BEOWULF

Translated by Gummere
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Introduction

Beowulf 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 scops (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 Grímar 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.

Lo, 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: {0a} 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.
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.

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

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 Heathoscylfing'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
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!

Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,
sovon of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,
boundless cares. There came unhiddent
tings 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 Herot 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,
their journey ended. Up then quickly
the Weders' 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,
miled folk, that you 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-welders: [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, --
you 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."

and friendship find in the Father's arms!

II

Thus 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,
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 ought 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 days 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,
clanman 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

Beowulf

it waft o'er the waters those well-loved thanes,
-- winding-neck'd wood, -- to Weders' bounds,
heroes such as the best 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
VI

Hrothgar 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 sovan Hrothgar, to seek thee here,
for my nerve and my might they knew full well.
Themselves had seen me from slaughter come
blood-fleked 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 sovan 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;
there 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 Wyrd (6f) as she must."

VII

Hrothgar 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,
obecred of ocean the Honor-Scyldings,
when first I was ruling the folk of Danes,
whelded, youthful, this widespread realm,
thus hoard-hold of heroes. Heorogar was dead,
my elder brother, had breathed his last,
Healfdene's bairn: he was better than I!
Welly 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 harryings. Hall-folk fail me,
my warriors ware; for Wyrd 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,
ears 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**

Unferth 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

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecglæow: --
"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,
stripings 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 chilllest 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 welmed by the hurly through hand of mine.
Beowulf

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-robbed 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."

\texttt{X}

Then Hrothgar went with his hero-train,
defence-of-Scyldings, forth from hall;
fain would the war-lord Wealtheow 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, --

\texttt{Beowulf} 

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 opended,
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 Wyrd 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 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 fairest 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
woeful 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

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,
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

Hrothgar 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

There 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,
broader 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 commended 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 Wyrd 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]
Hildeburgh 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
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 "Lafling," 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 Wealthow 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 were replaced,
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 wounden 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 Wyrd o'erwhelmed him
what time, in his daring, dangers he sought,
feud with Frisians. Fairest of gems
he bore him over the beaker-of-waves,
soveran strong: under shield he died.
Fell the corpse of the king into keeping of Franks,
egear of the breast, and that gorgeous ring;
weaker warriors won the spoil,
after grip of battle, from Geatland’s lord,
and held the death-field.
Din rose in hall.
Wealth theow 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 waseth 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. Wyrd they knew not,
destiny dire, and the doom to be seen
by many an earl when eve should come,
and Hrothgar homeward hasten away,
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

Hrothgar 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 liegenmen 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 liegenmen 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."
Waves were welling, the warriors saw, hot with blood; but the horn sang of 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: "Hruntung" 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
fled ere he felt the floor of the sea.
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 Ecglaef
for he felt the floor of the sea.
Soon found the fiend who the flood-domain
sturdy and strong, that speech he had made,
sword-hungry held these hundred winters,
drunk with wine, now this weapon he lent
greedy and grim, that some guest from above,
to a stouter swordsman. Himself, though, durst not
some man, was raiding her monster-realm.
under welter of waters wager his life
She grasped out for him with grisly claws,
as loyal liegeman. So lost he his glory,
and as violent as was.
with the other not so,
warrior. With the other not so,
who girded him now for the grim encounter.
and stiff. His strength he trusted,hand-gripe of might. So man shall dowhenever in war he weens to earn him

XXII

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: --
"Have mind, thou honored offspring of Healfdene
gold-friend of men, now I go on this quest,
sovran 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,
Hrithel'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 Hunting 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,
theLinked 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, fealty 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
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,
Beowulf spoke, 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 warden. 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, 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!

Under 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,
warror famous! The flower of thy might
Beowulf

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]

beowulf 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 erewhile 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.

