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***Beowulf* : A Translation in Blank Verse**

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Beowulf: A Translation in Blank Verse

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a translation into modern English blank verse of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. The bulk of the thesis is the poem itself, which represents not only the academic work of Old English translation, literary interpretation, and the study of early Germanic culture, but also the artistic work of creating poetry and adapting the poem's content to modern language and contexts. Included with the translation is an introduction placing it in conversation with other prominent modern translations of *Beowulf*, and analyzing the translation choices made at macro and micro levels. It is shown through this analysis that the medium of blank verse, despite being alien to the original poem, is nevertheless a viable medium for transmitting many of important elements of its poetry. Although some features are lost—among them structural alliteration and many compound words—the poem's archaisms of diction and syntax, its paratactic sentences, and the device of variation so important in Old English poetry, are all maintained. The effect is tonally very similar to the original, more similar, it is argued, than translations that adopt a stress-based meter superficially similar to Old English meter. A major goal of this translation is fidelity to the original's tone as well as to its words; the blank verse and other stylistic choices do not misrepresent the original, but make its alterity accessible for modern readers.

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INTRODUCTION

To analyze one's own work academically is difficult task, and a suspect one. In producing this translation of *Beowulf* I followed a poetic instinct (such as it is); in trying to see it now with a critic's eye I must put words to processes that were largely unconscious in its creation. In any event my appraisal must be of dubious objectivity, though I have tried to look squarely at both the successes and flaws of my endeavor.

Assessing Ezra Pound's translation of *The Sea-Farer*, Burton Raffel, himself a poet and translator of *Beowulf*, says:

no translation known to me captures anything like as much of the poetics of Old English, and in particular of its prosody.... But it must also be said that Pound has made, as I will argue that every translator must make, a very particular, and therefore a limited, balancing among the multiple claims exerted by the original. In order to accomplish what without the slightest doubt he has accomplished, he has had to forgo, and even to betray, other aspects of the original than those he wants to offer us. (Raffel 159-160)

In any act of literary translation there are choices to be made, to emphasize one or other of the original's "multiple claims." No translation can hope to espouse them all. Which precisely of these claims is kept and which discarded will depend on the translator's goals. But what should those goals be?

Here the question of “foreignizing” versus “domesticating” translation must be considered (Magennis 7). This question of the ethics of translation is considered at length by Lawrence Venuti. Domesticating translations, in his terms, assimilate foreign (or, as in the present case, ancient) texts to the “linguistic and cultural values” of the target language (Venuti 67); foreignizing translations, by contrast, aim at cultivating difference from the target and “reveal the translation to be in fact a translation, distinct from the text it replaces” (11). “Good translation,” for Venuti, “is demystifying: it manifests in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text”—even though, as he admits, “the very function of translating is assimilation” (11). Certainly, striking a balance between making a translated work approachable and preserving the unique or distinctive elements of the original must be, or at any rate, is a principal goal of many translators. In literary translation, what Raffel calls the “aesthetic” of the poem should be communicated, not just the meaning of the words: the translator must “reproduce in the new language the peculiar force and strength, the inner meanings as well as the merely outer ones,” of the old language (Raffel 157).

For a translator of *Beowulf*, fidelity to this aesthetic requires a deep engagement with the poem: merely a knowledge of the language and a poet’s ear will not do. “[A]ware of the radical differences between Old English poetry and modern poetry,” a verse translator must “make choices at the macro-level of their whole relationship to the poem and its poetry” (Magennis 3). My sense of the “aesthetic” of *Beowulf*—what I wanted especially to convey about its poetry—is its solidity, the weight of expression that compliments and furthers the weight of its subjects: kingship, heroic values, and, above all, the action of fate, the march of time, and the downfall of men and nations. The

poem's mood is, for me, at once lofty and tragic, in the venerable key of Homer. Though a Christian poem, it is not (primarily) a moral tale; such virtues as the characters display are set against a background of inexorable decay, and from their responses to this decay they gain their nobility. This is high matter, and the original poetry, diction and style, is high and formal to match. In translation, then, quaintness and lightness are to be avoided, as are any approaches that soften the poetry or render it colloquially.

The first choice to make was meter, and it guided the rest of the translation. Blank verse is a choice not without potential problems, as discussed below; but it is, in some way, a traditional verse and a lofty one—and, what was more, a verse I was competent with. “[W]ithin the parameters of metre and register, translators devise their particular ways of approaching issues of diction and grammar” (Magennis 4), and indeed the meter constrained my approach to both of these, as will be shown. In the end the central question will be: whether the choice of blank verse, altering as it must certain “claims” made by the original, facilitated or detracted from the achievement of that weighty and lofty character I and others admire in *Beowulf*.

My approach to the following analysis is suggested by Hugh Magennis' book *Translating Beowulf*, and his outline of the poem's artistry informs the discussion of my own translation. Line citations in Old English are all from *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th ed.; those in modern English are from my translation.

METER

The decision to set the poem in blank verse is certainly the most formative of my translation choices, and probably the most controversial. So great a departure from the poetry of the original requires an apology. The aims and criticisms of previous blank-

verse translations of *Beowulf* are pertinent here, so I will begin with them before discussing my own approach.

The first blank verse translation was, in fact, the first (partial) translation into English verse, by John Josias Conybeare in 1826: “his use of blank verse brings a classical feel to the translation and renders the original poem acceptable to an early-nineteenth century audience” (Magennis 48-9). His concern was thus for the accessibility of the poem to his readers, “for whom Old English verse would have seemed unbearably coarse” (Liuzza 284); he was also working with the generic conventions of epic, “to make *Beowulf* sound like an epic by translating it in the epic register” (285). His goal was “releasing the poem from its shackles”—shackles of a poorly-understood and potentially unlovely meter—“presenting it in a form his readers would recognize as natural, attractive, and heroic” (286).

The last (I believe) blank verse translation was that of Mary Waterhouse in 1949. Her choice, she says, is a “translation for the modern ear,” for which Old English verse “is too unfamiliar to be acceptable to those who are not students” (ix). Imitative meters she finds too heavily stressed and “overburdened with alliteration,” giving them an air of “flippancy or frivolity.” Furthermore she takes blank verse as “the modern heroic line and therefore the equivalent of the older one” (ix); by its use she hopes to present “a clear and straightforward version of the poem, free from archaisms” yet “keeping as closely as possible to the original” (xiv). Waterhouse gets into trouble with Edwin Morgan for these claims, for, as he points out in the introduction to his own translation, she does not steer away from archaisms at all (Morgan x). On similar grounds he also attacks her blank verse: “There is no ‘modern heroic line’ because there is no tradition of modern heroic

poetry; and blank verse is no longer a living medium for extended writing” (xii). Worse, blank verse “involves even the wariest of translators in verbal stylizations after the manner of its great users—Milton chiefly, but also Shakespeare and Wordsworth—and these are fatal to the pre-syllabic moods and effects of the Anglo-Saxon” (xiii).

Here Morgan touches on an issue Magennis also describes: that, while blank verse has a place as the “default” English verse, “it is far from being a neutral medium”; Waterhouse’s translation is “a polished, classicized *Beowulf*. . . . a ‘poetic’ poem from the golden treasury of (post-medieval) English verse” (Magennis 78). What was a goal for Conybeare—bringing a barbarous poem into civilized meter—is a flaw for any translator who claims to cleave “as closely as possible to the original.” To work *Beowulf* into blank verse, for both critics, is to distort it, presenting a highly domesticated version that misrepresents the feel, flow, and character of the original. This is exactly what Venuti indicates in saying that “foreign texts are often rewritten to conform to styles and themes that currently prevail in domestic literatures, much to the disadvantage of more historicizing translation discourses that recover styles and themes from earlier moments” (Venuti 67).

