying the monster Grendel in AD 515, *Beowulf* himself had already become something of a seasoned hunter of large reptilian monsters. He was renowned amongst the Danes at Hrothgar's court for having cleared the local sea lanes of monstrous animals whose predatory natures had been making life hazardous for the open boats of the Vikings. Fortunately, the Anglo-Saxon poem, written in pure celebration of his heroism, has preserved for us not just the physical descriptions of some of the monsters that *Beowulf* encountered, but even the names under which certain species of these animals were known to the Saxons and Danes.

However, in order to understand exactly what it is that we are reading when we examine these names, we must appreciate the nature of the Anglo-Saxon language. The Anglo-Saxons (like the modern Germans and Dutch) had a very simple method of word construction, and their names for everyday objects can sometimes sound amusing to our modern English ears when translated literally. A body, for example, was simply a bone-house (**banhus**), and a joint a bone-lock (**banloca**). When *Beowulf* speaks to his Danish interrogator, he is said quite literally to have unlocked his word-hoard (wordhord **onleoc**). *Beowulf*'s own name means bear, and it is constructed in the following way. The **Beo**-element is the Saxon word for bee, and his name means literally a bee-wolf. The bear has a dog-like face and was seen by those who wisely kept their distance to apparently be eating bees when it raided their hives for honey. So they simply called the bear a bee-wolf. Likewise, the sun was called

**woruldcandel**, lit. the world-candle. It was thus an intensely literal but at the same time highly poetic language, possessing great and unambiguous powers of description.

The slaying of Grendel is the most famous of *Beowulf*'s encounters with monsters of course, and we shall come to look closely at this animal's physical description as it is given in the *Beowulf* epic. But in Grendel's lair, a large swampy lake, there lived other reptilian species that were collectively known by the Saxons as **wyrmeynnes** (lit. wormkind, a race of monsters and serpents--the word serpent in those days meant something rather more than a snake). *Beowulf* and his men came across them as they were tracking the female of Grendel's species back to her lair after she had killed and eaten King Hrothgar's minister, Asshere, whose half-eaten head was found on the cliff-top overlooking the lake.

Amongst them were creatures that were known to the Saxons and Danes as giant **saedracan** (sea-drakes or sea-dragons), and these were seen from the cliff-top suddenly swerving through the deep waters of the lake. Perhaps they were aware of the arrival of humans. Other creatures were lying in the sun when *Beowulf*'s men first saw them, but at the sound of the battle-horn they scurried back to the water and slithered beneath the waves.

These other creatures included one species known to the Saxons as a **nicor** (pl. niceras), and the word has important connotations for our present study inasmuch as it later developed into **knucker**, a Middle English word for a water-dwelling monster or dragon. The monster at Lyminster in Sussex (see table of previous chapter) was a knucker as were several of the other reported sightings of such creatures in this country. The pool where the Lyminster dragon lived is known to this day as the Knucker's Hole. The Orkney Isles, whose inhabitants, significantly, are Viking, not Scots, likewise have their **Nuckelavee**, as do also the Shetland Islanders. And on the Isle of Man, they have a **Nykir**.

However, amongst the more generally named **wyrmas** (serpents) and **wildeor** (wild beasts) that were present at the lake on this occasion, there was one species in particular that was called an **ythgewinnes**, (9) evidently a surface-swimming monster if its name is anything to go by, rather than a creature that swam at depth like the **saedracan**. Intrigued by it, *Beowulf* shot an arrow into the creature, and the animal was then harpooned by *Beowulf*'s men using **eoferspreotum**, modified boar-spears.

Once the monster was dead, Beowulf and his men then dragged the ythgewinnes out of the water and laid its body out for examination. They had, after all, a somewhat professional interest in the animals that they were up against. Moreover, of the monstrous reptiles that they had encountered at the lake, it was said that they were such creatures as would sally out at midmorning time to create havoc amongst the ships in the sea lanes, and one particular success of Beowulf's, as we have already seen, was clearing the narrow sea lanes between Denmark and Sweden of certain monsters which he called **merefixa** and **niceras**. Following that operation, the carcasses of nine such creatures (niceras nigene--Alexander mistakenly translates nigene as seven) were laid out on the beaches for display and further inspection.