Came now to ocean the ever-courageous
hardy henchmen, their harness bearing,
woven war-sarks. The warden marked,
trustly 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,
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

Hastened 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 sovran 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, claps of gold,
er she sought her seat, to sundry gave.
Oft to the heroes Hrothgar's daughter,
to earls in turn, the ale-cup tendered, --
whom I heard these hall-companions
Freaewaru 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 Freaewaru'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,
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 counsellor, 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.
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 sovrán left it,  
to daring Heoroweard, -- 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 Wealthéow gave him  
soverán’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 Ecgthéow  
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 bade bring within,  
hardy chieftain, Hræthel’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,  
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 harryings horrid, that Hygelac perished,  
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, 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. 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!
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 haunteh, 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 undoomed 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 
il-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

Then the baleful fiend its fire belched out, 
and bright homes burned. The blaze stood high 
all landsfolk frightning. 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-atar 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 Scyldings'-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

The 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,
Beowulf

Wide split the war-helm: wan he fell, hoary Scylding; 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 Daeghre fn fell, slain by my hand, the Hugas’ champion. Nor fared he thence to the Frisian king with the booty back, and breast-ornaments; 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 liegenmen 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 Wyrd allots, all mankind’s master. My mood is bold

XXXIII

Then 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 Hroesnabeorh. 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 Haethcydn 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.
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.
because he counted us keen with the spear
and hardy 'neath helm, though this hero-work
our leader hoped unhelped 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 steaded 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

Twas 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 unsuan 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, 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 Wyrd 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;  
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 sovrán lord.  
Now in their shame their shields they carried,  
armor of fight, where the old man lay;  
and they gazed on Wiglaf. Weared he sat  
at his sovrán'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  
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 three 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

That 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
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

The 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 Hrætheallings 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 Wundreding with weapon struck;
and the chieftain's blood, for that blow, in streams
flowed 'neath his hair. No fear felt he,
stout old Scylding, but straightway repaid
in better bargain that bitter stroke
and faced his foe with fell intent.
Nor swift enough was the son of Wundred
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,

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
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 eorl 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 Scyldings.
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,
bered 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
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

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 best 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,
fealty 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,
der 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

Thus 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 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.

Unferth, Beowulf's sometime opponent in the flyting. 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.

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.

Hrothgar. He is also the "refuge of the friends of Ing," below. Ing belongs to myth.

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.

Man-price, wergild. Beowulf. Hrothgar. 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.

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...
This brown of swords, evidently meaning burnished, bright, continues to be a favorite adjective in the popular ballads.

After the killing of the monster and Grendel's decapitation.

Hrothgar.

The blade slowly dissolves in blood-stained drops like icicles.

Spear.

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."

That is, he is now undefended by conscience from the temptations (shafts) of the devil.

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.

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."

With the speed of the boat.

Queen to Hygelac. She is praised by contrast with the antitype, Thryth, just as Beowulf was praised by contrast with Heremod.

Kenning for "wife."

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:

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.

That is, their disastrous battle and the slaying of their king.
Beowulf

[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.
[30a] Literally "loan-days," days loaned to man.
[30b] Chattuarii, a tribe that dwelt along the Rhine, and took part in repelling the raid of (Hygelac) Chocilaicus.
[30c] 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.
[31a] 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.
[31b] That is, the king could claim no wergild, or man-price, from one son for the killing of the other.
[31c] Usual euphemism for death.
[31d] Sc. in the grave.
[32a] 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.
[32c] Shield.
[32e] 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.
[33a] Usual euphemism for death.
[33b] Eadgils. -- The immediate provocation for Eadgils 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.
[33c] Shield.
[33d] The hollow passage.
[33e] 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.
[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.
[35c] What had been left or made by the hammer; well-forged.
[35d] Trying to revive him.
[35e] Nothing.
[36a] Dead.
[36b] Death-watch, guard of honor, "lyke-wake."
[36c] A name for the Franks.
[36d] Ongentheow.
[36e] Haethcyn.
[37a] 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.
[37b] Eofor, brother to Wulf Wonreding.
[37c] Sc. "value in" hides and the weight of the gold.
[37d] Not at all.
[37e] 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.
[38a] 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."
[38b] That is "one and a few others." But Beowulf seems to be indicated.
[38c] Ten Brink points out the strongly heathen character of this part of
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 pre-Christian 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?:

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

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.

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.
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 *Chlochilaichus*. (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 ... 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 wouoldcandel, 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 swumpy 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 wyrmes (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 mean to grind, or grind. 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 grena, 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 wonsaei (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...
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 *mutbona*, 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 animals 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 monsters 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 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 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)

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**Notes**

* Drawn from chap. 11 of *After the Flood*. 1995 New Wine Press Chichester UK.
2. lines 1957-61 (Klaeber).
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.
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.
11. Beowulf lines 1345-1355 (Klaeber).
Shield from the ship-burial at Sutton Hoo (part-reconstruction)
Anglo-Saxon, early 7th century AD From Mound 1, Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, England