None of these perceived flaws do I really dispute—but they are flaws only insofar as they stray from a certain poetic or translational goal. Morgan is absolutely correct in considering blank verse “metrical archaizing,” but his statement that this “is merely another barrier between reader and original” (xiii) needs qualification. If the archaism obfuscates, diminishes, or otherwise distorts the poetry of the original, it is a barrier and should be opposed. But if that archaism does not distort, indeed, if it in fact clarifies that poetry, then it ought to be maintained. The meter of *Beowulf* was traditional in its own

time, and that tradition is no less a part of the poem than its words. If one wants to convey that sense of tradition, one must choose an appropriate meter.

Paradoxically, an adaptation of the original's stress-timed meter probably will not strike a general reader as traditional: it will sound novel, experimental, not the product of an unbroken line of poetic transmission. Poets and scholars may know and assert its traditionality, but it does not come across to anyone unfamiliar with the form. Blank verse, on the other hand, not only is traditional (to the extent that tradition exists in English poetry) it *sounds* traditional as well. As Magennis noted (albeit negatively), blank verse sounds like poetry, recognizable as such to even a casual reader. Furthermore, as Morgan noted, it sounds like ancient poetry. Therefore, though it admittedly fails to convey the sound of the native meter, it may serve well to convey the sense of something old, traditional, and poetic.

On the issue of sound, however, the technical aspects of blank verse make it more easily suited to the linguistic realities of modern English. Old English poetry has been noted for its expressive concision, by which half-lines of only two major stresses may convey syntactically complete phrases (and sometimes whole clauses). The inflectional morphology of the older language surely played a role in this compression: words may have their functions and relations expressed simultaneously in a single unstressed syllable, which not only shortens the overall length of a given phrase but allows for considerable flexibility in sentence structure, and hence in the composition of verses. But this is no longer the case in modern English. As Norman Blake writes:

as the language became analytical instead of synthetic, the denseness, or tightness, of organization and the regularity of rhythm characteristic of classical Old English

poetry were no longer possible. The growth in the number of grammatical words and the alteration in the stress patterns would change the rhythm of the language and tend toward expansiveness in poetry. (120-1)

Such changes are readily seen in Middle English alliterative poetry: “longer lines, less regular stress, and ultimately a freer alliteration” (121). They are evident also in modern English translations of *Beowulf* into stress-timed meters, few of which cleave to Sievers’ verse types or employ the original alliterative patterns.

Blank verse, by contrast, works considerably more easily in modern English. I do not say it works better—the translations mentioned above (among them Seamus Heaney’s widely popular version) are evidence that stress-timed alliterative meters can work well in modern English, with some flexibility. But the centuries-long tradition of blank verse equally attests to its suitability. The longer lines, with five rather than four stresses, allow for the “expansion” of the language, the necessity of employing more words per phrase. Furthermore, the myriad words imported from Romance languages (especially French) unsurprisingly fit better into a syllabic metrical form, as this form was developed precisely for these languages.

I grant that the blank verse tradition is starkly different—neoclassical, continental, and in many other ways alien to Anglo-Saxon poetics; I will, however, endeavor to show that this difference is not necessarily as “fatal” to the original’s mood as Morgan believes, and that the important elements of Anglo-Saxon poetics need not be discarded or “classicized” away. Much of the rest of this introduction will focus on how this balance is achieved, and where it is *not* achieved, where the Old and modern English styles work in harmony and where they conflict. By the end I hope to demonstrate that

my translation is reliably faithful to the poetry of the original, and that, far from distorting the poem, blank verse actually helps render some of its character.

Alliteration. I must begin, however, with a departure from the original. Naturally, the adoption of blank verse requires, or at least encourages, the lack of structural (or even prevalent) alliteration. Of course, alliteration is not necessary to connect the half-lines, because there are no half-lines; furthermore, systematic alliteration would have further restricted word choice, resulting in a less accurate translation (semantically speaking). The meter carries all the structure and sound of the poetry; other elements are only decorative.

Yet alliteration *is* present, and probably in more than usual proportion. In many cases it has been taken over entirely from the original: “a youth within his yards” (14), “wielded words” (31), “sharp shield-warrior” (284), “sat the sea-boat” (614), “fearsome fen-paths” (1296), “war beneath the waves” (1572), “limb-armor linked by hand” (1798), “heroes’ hand-fight” (1966), and so on. In other cases, however, it revises the original alliteration to fit translated words, as with “dire disturber” (575) for *atol æglæca*, or “shining shore-cliffs” (222) for *brimclifu blican*. Sometimes it has even been supplied where no alliteration was originally present, as in “band and boy-troop” (603) for *duguþe ond geogope*, “battle-brave” (666) for *heaðodeor*, or “woe and warfare” (1154) in lines translating *wean ahsode, / fæhðe to Frysum*. In this last category falls “dire distress,” a translation used four times (lines 16, 193, 280, and 413) for different compounds, respectively *fyrenþearfe*, *nydwracu*, *þreanyd*, *nearoþearfe*. There is, perhaps, preserved in this usage something of the traditional character of *Beowulf*’s diction, imaginatively reapplied to the modern translation.

As in the above examples, most of the alliteration in the translation comes in short phrases, at most translating a half-line of the original. But there are some cases where the alliteration is maintained through the whole line: “the grim and greedy man, grew eager now” (123); “he still more murders made, nor mourned at all” (138); “the war-chief wished to seek Queen Wealhtheow out” (643); “they dwell on wolf-slopes and on windy cliffs” (1295); “For that I seethed in sorrow-surging care” (1892); “the people’s pledge of peace, passed through the hall” (1915); “He bade them bring inside the boar’s-head sign” (2038). A dense grouping of such alliteration occurs in 2172–4: “he sniffed along the stone, stark-hearted, found / his foeman’s footprints; by the dragon’s head / with secret skill he had so nearly stepped.” As in the other cases, the alliteration in these lines is ornamental, not structural—yet even so it plays with the powerful effect this device has in English poetry, and in a way pays homage to the finely-wrought linkages of the original.

Metrical Features. The translation approaches blank verse with some flexibility. This is most pronounced in the case of compound words, where two stressed elements are directly juxtaposed; this is discussed in more detail below. An inverted first foot is sometimes used (sparingly), usually to achieve emphasis, as in the introduction of the famous monster: “Grendel was he named, that specter grim” (103); at other times it facilitates interesting or important compounds, like “death-doomed and put to flight” (808). A handful of lines play very loose with the meter, usually under strained conditions, such as the sequence of three Germanic names in “Herebeald, Hæthcyn, or Hygelac” (2313); here the first syllable is omitted and the stress of “Hæthcyn” is reversed, but the sense is achieved in a single line. Another loose line comes from

Beowulf's pyre: "Heaven swallowed the smoke" (2991). This is a direct rendering of the original "Heofon rece swealg" (3155), and conveys the same simplicity and abruptness at the cost of perfection in meter.

A more pervasive alteration, or rather addition, to traditional blank verse is the adoption of a caesura throughout most of the poem. Edwin Morgan considered the caesura an intractable problem for blank-verse *Beowulfs*, highlighting the "impossibility of satisfactorily transforming a symmetrical 4-stress line into an unsymmetrical 5-stress line"; "if you try to keep the caesura (or, more likely, find it hard to avoid!), then your blank verse will rapidly degenerate into a 4-stress metre with ten syllables" (Morgan xiv). Morgan is correct that a caesura is "hard to avoid," especially when translating closely, and to be sure its adoption is making a virtue of necessity; but, having worked through an entire translation in blank verse, *with* caesurae, I am not inclined to consider it "impossible" to do satisfactorily.

