

From Beowulf: A New Verse Translation by Seamus Heaney

Introduction of the Danes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**bothies- small huts or cottages*

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

**lays- stories about how things are*

**reavers- raiders or pillagers*

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

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

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

For Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.
 There was panic after dark, people endured
 Raids in the night, riven* by the terror.
 *riven- to be split or torn apart

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

A hero arrives

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

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

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

270

280

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

The man whose name was known for courage, 340

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now I cannot recall

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

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

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

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

Fight with Grendel

Then out of the night

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

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

***Moor- an open wasteland**

***Bawn- a rocky shoreline**

710

720

730

Mighty and canny,

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

740

750

760

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

Had fulfilled the dearest wish of the Danes.

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

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

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grendel's Mother

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

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

At night there, something uncanny happens:

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

1370

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

Out of its depths a dirty surge

Is pitched towards the heavens. Now help depends
Again on you and on you alone.

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

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

1380

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

“Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.

For every one of us, living in this world

Means waiting for our end. Let whoever can

Win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,
That will be his best and only bulwark.

So arise, my lord, and let us immediately

Set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.

I guarantee you: she will not get away,

1390

Not to dens under ground nor upland groves

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

Endure your trouble to-day. Bear up

And be the man I expect you to be.”

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

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats

1492

Was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:

Without more ado, he dived into the heaving

Depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day

Before he could see the solid bottom.

Quickly the one who haunted those waters,

Who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds

For a hundred seasons, sensed a human

Observing her outlandish lair from above.

1500

So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him

In her brutal grip, but his body, for all that,

Remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail

Saved him on the outside. Her savage talons

Failed to rip the web of his warshirt.

Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish swimmer

Carried the ring-mailed prince to her court

So that for all his courage he could never use

The weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde

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

1510

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

1520

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

1530

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

1540

1550

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

1560

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

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

Beowulf becomes King of the Geats

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

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

The wide kingdom
Reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well
For fifty winters, grew old and wise
As warden of the land
Until one began 2210
To dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl
Form the steep vaults of the stone-roofed barrow
Where he guarded a hoard; there was a hidden passage
Unknown to men, but someone managed
To enter by it and interfere
With the heathen trove. He had handled and removed
A gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,
Though with a thief's wiles he had outwitted
The sleeping dragon; that drove him into a rage,
As the people of that country would soon discover. 2220

The intruder who broached the dragon's treasure
And moved him to wrath had never meant to.
It was desperation on the part of a slave
Fleeing the heavy hand of some master,
Guilt-ridden and on the run,
Going to ground. But he soon began
To shake with terror; In shock
The wretch.....
.....panicked and ran
away with the precious 2230
metalwork. There were many other

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

A newly constructed

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

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

Then and old harrower of the dark 2270

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

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

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

Beowulf attacks the dragon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before long

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

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

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

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

After those words, a wildness rose

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

Inspired again

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

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

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

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

Once again the king

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

Then the wound

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

Beowulf spoke: in spite of his wounds,
 mortal wounds, he still spoke
 for he well knew his days in the world
 had been lived out to the end: his allotted time
 was drawing to a close, death was very near.

(Beowulf asks Wiglaf to go into the barrow and examine the dragon's treasure before bringing some to Beowulf. The dying king wants to see what he gave his life for, so Wiglaf does as he is commanded. Once Wiglaf returns with the gold, Beowulf gives thanks "to the everlasting Lord of All" and asks to be buried in a barrow on the coast to remind his people and sailors of his brave deeds.)

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

"You are the last of us, the only one left
 of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us all away,
 sent my whole brave high-born clan
 to their final doom. Now I must follow them."
 That was the warrior's last word.
 He had no more to confide. The furious heat
 of the pyre would assail him. His soul fled from his breast
 to its destined place among the steadfast ones.

It was hard then on the young hero,
 having to watch the one he held so dear
 there on the ground, going through
 his death agony. The dragon from underearth,
 his nightmarish destroyer, lay destroyed as well,
 utterly without life. ...

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

(Soon the deserters return, and Wiglaf berates them for the cowards that they are. He recounts the battles and on-going feud with the Swedes and predicts that with Beowulf's death and the rumors of deserting soldiers, it is only a matter of time before they are invaded. Wiglaf quickly orders seven men to collect the dragon's treasure, and they quickly set about preparing Beowulf's barrow along the high cliffs of the shore. After building a large pyre, adorned with swords and shields, they burned Beowulf's body. What remained after the fire was placed in the barrow as a memorial to their great king. Twelve riders circled the barrow lamenting and telling the great deeds of king Beowulf.)

They extolled his heroic nature and exploits 3173
 and gave thanks for his greatness; which was the proper thing,
 for a man should praise whom he holds dear
 and cherish his memory when that moment comes
 when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.
 So the Geat people, his hearth companions,
 sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.
 They said that of all the kings upon the earth, 3180
 he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,
 kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.

~the end