The last monster to be destroyed by Beowulf (and from which encounter Beowulf also died in the year AD 583) was a flying reptile which lived on a promontory overlooking the sea at Hronesness on the southern coast of Sweden. Now, the Saxons (and presumably the Danes) knew flying reptiles in general as **lyftfloga** (air-fliers), but this particular species of flying reptile, the specimen from Hronesness, was known to them as a **widfloga**, lit, a wide (or far-ranging) flyer, and the description that they have left us fits that of a giant **Pteranodon**. Interestingly, the Saxons also described this creature as a **ligdraca**, or fire-dragon, and he is described as fifty feet in length (or perhaps wing-span?) and about 300 years of age. (Great age is a common feature even among today's non-giant reptiles.) Moreover, and of particular interest to us, the name widfloga would have distinguished this particular species of flying reptile from another similar species which was capable of making only short flights. Such a creature is portrayed in Figure 11.1, a shield-boss from the Sutton Hoo burial which shows a flying dragon with its wings folded along its sides. Its long tooth-filled jaws are readily seen, and the shield-boss can be seen to this day in its showcase at the British Museum. Modern paleontologists, working from fossilized remains, have named such a creature Pterodactyl.

But our attention must now be drawn towards another reptilian monster which was surely the most fiercesome of all the animals encountered by Beowulf, the monster called **Grendel**.

It is too often and mistakenly thought that the name Grendel was merely a personal name by which the Danes knew this particular animal. In much the same way as a horse is nicknamed Dobbin, or a dog Fido, this

monster, it is assumed, was called Grendel. But, in fact, Grendel was the name that our forebears gave to a particular species of animal. This is evidenced by the fact that in the year AD 931, King Athelstan of Wessex issued a charter in which a certain lake in Wiltshire (England) is called (as in Denmark) a grendles mere. (10) The Grendel in Beowulf, we note with interest, also lived in a mere. Other place-names mentioned in old charters, Grindles bee and Grendeles pyt, for example, were likewise places that were (or had been) the habitats of this particular species of animal. Grindelwald, lit. Grendelwood, in Switzerland is another such place. But where does the name Grendel itself come from?

There are several Anglo-Saxon words that share the same root as Grendel. The Old English word grindan, for example, and from which we derive our word grind, used to denote a destroyer. But the most likely origin of the name is simply the fact that Grendel is an onomatopoeic term derived from the Old Norse **grindill**, meaning a storm or **grenja**, meaning to bellow. The word Grendel is strongly reminiscent of the deep-throated growl that would be emitted by a very large animal and it came into Middle English usage as grindel, meaning angry.

To the hapless Danes who were the victims of his predatory raids, however, Grendel was not just an animal. To them he was demon-like, one who was **synnum beswenced** (afflicted with sins). He was **godes ansaca** (God's adversary), the **synscatha** (evil-doer) who was **wonsaeli** (damned), a very **feond on helle** (devil in hell)! He was one of the **grundwyrgen**, accursed and murderous monsters who were said by the Danes



Fig. 11.1 The portrayal from a Saxon shield (Sutton Hoo burial site) of a flying reptile at rest. Note the wings folded along its sides as well as the long tooth-filled jaws. Comparison of this with a modern reconstruction of a Pterodactyl or similar creature is most instructive.

to be descended from Cain himself. And it is descriptions such as these of Grendel's nature that convey something of the horror with which the men of those times anticipated his raids on their homesteads.

But as for Grendel's far more interesting physical description, his habits and the geography of his haunts, they are as follows:

At one point in the poem, Hrothgar, king of the Danes, relates to Beowulf the following information when describing Grendel and one of the monster's companions:

'Ic thaet londbuend leode mine seleraedende secgan hyde thaet hie gesawon swylce 1-wegen micle mearcsta pan moras healdan ellor-gaestas. Thaera other waes thaes the hie gewislicost gewitan meahton idese onlicnes, other earmscea pen on weres waeslmum sraeclastas traed naefne he waes mara thonne aenig man other thone on geardagum Grendel nemdon foldbuende...' (11) (Emphases mine)

... the best translation of which is Alexander's:

'I have heard it said by subjects of mine who live in the country, counselors in this hall, that they have seen such a pair of huge wayfarers haunting the moors, otherworldly ones; and one of them, so far as they might make it out, was in woman's shape; but the shape of a man, though twisted, trod also the tracks of exile - save that he was more huge than any human being. The country people have called him from of old by the name of Grendel.'" (12)

The key words from this passage, and from which we gain important information concerning the physical appearance of Grendel, are *idese onlicnes* when referring to the female monster, and *weres waestmum* when referring to the male. Those Danes who had seen the monsters thought that the female was the older of the two and supposed that she was Grendel's mother. She may have been. But what exactly do the descriptive terms tell us that is of such importance? Simply this: that the female was in the shape of a woman (*idese onlicnes*) and the male was in the shape of a man (*weres waestmum*), 'though twisted'. In other words, they were both bipedal, but larger than any human.