A sample may be taken from almost anywhere in the translation. Consider these lines at the feast in Heorot:

To him a cup was borne, a summons kind
was offered him in words, and twisted gold
presented with good will, a shirt of mail,
two arm-bands, rings, the greatest collar yet
that I have heard of over all the earth.
No better treasure know I under sky,
no hero's wealth, since Hama carried off
the Brosings' necklace, jewel and precious brooch,
to his bright stronghold—he who fled the snares
of Eormenric, and chose eternal gain. (1140-49)

A strong caesura is apparent in eight of these ten lines, falling after either the second or third foot. It does not separate or demarcate "half-lines"—a meaningless phrase in a blank-verse context—nor is it strictly symmetrical, yet it adds, or rather reflects, the pace

and flow of the original verses, and compliments the appositive style cherished by Old English poetry (discussed below). Most importantly, in my opinion it does not interfere with the blank verse *as* blank verse. A pure Miltonic or Shakespearean line might avoid a strong middle pause, but outside of some prescriptive rules considerable flexibility is possible. What I see here is a merging of blank verse and Old English metrical styles: blank verse informs the rhythm of the individual line, while the caesura informs phrasal and sentence-level structure. The success of this merging is, perhaps, up to the reader to decide.

A final notable metrical feature in the translation's treatment of the "hypermetric" verses, which contain an extra stressed element in the first half-line. Though it is not always clear why these are used in *Beowulf*, they are so rare and so clearly intentional that they must be meaningful. It seemed best to mirror this emphasis in a similar manner: by adding an extra foot, producing an Alexandrine line. These verses also feature a distinct medial caesura. The first group will serve to illustrate the effect:

wearing a golden ring she walked where those two sat,
the king and his nephew: they both were yet at peace
and to each other true. At Hrothgar's feet there sat
his spokesman, Unferth; all of them believed his heart,
that he was great of mind (though maybe to his kin
not kind at play of swords). The Scylding lady spoke... (1113-18)

By interrupting the pentameter flow and slowing it down by a foot's length, the lines are both striking and somewhat more contemplative, encouraging a reader to consider well what is being presented. This is, perhaps, the use to which they are put in the original.

I have also used the hypermetric line at the very end of the poem, where it does not appear in the original:

they said that he had been of any worldly king
the mildest man of all, and the most gentle lord,
most gracious to his folk, most yearning to win praise. (3014-16)

It did seem appropriate to elevate and emphasize the poem's final lines, but in fact the alexandrine was adopted here for a different reason: to preserve what I took to be an essential phrasing of the final line. The sense and sound would have felt rushed in a pentameter line, and the parallelism of "most" might have been sacrificed.

DICTION

Magennis notes the "double alterity" of *Beowulf* for modern readers: "Not only is the poetic language of *Beowulf* different from that of Modern English... in its original Anglo-Saxon context it is also to be seen as unlike the language of ordinary speech" (137). It is written "in the highest register available.... Its language is lofty and formal, conveying delicate social nuance, and it is archaic" (Magennis 3-4). "Given free choice," remarks Russom, "the poet actually *prefers* archaisms to ordinary words in poetic compounds," and syntactic archaisms are also used "with no obvious practical utility" (Russom 75). For the translator to convey this alterity and archaism through his own diction and syntax might be an obvious stylistic goal, but it is not one without dangers. Archaizing diction was, as Magennis notes, the rule in early (pre-1950) translations of *Beowulf*, prose and verse alike. But these by and large achieved only "quaintness" (Magennis 82). Morgan styled it "a tiresome and thoughtless... tone-raising device" (viii), "superadded linguistic crinkum-crankum and mock-epopeanism" (xii); for him it is neither modern, nor poetic, nor necessary, since the poem's background, social system, and "inescapable bedrock vocabulary of *king... gold-giving... coat of mail... burial-*

mound’ will feel far enough removed from a modern reader to serve the archaizing function (xi-xii).

I agree with Morgan on the last point, at least: the very fabric of *Beowulf* is “foreign” enough to convey its alterity and venerable age. At the same time, however, I wanted to retain the distinctly elevated tone and “poetic” style of the poem. As Tolkien says in the “Prefatory Remarks” of the 1950 Clark-Hall translation, “If you wish to translate, not rewrite *Beowulf*, your language must be literary and traditional... because the diction of *Beowulf* was poetical, archaic, artificial” (quoted in Magennis 17). In my translation, therefore, I endeavored to avoid deliberate and “quaint” archaism, while maintaining a high, formal register and poetic language.

The ideal, then, is to tap into the native poetry of such words as Morgan describes—king, gold, dragon, sword, and so on—words that are plain normal English but are semantically endowed with poetic virtue, especially as belonging to an older time or to legendary settings. But the translation makes use of distinctly poetic language in many places as well: such words as “rime” (35), “main” (49), “visage” (248), “boon” (418), “base” meaning bad (709), “ill” meaning evil (791), “fastness” (2218), “doffed” (2664), “tidings” (2741), “deemed” (3008). Some of these reflect the Old English, like “boon” (*bene*), “fastness” (*fæsten*), and “doffed” (*dyde him of*). Others are employed for metrical reasons—not unlike the archaisms of the original poem. Archaic prepositions like “unto” (78), and adverbs like “whence” (326), “hither” (368), and “thence” (1811), are also used, again for metrical reasons.

Archaism and “poeticism” extend to phrases as well: “they knew no woe” (121), “ill at ease” (132), “they then fared forth” (295), “heaven’s vaulting veil” (405). Many

phrases employ syntactic inversion, a poetic device common to blank verse (again made necessary, or at least useful, by the meter). Sometimes these reflect the syntax of the original, as in the early lines: “princes valor have performed” (3) for *æþelingas ellen fremedon*; “the mead-seats dragged away” (5) for *meodosetla ofteah*; “penniless / he first was found” (6-7) for *feasceaft funden*. But often the Elizabethan tone of such phrases upsets the character of the poetry and approaches quaintness, as the almost Spenserian “undead spirits vile” (114) and “worms and creatures wild” (1361), or the somewhat flat “did not at all keep silent of his news” (2747).

But other archaic features, found in many early translations, are generally avoided. The exclamatory *Hwæt*, often translated “Lo,” “Behold,” is given in more modern language: “What” (1), “Now listen” (517), “Indeed” (904), “What!” (1690), “See” (2132)—a sixth use, at line 1652a in the original, is omitted. The vocative particle “o” is used five times, in four lines: “Be well, o Hrothgar!” (398); “In truth I say to you, o Ecglaf’s son” (573); “To you, o Halfdane’s son, o Scylding prince” (1568); “Hold now, o earth, this property of earls” (2131). While this is a distinctly archaizing feature, it is used sparingly and reflects something of the dignity of the speeches in which it is found.

Archaic or poetic style is sometimes employed by the translation to suggest formality, as in the introductions to speeches: “Now Unferth, son of Ecglaf, made a speech” (488), and “Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, made reply” (516), and similar lines. In the original these lines are conspicuous examples of the formulaic style, and the translation seeks to reflect this. The most often repeated lines, *Beowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*, is given as “Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words” in seven of

its nine occurrences (918, 1318, 1402, 1567, 1729, 1898, 2304)—“these words” being added to fill out the line.

Formulae are often replicated in the translation. *Mære þeoden*, occurring fifteen times in *Beowulf*, is rendered similarly throughout the translation: eight times as “famous king,” five as “glorious king,” once as “famous prince”; once it is simply “the king” (342). Except for the last case the variants are metrically identical (the *i* in “glorious” is weakened to a glide—a point of pronunciation consistent in other words); it may be desirable, therefore, to use the same “formula” in each case, as in the original. But the *Beowulf* poet is not always bound to formulae, employing metrically-equivalent synonymous variations apparently for variation’s sake: for example, *guðbeorn* and *guðrinc*, both meaning “warrior,” or *seglrad* and *swanrad*, both kennings for “sea” (Russom 75-77). Thus the translation’s variations on the original formula may actually suggest something of the original poet’s own dexterity, “at once traditional and strikingly original” (Magennis 38).

Sometimes a word or phrase presents particular difficulties in translation, due to semantic shifts from Old to modern English. One example would be *feormend*, used twice in reference to the dragon’s hoard: literally this is “cleaner, polisher,” but can hardly be translated as such—these words in modern English suggest housekeeping products or cosmetics, not warriors. But the words are used to vividly contrast what the armor and weapons of the hoard ought to be (i.e. shining and burnished) against what they are (rust-eaten and corroded), and so the sense of “one who burnishes” cannot be laid aside. In such cases creative restructurings of the language are often needed. So “fyrnmanna fatu, feormendlease, / hyrstum behrorene” (2761-62a) becomes “the cups of

ancient men, deprived of jewels, / with none to polish them” (2620-1): the awkward “polisher-less” is recast as a prepositional phrase, conveying the appropriate sense.

Wordplay is another element necessarily “lost in translation.” A number of puns are present in the Old English, playing on phonetic or semantic similarities not present in modern English. The words *gæst* “ghost” and *gæst* “guest” are continually punning, as in these descriptions of Grendel and the dragon: “Syððan heofones gim / glad ofer grundas, gæst yrre cwom” (2072-3); “Ða se gæst ongan gledum spiwan” (2312). In these cases either meaning might be appropriate, and the uncertainty as to whether the monsters are called merely “ghosts” (“spirits,” i.e. living creatures) or, ironically, “guests,” contributes to the poem’s richness. But this pun is unavailable in modern English, and the ambiguity must therefore be resolved: in translating the first example, I give “that angry ghost” (1967), while the second has “That guest, the worm” (2197). Likewise there is wordplay in the passage where Beowulf returns Unferth’s sword:

The hardy man commanded Hrunting borne
to Ecglaƿ’s son, and bade him take his sword,
the precious iron; thanked him for the loan,
and said he reckoned it a trusty friend
in battle, strong in war, blamed not in words
the weapon’s edge; he was so brave a man. (1719-24)

In the original “*guðwine*,” given as “friend in battle” above, could refer either to the sword or to Unferth himself; so could “*secg*,” here translated “man” but also meaning “sword.” Once again, translation requires resolution: modern English has easy puns for “sword” and “man,” and the referent of *guðwine* must be made plain by its pronoun—Old English *þone* can be used of both animate and inanimate antecedents, a flexibility impossible in the modern language.

Compound Words. The original poem makes extensive use of poetic compound words, very many of which are unique to *Beowulf* (Magennis 31). These serve a pragmatic function: they are integral to the creation of alliterative bindings, as the “‘word-hoard’ of poetic diction... allow[s] the same idea to be fitted into a range of alliterative contexts” (29). As such they also contribute to the “elaborate use of variation and repetition” so characteristic of *Beowulf*’s syntax (31). But of course the compounds also carry their own aesthetic qualities, as unique and telling metaphors.

In the translation many of these compounds have been replaced by simplex nouns, modified nouns, genitive phrases, or sometimes whole lines to convey a complex meaning. A survey of compounds in the first twenty-five lines and their translations will demonstrate the effect: *geardagum* “days of old”; *þeodcyning* “kings of men”; *weorðmyndum* “worthiness”; *hronrade* “dolphin’s course”; *fyrenðearfe* “dire distress”; *liffrea* “Lord of Life”; *woroldare* “honor and the world’s respect”; *feohgiftum* “gifts of treasure”; *wilgesipas* “companions willing”; *lofdædum* “praise for lofty deeds” (“lofty” suggested by *lof-* but only added for meter). Only one compound escapes unharmed: *meodosetla* “mead-seats” in line 5.

The loss of compounds is partly precipitated by the meter. A great number of the compound words in *Beowulf* occur in type C, D, and E verses. These verse types all contain back-to-back stresses, making them well-suited to the deployment of compounds, and indeed their unusual proportion in *Beowulf*, “unmatched by any of the longer poems but *Ex.*”, may be “a consequence of... the exceptionally high incidence of compounds” (Fulk et al. clix). In the above examples, *in geardagum*, *ofer hronrade*, and *him þæs liffrea* are type C; *þeodcyninga* and *fromum feohgiftum* are type D; *meodosetla ofteah*,

weorðmyndum ðah, fyrendearfe ongeat, woroldare forgeaf, lofdædum sceal are type E. Only 23a *wilgesipas* is type A. Needless to say, these back-to-back stresses do not occur in blank verse, which is why the genitive phrase is so often used to replace them: the unstressed “of” separates the two stresses. An alternative is seen in the case of “mead-seats”, where the second stress is subordinated to the first; this, however, produces an imperfect line (“-seats” is still a heavy syllable, a long vowel followed by two consonants, and so cannot be truly unstressed), and even this imperfect option is not available in all lines. But in this case the symbolism of mead was too important to be lost; a simplex noun like “benches” may have been supplied, more accurate to the meter but devoid of the necessary effect.

The reduction of compounds is present throughout the translation, but in later sections more compounds are retained—perhaps as I refined my style. In a passage of equal length in the original, 465–490 (translation 456–480), the following have been retained as compounds: *hordburh* “treasure-town”; *fletwerod* “hall-troop”; *ealowæge* “ale-cups”; *medoheal* “mead-hall”; *bençpelu* “bench-planks”. Not retained are: *hetepancum* “thoughts of hate”; *færniða* “sudden evil deeds”; *dolscaðan* “witless ravager”; *oretmecgas* “warriors”; *morgentid* “morning”; *sigehreð* “deeds of glory”. *wigheap*, *beorsele*, *drihtsele*, and *heorudreore* have not been translated at all; these are mostly variations, and their removal is a syntactic rather than semantic matter. It is worth noting that one compound in the translation, “treasure-gifts” (462), has actually been expanded from the original’s *madmas* (472)—in the translation, too, compounding is a strategy for metrical fulfillment.

The retentions above all display, like “mead-seats,” an imperfect meter, for again the second element, always heavy, cannot be truly unstressed. The same goes for most compounds formed from two monosyllables. This illustrates some of the flexibility I employed in the meter, which, although it conditioned many of my translation choices, did not prevent me from translating some of the more evocative (to me) compounds: as “hand-grip” (370), “bone-case” (713), “death-doomed” (850), “storm-hard” (988), “march-stalkers” (1286), “wolf-slopes” (1295), “mere-wife” (1444), “mead-cheer” (1913), “hoard-guard” (2186), “bone-house” (2381), “hoard-wealth” (2933), to name just a handful.

Of course, compounds that begin with disyllables are more easily retained. “Battle-” compounds are especially prevalent, due not only to the word’s stress but to the frequency of similar elements in Old English: *beado-*, *heaðo-*, *here-*, *hilde-*, *guð-*, *wig-*, and to some extent *heoro-*, *searo-*, and *wæl-*. Thus, to name a scant few: “battle-skill” (129) for *guðcraeft*; “battle-storm” (294) for *hilderæs*; “battle-shafts” (328) for *heresceafta*; “battle-shroud” (444) for *beaduscruda*; “battle-play” (568) for *heaðolace*. “Treasure-” is similar, also translating high-frequency elements—*maððum*, *sinc*, *hord*—in a squarely iambic meter: “treasure-lord” (969) for *sincgyfan*; “treasure-cup” (2284) for *maðþumfæt*; “treasure-house” (2684) for *hordærne*. Some “treasure-” compounds are created from phrases in the original: “treasure-giver” (588) for *sinces brytta*, or “treasure-hoard” (2655) for *maðma hord*.