Further important detail is added elsewhere in the poem concerning Grendel's appearance, especially when the monster attacked the Danes for what was to prove the last time. In lines 815-8, we are told, in the most graphic detail, how Beowulf inflicted a fatal injury on the monster by

holding the creature in an arm lock, which he then twisted 'wrythan'(line 964). The poem then goes on to tell us that:

'Licsar gebad atol aeglaeca him on eaxie wearth syndolh sweotol seonowe onsprungon burston banlocan.'

Which may be translated thus:

'Searing pain seized the terrifying ugly one as a gaping wound appeared in his shoulder. The sinews snapped and the (arm) joint burst asunder.' (My translation)

For twelve years the Danes had themselves attempted to kill Grendel with conventional weapons, knives, swords, arrows and the like. Yet his impenetrable hide had defied them all and Grendel was able to attack the Danes with impunity. Beowulf considered all this and decided that the only way to tackle the monster was to get to grips with him at close quarters. The monster's forelimbs, which the Saxons called **eorms** (arms) and which some translate as claws, were small and comparatively puny. They were the monster's one weak spot, and Beowulf went straight for them. He was already renowned for his prodigious strength of grip, and he used this to literally tear off one of Grendel's weak, small arms.

Grendel, however, is also described, in line 2079 of the poem, as a **mutb-bona**, i.e. one who slays with his mouth or jaws, and the speed with which he was able to devour his human prey tells us something of the size of his jaws and teeth (he swallowed the body of one of his victims in large 'gobbets'). Yet, it is the very size of Grendel's jaws which paradoxically would have aided Beowulf in his carefully thought out strategy of going for the forelimbs, because pushing himself hard into the animal's chest between those forelimbs would have placed Beowulf tightly underneath those jaws and would thus have sheltered him from Grendel's terrible teeth.

We are told that as soon as Beowulf gripped the monster's claws (and we must remember that Grendel was only a youngster, and not by all accounts a fully mature adult male of his species), the startled animal tried to pull away instead of attacking Beowulf. The animal instinctively knew the danger he was now in and he wanted to escape the clutches of the man who now posed such an unexpected threat and who was inflicting such alarming pain. However, it was this action of trying to pull away that left Grendel wide open to Beowulf's strategy. Thus, Beowulf was able in the ensuing struggle eventually to wrench off one of the animal's arms

as so graphically described in the poem. As a result of this appalling injury, the young Grendel returned to his lair and simply bled to death.

But is Beowulf's method of slaying Grendel unknown elsewhere in the historical record? Are there no depictions to be found of similar creatures being killed in a similar way? It would seem that there are, the illustration below being one example (see Figure 11.2). It is taken from an impression of an early Babylonian cylinder seal now in the British Museum, and clearly shows a man about to amputate the forelimb of a bipedal monster whose appearance, though stylistic, fits the descriptions of Grendel very closely. I know of no scholar who would venture to suggest that the Old English author of *Beowulf* filched his idea from his knowledge of Babylonian cylinder seals. So we may, I think, safely assume that Beowulf's method of slaying this particular kind of animal was not entirely unknown in the ancient world. Nor, indeed, was the Grendel itself entirely unknown in the ancient world, as is evident from the following item depicted in Figure 11.3.



Fig. 11.2 Was Beowulf's method of mortally wounding Grendel entirely novel, or was he merely employing a tried and tested strategy? This illustration from an early Babylonian cylinder seal, and it portrays a man seizing and about to amputate the forelimb of a Grendel-like bipedal monster.

Here we are presented with a truly remarkable scene. The stone in which these strange animals are carved, is preserved in the church of SS. Mary and Hardulph at Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire. This church used to belong to the Saxon kingdom of Mercia. The stone itself is part of a larger frieze in which are depicted various birds and humans, all of them readily recognisable. But what are these strange creatures represented here? They are like nothing that survives today in England, yet they are depicted as vividly as the other creatures. There are long-necked



Figure 11.3 A most graphic portrayal from Saxon times of an attack on a herd of long-necked quadrupeds by a bipedal predator. Note the predator's two large legs and puny forelimbs. This portrayal conforms very closely indeed to the description of Grendel, and is a clear indication that such creatures were to be seen on the British mainland as well as the Continent, as is also shown by Athelstan's and other charters. The stone can be seen inside the church of SS. Mary and Hardulph at Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire.

quadrupeds, one of whom on the right seems to be biting (or 'necking' with) another. And in the middle of the scene appears a bipedal animal who is clearly attacking one of the quadrupeds. He stands on two great hindlegs and has two smaller forelimbs, and carries what appears to be armour plating on his back. His victim seems to be turning to defend himself; but with his hindlegs buckled in fear.