SYNTAX AND STYLE

The traditional meter and diction of Anglo-Saxon poetry are involved in the formation of its distinctive syntax. In *Beowulf*, this is seen in “patterns of phrasal parallelism and

phrasal contrast, including abrupt opposition and the use of parenthetical interjections...” (Magennis 29). Syntactical structures of “apposition, parallelism, recapitulation and juxtaposition” (31) are present throughout. The strong divisions between half-lines encourage smaller semantic units that can be easily varied, usually to fill metrical or alliterative gaps. The poem prefers parataxis and asyndetic coordination. Together these syntactic devices give the poem its “marked exclamatory quality” (Magennis 29) and a stately pace, fitting, like the formality of its diction, the nature of its subject.

These devices are atypical of modern English writing, where they may sound disjointed or (in the case of variation especially) redundant. For this reason several translators elected by and large to recast the poem’s syntax in more modern style. However the syntax, like the archaism and formality of the diction, is part of *Beowulf*’s poetics, and cannot easily be altered without altering the character of the poem. I have, by and large, endeavored to retain the most important and distinctive features of *Beowulf*’s style in my own translation, notwithstanding the shift to blank verse. Inevitably metrical issues and concerns for readability, given a modern English-speaking audience, have persuaded me to make some stylistic alterations; but in my estimation these do not upset too much my fidelity to the original.

Variation. As “the very soul of the Old English poetical style” (Fulk et al. cxviii), variation is typically maintained in the translation, even at the expense of an idiomatic modern style. It is simply too important to the feeling of *Beowulf*, to the sense of weight and poetic elegance it conjures, to be elided in the interest of clarity or modernity. This is not to say I have kept every instance of variation—the complexity of some passages, as discussed below, demanded some omissions—only that it is a conspicuous and consistent

element of my translation. Some examples will illustrate this: take these lines recounting Hrothgar's trouble with Grendel:

So in that grievous season did he seethe,
the son of Halfdane, in a ceaseless brood,
nor might the wise man turn aside his woe:
the hardship was too great, enduring long,
which on that people fell, a dire distress,
evil and grim, the worst of night attacks. (189-94)

In the original, "a complex period is developed out of three main clauses... that develop a single idea in three different ways" (Fulk et al. cxviii), and this structure is replicated in the translation. "He," "the son of Halfdane," and "the wise man" are in apposition, as are "hardship," "dire distress," and "worst of night attacks." Even the modifiers "too great," "enduring long," and "evil and grim" are varied, as are their Old English counterparts *to swyð*, *longsum*, and *nipgrim*. To smooth this passage by the omission or reduction of some varied elements would remove the "rising rhetorical crescendo" of the original (Fulk et al. cxviii), and the poetry would suffer.

Another particularly dense grouping of appositives is in Beowulf's short speech to Hrothgar before he dives into Grendel's mere:

Think now, you famous son of Halfdane king,
now that I am prepared to go, wise prince,
gold-friend of men, on what we two have said:
that, should I lose my life for your great need,
you'd be for me as father in my death.
Protect my kindred thanes, friends at my side,
if battle takes me off; and send those gifts,
the treasures which you gave me, to my lord,
to Hygelac. So Hrethel's son may know,
when he observes that wealth, that shining gold,
that I had found a treasure-giver true
and I enjoyed his kindness while I could.
And give to Unferth, well-known man, my blade,
my heirloom old, my splendid wave-marked sword

of hardy edge; I shall with Hrunting work
my glorious deed—or death will take me off. (1403-18)

Variation is evident in the addresses to Hrothgar (“son of Halfdane,” “wise prince,” “gold-friend of men”), to Beowulf’s fellows (“kindred thanes, friends at my side”), to Hygelac (“to my lord, / to Hygelac”), to Hrothgar’s gifts (“those gifts, / the treasures” and “that wealth, that shining gold”), to Unferth, and to Beowulf’s sword (“my blade, / my heirloom old, my splendid wave-marked sword”). Most of these are preserved from the original: only *Geata dryhten* in 1484b is missing. Conversely, “those gifts” (1409), not in the original, is supplied to fill the meter, once again imaginatively employing Old English poetic devices. The overall effect is formal and poetic—this is clearly not idiomatic modern English—but not confusing or overwrought.

A related but distinct feature of the poetry of *Beowulf* is the use of parenthetical statements or asides. Some examples are: *He wæs fag wið God* (811b), *him bið grim sefa* (2043b), *wæs ða frod cyning, / eald eþelweard* (2209b-10a), *him wæs sefa geomor* (2632b). Like apposition these work to fill out lines, but they are also used to provide characterization or additional detail. From the perspective of modern English they tend to interrupt the narrative flow, but they are nonetheless part of *Beowulf*’s style, and I endeavored to keep them where possible. The above examples maintain their parenthetical aspect in the translation: “God’s foe was he” (777); “his soul is grim” (1939); “wise was he, the king, / the old home-guard” (2094-5); “mournful was his soul” (2500).

Parataxis and Coordination. The *Beowulf* poet prefers paratactic construction, “so that a sentence may be syntactically complete a number of times before it comes to a full stop” (Fulk et al. cxvii). Such construction is unusual in modern English—alien, in fact, to my

own prose style—and it is more natural to build complex sentences with subordinate clauses. But, like variation, it is a conspicuous aspect of *Beowulf*'s poetic voice, and one I thought important to maintain. At the best of times the translation is able to capture such phrasings almost exactly: “he came up to the hall, / upon the step he stood, looked on the roof / so lofty...” (887-9). This mimics the structure of “he to healle geong, / stod on stapole, geseah steapne hrof” (925b-26), where three complete clauses with three finite verbs, “came”, “stood”, and “looked,” are joined directly together. Each verb seems more purposeful and meaningful, rather than simply part of a sequence; each can be appreciated as a distinct action that Hrothgar performs.

In a few cases parataxis is replaced with subordination. Consider the coast-guard's approach to Beowulf's party: “He rode his horse to shore, / the thane of Hrothgar, shaking his strong spear / with mighty hands, demanding with these words” (233-5). The participles “shaking” and “demanding” replace finite verbs *cwehte* and *frægn* in the original, conjuring a smoother image than the original: all three actions, riding, shaking, and demanding, happen at once, the latter two subordinated to the first. In similar terms Unferth describes the swimming contest: “The sea-streams you enfolded with your arms, / traversing water-straits with weaving hands / and gliding on the ocean” (501-3). Again, finite verbs *mæton*, *brugdon*, and *glidon* have become participles “traversing,” “weaving,” and “gliding,” to produce a streamlined syntax. But such revisions are uncommon, and with few exceptions like these the translation is paratactic in structure.

Whereas parataxis is kept, the asyndetic coordination preferred by the original is not generally maintained in the translation. Often this is due (as usual) to the meter, as conjunctions are convenient unstressed monosyllables, easy to insert where needed. This

is evident in the opening lines, where “and” is supplied in the translation but not the original: “the mead-seats dragged away, / and terrified the earls”; “he grew in might beneath the sky above / and rose in worthiness”; “should hear his word / and yield him tribute” (4-12). This structure focuses on the actions as a sequence, where one leads to another, rather than on each action in its turn, without necessarily implying a sequence. The translation is thus grammatically smoother but loses some of the original’s weightiness or contemplation. A similar shift in focus is evident in many action scenes, as in the fight with Grendel’s mother:

The belted hilt he seized,
the Scylding warrior, fierce and battle-grim,
and drew the ring-marked sword, hopeless of life,
and struck in anger, that the sword gripped firm
against her neck, and broke the bone-rings all... (1486-90)

This translates the original lines 1563-67a:

He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga
hreoh ond heorogrim, hringmæl gebrægd
aldres orwena, yrringa sloh,
þæt hire wið halse heard grapode,
banhringas bræc...

In the original the clauses move directly into one another without conjunctions (except *þæt*), whereas in the translation “and” is supplied between all clauses. This leads to a much smoother passage that emphasizes the scene’s quick action, but loses the abruptness and corresponding vigor of the Old English lines. However, in other respects the passage reflects the Old English closely, in maintaining the appositions and the paratactic structure—as well as the compounds *heorogrim*, *hringmæl*, and *banhringas*.

Voice. Another general tendency is the change of stative or passive constructions (usually employing *beon/wesan* or *weorðan*) to dynamic or active. In modern English the former

tend to sound flat and plodding, and often produce ungainly, verbose phrasing, not easily worked into a strict meter. But in *Beowulf* these constructions are more numerous, and sometimes suggest a formal, or at least formulaic style. When Beowulf arrives at Heorot the door-guard Wulfgar addresses him as a *bena* “petitioner”: “Ic þæs wine Denigea... frinan wille... swa þu bena eart” (350b-52). Later, speaking to Hrothgar, he again calls all the Geats “petitioners”: “Hy benan synt þæt hie, þeoden min, wið þe moton wordum wrixlan” (364b-66a). The phrase works well in the poem, but “as you are a petitioner” and “They are petitioners” not only sound dry in modern English, they are too long to fit nicely into a pentameter line. In the translation these addresses have been reworked: “I will ask the king, the friend of Danes... as you request” (342-4); “They have petitioned that they may with you, my king, exchange their words” (356-7). “Petitioner” is changed into a verb, “request” in one case and “petition” in the other, making the sentences dynamic while endeavoring to maintain something of the original’s sense of formality. In the same way, in Wiglaf’s exhortation to his fellows, “þenden hyt sy, gledegese grim” (2649b-50a) adopts a stative structure that sounds too flat in literal translation: “while there is heat.” This is revised, again, into a dynamic statement: “while he [Beowulf] endures the grim and awful flames” (2517).

One particularly troubling locution in the original is the formula *to banan weorðan* and its variants (*handbanan*, *ecgbanan*, *muðbanan*), used seven times in *Beowulf*. Literally the phrase may be rendered “become as a slayer (to someone),” a verbose passive construction glossed actively as “kill.” A literal translation of this phrase is too offensive to modern English style (favoring directness and active voice) to be used very often, and I have employed the exact rendering only once: “though you became a

killer to your kin” (570). The other six instances are evenly split between active voice, and a more normal passive voice construction: in active voice are “[Cain] struck down his only brother with a blade” (1208), “A restless, bloody spirit slew him here” (1270), and “I in honor struck down Day-Raven” (2375); in passive, “by his hand / was Heatholaf... slain” (451-2), “that famous thane / was killed in Grendel’s mouth” (1972-3), and “Heardred under shield-defense was slain / by swords of war” (2088-9). Something is lost in smoothing the locution (especially in the arresting *muðbonan* of 2079b)—an element of formality, perhaps, or simply an intriguing perspective on the relation of agent to action. But my concern was for comprehension and idiomatic phrasing, and the passive renderings, at least, retain the important instrumental components of the original.

Complexity and Simplification. Concerns of meter, diction, and style necessarily limit the accuracy of the translation, and in the most complex passages significant reworking is needed: for the bare sense of the lines to be transmitted, the syntax and diction of the original must be smoothed. Typically this happens in small sections, resulting in the omission of a half-line, often an appositive. So “and there he asked the wise lord of the Danes / if night had been agreeable to him” (1259-60), where verse 1320a *æfter neodlaðum* “according to [his] desire,” modifying *getæse* “agreeable,” has been omitted as semantically unnecessary. For the same reason “A fair feast was arranged, as was before” (1702) omits the *niowan stefne* of 1789a. In “nor was he honored by the Storm-Geat lord” (2071), the whole sense of the original’s *micles wyrðne... gedon wolde* is rendered as “honored.”

Revisions like these extend to longer passages as well. In an early passage we hear of Hrothgar: “Him on mod bearn / þæt healreced hatan wolde, / medoærn micel men

gewyrcean” (67b-69). This is a complex construction containing three verbs in sequence: *wolde hatan gewyrcean* “wished to command (men) to build.” The translation conveys this succinctly: “He had in mind to bring about this work: / to build a greater mead-hall...” (68-69). Also, the impersonal phrasing of *Him on mod bearn* “(it) ran into his mind” is substituted with a more idiomatic expression. A similar simplification occurs a few lines later: “I heard he summoned tribes from far and wide / throughout the world to ornament this stead” (74-5), translating “*Ða ic wide gefrægn weorc gebannan / manigre mægþe geond þis middangeard, / folcstede frætwan*” (74-76a). Here the agent “he” is added, the patient *weorc* is omitted, and the dative *manigre mægþe* takes its place as the object of a typical active-voice sentence, less grammatically taxing than its passive counterpart.

Larger revisions than these are, I believe, rare in my translation, but they do occur. A striking example is the poet’s praise of Beowulf after his death:

Few mighty men, though they may dare all deeds,
 have so excelled that they could have advanced
 against the poison breath, or could have stirred
 the ring-hoard with their hands, if they had found
 the watchful warden dwelling in his cave. (2690-4)

Note how much has been altered of the original passage:

Huru þæt on lande lyt manna ðah
 mægenagendra mine gefræge,
 þeah ðe he dæda gehwæs dyrstig wære,
 þæt he wið attorsceaðan oreðe geræsde,
 oððe hringsele hondum styrede,
 gif he wæccende weard onfunde
 buon on beorge. (2836-42a)

Several words and phrases are omitted (*huru þæt on lande*, *mine gefræge*, *-sceaðan* in *attorsceaðan*), the person changes from singular to plural, the voice of line 2838 goes

from passive to active, and the complex subject *lyt manna... mægenagenda* “few of might-possessing men” has been drastically simplified. But the result is, in my opinion, one of the better-crafted passages in the translation, smooth and idiomatic, yet distinctly elevated and poetic. The blank verse here, though it clearly interferes with “accurate” translation, provides not only the formal quality of its meter but compels carefulness in the construction of the lines.

CONCLUSION

J. K. Crane identified four audiences for *Beowulf* translations, coinciding with four different approaches to the task of translation: “the general reader interested in ‘reading,’ not ‘studying’ the poem”; “the non-specialist student who could be expected to both read it and examine its artistry, yet who would have no knowledge of Anglo-Saxon to assist him in the latter regard”; “the specialist, the reader with an Anglo-Saxon background who is attempting to rectify for himself the disparities between the original and *any* translation”; and those translations “in which the attempt is rather to create a new work of art than preserve and make available an old one” (Crane 322). In considering the question posed in the introduction—whether blank verse was, in the end, a help or hindrance to conveying the “aesthetic” of *Beowulf*—it may be helpful to consider into which of Crane’s categories my translation falls.