Now it cannot be pretended that these are merely caricatures of ordinary animals that are indigenous (these days) to the British Isles, for none of our present native species have long necks or are bipedal. So how are we to satisfactorily account for them? Is there a predatory animal from the fossil record known to us, who had two massive hindlegs and two comparatively puny forelimbs? There is indeed. In fact there are several such species, but how was our Saxon artist to know about such creatures if he'd never seen one? Are we looking here at a depiction in stone of the creature known to the Saxons and Danes as Grendel? Considering the close physical descriptions that we find in *Beowulf*, it would seem that we are.

The *Beowulf* epic tells us that as for his haunts and habits, Grendel hunted alone, being known by the understandably frightened locals who sometimes saw his moonlit shape coming down from the mist-laden fens

as the **atol angengea**, the terrifying solitary one. He was a **mearcstapa** (lit. a marsh-stepper), one who stalked the marshes or outlying regions, ('haunting the moors', as Alexander so powerfully renders it). He hunted by night, approaching human settlements and waiting silently in the darkness for his prey to fall asleep before he descended on them as a **sceadugenga** (lit. a shadow-goer, a night-walker). Gliding silently along the **fenhlith** (the waste and desolate tract of the marshes), he would emerge from the dense black of night as the **deathscua** (death's shadow). The Danes employed an **eotanweard** (lit. a giant-ward, a watcher for monsters), to warn of Grendel's approach, but often in vain. For so silent was Grendel's approach when he was hunting in the darkness of the night that sometimes an eotanweard himself was surprised and eaten. On one particular and long-remembered night, no less than thirty Danish warriors were killed by Grendel. Little wonder then Beowulf was rewarded so richly and was so famed for having slain him.

In all, a comprehensive and somewhat horrifying picture of Grendel emerges from the pages of *Beowulf*, and I doubt that the reader needs to be guided by me as to which particular species of predatory dinosaur the details of his physical description fit best. Modern commentators who have been brought up on evolutionary ideas are compelled to suggest that monsters like Grendel are primitive personifications of death or disease, and other such nonsense. (It had even once been suggested that he was a personification of the North Sea!) But really, the evidence will not support such claims. One modern and refreshingly honest publication on the poem makes a more telling comment:

'In spite of allusions to the devil and abstract concepts of evil, the monsters are very tangible creatures in *Beowulf*. They have no supernatural tricks, other than exceptional strength, and they are vulnerable and mortal. The early medieval audience would have accepted these monsters as monsters, not as symbols of plague or war, for such creatures were a definite reality.' (13)

## Notes

- \* Drawn from chap. 11 of **After the Flood**. 1995 New Wine Press Chichester UK.
1. Brit. Mus. Cotton. Vitellius. A. XV.
  2. lines 1957-61 (Klaeber).
  3. Alexander, M. *Beowulf*. Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth. pp.112-3.
  4. Which incidentally verifies the pre-Christian origins of the Mercian, and therefore other pedigrees, proving that the early Saxon genealogies were in existence before the Saxons migrated to England.
  5. *Historiae Franconim*. Book III. chap. 3. See Thorpe, Lewis tr. Gregory of Tours: *The History of the Franks*. Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth. 1974. p. 163.
  6. cit. Klaeber. p. xli.
  7. *ibid*.
  8. This is the one flaw that mars Michael Alexander's otherwise excellent translation of *Beowulf*. Surprisingly, Klaeber also makes the same error, having actually edited the original text of the poem.
  9. **Ythgewinnes**. lit. a wave-thrasher. Its surface-swimming nature would explain the ease with which the creature was harpooned from the shore of the mere. It is also probably the ythgewinnes whose likeness was portrayed so often on the prow of Viking ships. Rather than being merely a superstitious emblem, perhaps that likeness had the very practical purpose of deterring other wave-thrashers from attacking the vessel.
  10. *Cartularium Saxonicum*. (W. de Gray Birch ed.). ii. 363 if. (cit. also by Klaeber. p. xxiv).
  11. *Beowulf* lines 1345-1355 (Klaeber).
  12. Alexander. p. 93.
  13. Longman Literature Guides. (York Notes Series). *Beowulf*. p. 65.



Shield from the ship-burial at Sutton Hoo (part-reconstruction)  
Anglo-Saxon, early 7th century AD From Mound 1, Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, England