The use of blank verse as the meter somewhat precludes Crane’s second and third categories—too much is compromised, metrically and linguistically, for the translation to meet the standards of these audiences. I have said that blank verse, in my opinion, well imitates the “poetic-ness” of *Beowulf*, but it does not imitate its poetics. I see my translation as falling somewhere between, or rather within both the first and final

categories. More so, I believe, the former: for while it must be considered a “new work of art,” due not only to its alien meter but to its very nature as translation, I aimed throughout for what Raffel calls “interpretative” translation, “for a literary audience and for people who do not have access to the original” (Raffel 118). The artistry of my version may be “new,” but I believe that, given the examples outlined above, in its style and mood it approaches very near to the original—at least, to how I appraise the original. Whatever distortion the blank verse may cause, I am satisfied that I have remained true to the solidity and loftiness so admired in the poem; it has not been “fatal” to the original, as Edwin Morgan feared.

“Every version is provisional,” as Liuzza says, “a gesture towards an empty space where a text used to be, an act of recovery which takes the place of the vanished original” (294-5). Of the “multiple claims” of *Beowulf*, I have foregone that of its prosody and aimed instead at exactness of expression, imitation (to an extent) of style, reflection of its traditional and poetic character, and re-creation of its mood. In the balance between domesticating and foreignizing that I mentioned at the beginning, I have strived to, as it were, meet the audience halfway: neither to fully gloss over the real strangeness, to modern ears, of *Beowulf*’s poetry, nor to render it by acute literalism more alien to them than it ever was to its original hearers, but to present some of that strangeness in a way that encourages engagement rather than mere curiosity. *Beowulf* should feel unfamiliar, but enticing. The world of distant antiquity it conjures should invite the reader—and for this reason it cannot seem unapproachable or confusing. One must own a work of literature to appreciate it.

BEOWULF

What glory we have learned of kings of men
among the Spear-Danes' folk in days of old,
and how those princes valor have performed.

- The son of Sheaf, named Scyld, from troops of foes
5 and many tribes the mead-seats dragged away,
and terrified the earls, though penniless
he first was found. For that he comfort saw:
he grew in might beneath the sky above
and rose in worthiness, until each one
10 of all the tribes that sat around his lands
across the dolphin's course should hear his word
and yield him tribute—that was a good king.
To him a son was born in later years,
a youth within his yards, whom God had sent
15 as comfort to the kin, for he perceived
the dire distress that they had borne before—
to be without a king so long a time.
Therefore the Lord of Life, who glory wields,
gave honor and the world's respect to them:
20 the famous Beow, the son of Scyld, whose rule
spread widely over Scandinavian land.
So shall a young man bring about his good
by gifts of treasure in his father's keep,
that in his age, whenever war might come,
25 companions willing shall remain with him
and keep his side; by praise for lofty deeds
shall that man thrive in nations everywhere.
Still strong was Scyld, when at the fated hour
he sought the Lord's embrace. To waters' edge
30 his dear companions brought his body down,
as he had bid them while he wielded words.
Long had he ruled, his people's friend and lord,
beloved of that land. A ring-prowed ship
stood in the harbor, ready to sail out,
35 a noble vessel clad in frost and rime—
upon its bosom, by the mast they laid
their glorious king so dear, who gave out rings.
Much wealth and jewels from far-away were brought,

nor have I known more comelier a keel
40 so stocked with gear of battle, warlike arms,
with cutting swords and mail coats so supplied.
So many treasures lay upon his breast
to fare with him afar on water's main:
no lesser gifts did they provide for him,
45 no treasures of their folk, than those who first
had sent him forth alone across the waves,
when he was young. High over head they flew
a golden banner, then they gave their lord
up to the main to bear him on the waves,
50 and in their hearts a mournful mood arose.
No man can tell, no counsellor in hall,
no hero bold, who took that burden in.

Then Beow the Scylding was that people's king
for many years, renowned among his folk
55 (his father now was gone to other lands),
until the high Halfdane was born to him.
He ruled the grateful Scyldings for a time,
fierce man of war, and lived to ancient age.
Four children did that prince of men bring forth
60 into the world: Hrothgar and Heorogar,
and holy Halga; Yrsa was the fourth,
who (I have heard) was wed to Onela,
the warlike Swede's dear consort and his queen.

To Hrothgar now were given strength in war
65 and battle's glory, that his friends of youth
obeyed him eagerly: so grew his troop
into a mighty company of men.
He had in mind to bring about this work:
to build a greater mead-hall than was known
70 to all the sons of men in time before,
and there within deal out to young and old
all things that God should give into his sway
except the people's lands and lives of men.
I heard he summoned tribes from far and wide
75 throughout the world to ornament this stead,
and in good time that greatest house was built.
Then he whose words had power far and wide
the name of Heorot gave unto his hall.
He did not fail his vow: he gave out rings
80 and treasures at the feast. The hall stood high,
with curving gables roofed—it waited yet
for battle surges and the flames of foes
(and it was no long time before fierce war

85 and hostile swords should wake for bloody hate
between that father and his son-in-law).

A demon, who in darkness dwelt nearby,
a strange and mighty spirit, suffered long
in pain, for every evening he could hear
the loud rejoicing drift from Hrothgar's hall,
90 the music of the harp and voices clear.
One sang aloud a tale that he knew well
of man's beginning in a time far gone:
he sang how the Almighty shaped the earth,
the fair-faced plains encompassed by the sea;
95 he set in triumph glorious Sun and Moon
as shining lamps for all who dwelt below,
and decked the face of earth with limb and leaf,
and last he fashioned life for every kind
of creature that would walk upon the world.
100 And so those men in blissful revels lived—
until that one, the fiend in hell, began
to work his wicked deeds, and sins commit.
Grendel was he named, that specter grim,
a stalker in the marches, widely feared,
105 who ruled the moors, and fen and fastness held.
A land of demons that unhappy man
had guarded long, for he was doomed by God
as kin of Cain, on whom the Lord of all
had wreaked the vengeance for his brother slain—
110 he did not in his evil deed rejoice,
but for his crime, by God's supreme decree,
he was made exile from the race of men.
From him had sprung all evil progeny,
as trolls, and elves, and undead spirits vile;
115 likewise the giants, who had fought with God
so long a time—for that he paid them back.

When night had fallen Grendel marched from moors
to seek the high-roofed house, in which the Danes
had settled, after taking beer, to sleep.
120 Therein he found the troop of noble lords
asleep after their feast; they knew no woe,
no misery of men. That evil thing,
the grim and greedy man, grew eager now,
so fierce and furious, and from their rest
125 he snatched up thirty thanes, and stole away,
exulting in his spoil, to seek his home,
and full of slaughter ran off to his lair.
At dawn, by early light of day, the strength

and battle-skill of Grendel was revealed—
 130 and after such a feast, so great a weeping rose,
 a mighty morning-cry. The glorious king,
 the prince so good of old, sat ill at ease:
 the strong one suffered sorrow for his thanes,
 for now the track of that most hated foe,
 135 that spirit cursed, they saw; it was too much to bear,
 that long and loathsome strife. Nor did they rest
 for but a single night, when once again
 he still more murders made, nor mourned at all
 for wicked deeds: he was too fixed on them.
 140 It was not hard to find a man who sought
 his rest elsewhere, far distant from the hall,
 a bed in outer buildings, for they saw
 how signs and tokens clear told Grendel's hate
 for thanes in hall: but those who kept themselves
 145 secure—and far away—escaped the fiend.
 So Grendel ruled, and fought against the right,
 alone against them all, until there stood
 the best of houses empty and unused.
 Twelve winters' time the Scylding's friendly lord
 150 each grief, each woe, and sorrows great endured.
 By mournful songs it was made known to men
 that Grendel fought with Hrothgar, wreaking woes
 by crime and killing and unceasing war.
 For many years no peace would he allow
 155 to any man among the Danish host,
 nor take away his wrath, nor offer fees—
 no counselor expected splendid gifts
 of recompense from that mad slayer's hand.
 That adversary, shadow of dark death,
 160 pursued the youths and warriors of the troop,
 in ambush hovering; upon the cloudy moors
 he ruled a night unending: men know not
 the secret courses of the fiends of hell.
 So many sins, such injuries so hard
 165 the enemy of men so often worked,
 the horrid lonesome one. In darkest night
 he dwelt in Hrothgar's treasure-laden hall—
 but he could not approach the precious throne
 for God's decree, nor did he know his love.
 170 That was a torment for the Scyldings' lord,
 great grief in mind and breaking of his heart.
 In council many princes often sat
 to judge what would be best for valiant hearts
 to work against this sudden terror's sway.

175 Sometimes at heathen altars they made vows
 and honored idols, bid the bane of souls
 to give them aid against their people's ill.
 Such was their manner then, their heathen hope:
 within their heart of hearts they thought of hell,
 180 for they knew not their Maker, God of Hosts
 and Judge of Deeds, nor could they render praise
 to heaven's King, the glory-wielding One.
 Woe comes to them who must through dreadful need
 cast down their souls into the flame's embrace:
 185 no joy should they expect, nor change at all;
 but well will that folk be who may seek out
 the Lord, their God, after the day of death
 and in the Father's bosom ask for peace.
 So in that grievous season did he seethe,
 190 the son of Halfdane, in a ceaseless brood,
 nor might the wise man turn aside his woe:
 the hardship was too great, enduring long,
 which on that people fell, a dire distress,
 evil and grim, the worst of night attacks.

195 Of Grendel's deeds thethane of Hygelac,
 a good man of the Geats, had learned at home;
 he was the strongest, noble and immense,
 of all who lived in that day of this life.
 A trusty ship he ordered to be made
 200 to ride upon the waves, and said that he
 across the swan-road would that warlord seek,
 the famous king, who now had need of men.
 The wise ones little blamed him for that course
 though he was loved by them; they saw the signs
 205 and urged his valiant mind. That trusty man
 had chosen champions from the Geatish folk,
 the bravest he could find. With fourteen men
 he sought the wooden ship; one led the way,
 a crafty helmsman, to the bounding shore.
 210 The ship was floated out upon the waves
 beneath the headlands. Ready men stepped up
 onto the prow while currents wound and curled,
 the sea against the sand. The warriors bore
 into the vessel's hold their treasures bright
 215 and splendid gear of war; the men shoved off
 and set the ship out-bound upon its quest.
 Across the wavy sea with foaming prow
 the boat flew like a bird upon the wind,
 until the second day, around that time,

220 the ship with curving stem had sailed so far
 that all the voyagers could see the land,
 the shining shore-cliffs and the headlands steep,
 the wide walls of the sea: the journey passed,
 the voyage at an end. The Weather-Geats
 225 stepped quickly out upon the seashore there
 and moored the ship; their mail shirts rattled loud,
 their garb of war. To God they gave their thanks
 who made their journey easy on the waves.

The Scylding's warden—he whose duty was
 230 to guard the seaward cliffs—spied from the wall
 bright shields and ready war-gear borne to shore;
 his thoughts were pressed with the desire to know
 who those men were. He rode his horse to shore,
 the thane of Hrothgar, shaking his strong spear
 235 with mighty hands, demanding with these words:
 “What are you warlike men, in armor clad,
 by mail coats warded, leading this high keel
 across the sea-road hither on the waves?
 Long have I stood my watch upon the shore
 240 and held the sea-guard, that on Danish land
 no foe might harm us with a host of ships.
 Without our knowledge have you come to us,
 you shield-bearers, nor did you ask at all
 our warriors' word of leave, our kinsmen's say.
 245 No greater man in armor have I seen,
 no earl on all the earth, than is your chief;
 he is no mere retainer, so adorned
 with worthy arms—unless his visage lie,
 his peerless form. Now must I know your kin,
 250 lest you in Danish land shall farther fare
 and be considered spies. You foreign men,
 far-sailing folk, hear now my simple thought:
 haste is best to make known whence you come.”

To him the chief, the leader of the band,
 255 unlocked his hoard of words and answered thus:
 “We are the people of the Geatish tribe
 and Hygelac's companions at his hearth.
 My father was well-known to many folk,
 a noble leader. Ecgtheow was his name.
 260 He lived for many years, until he turned
 and left the world of men, an aged soul;
 and all the wise throughout the earth so wide
 remember well and readily his name.
 We come with friendly hearts to seek your lord,

265 the son of Halfdane, guardian of his folk.
 Advise us well: our errand with the king,
 the Danish lord, is great. I think it best
 for nothing to be secret: you must know
 if it is truly as we hear men say,
 270 that with the Danes some foe—I know not what—
 some hidden persecutor in dark nights
 shows through his horrid deeds unheard-of hate,
 great harm and slaughter. Counsel I can give
 to Hrothgar, through the greatness of my heart:
 275 how, wise and good, he may outmatch the fiend
 and cool the seething sorrows in his breast—
 if change of fate should ever come to him,
 a turning-back, a help for baleful care;
 else they shall always bear this time of woe,
 280 this dire distress; that best of halls shall stand
 forever useless in its lofty place.”
 The warden, sitting on his horse, replied,
 the fearless officer: “Between these two
 the sharp shield-warrior wishing to think well
 285 must make distinction: between words and works.
 I sense this band is loyal to our lord.
 Go on ahead and bear your arms and gear;
 I’ll show the way, and also will command
 my thanes to guard your vessel from all foes,
 290 to hold in honor this your new-tarred ship
 upon our shore, until its curving prow
 bears back to Weathermark across the sea
 you men so dear, such doers of good deeds—
 if you endure that fated battle-storm.”
 295 They then fared forth; the boat sat still behind,
 the wide-hulled vessel rested on its rope,
 on anchor fast; above their cheek-guards shone
 the images of boars adorned with gold
 and hardened by hot flames; the warlike man
 300 in battle-mask gave them a safe escort.
 They moved in haste together; soon they saw
 the timbered hall that gleamed with splendid gold,
 where dwelt the king: that was of earthly halls
 foremost in fame for all men here below,
 305 whose light did shine upon so many lands.
 The valiant one then pointed out to them
 the bright house of brave men, that they might go
 directly there; that warrior turned his horse
 and thereupon he spoke a word to them:
 310 “Now must I go; almighty Father’s grace

keep you upon your journey safe from harm.
I must return to watch the sea, to guard
against approaching companies of foes.”

- The street was cobbled stone which led the way
315 for all those men together; mail coats shone,
strong gear of war hand-linked; bright iron rings
in armor sang. Up to the hall they came
in fearsome armor dressed, sea-weary men;
against the wall they set war-tested shields
320 and sat down on the benches of the hall.
War-shirts and battle-harness rang aloud;
the seamen’s ash-wood spears together stood,
steel-gray upon their tips; that iron troop
was honored by their arms.
- A haughty man
- 325 after the lineage of those warriors asked:
“Whence do you bear these ornamented shields,
these steel-gray shirts, and mask-helms, and this heap
of battle-shafts? I am the door-keeper
and herald of the king: I have not seen
330 so many foreign men more brave in looks.
I guess that you seek Hrothgar out of pride
and might of mind—and not as exiled men.”
- The valiant one made answer to him then,
a proud prince of the Geats, hard under helm:
- 335 “We are the thanes of Hygelac, our lord,
his table-fellows; Beowulf is my name.
I wish to speak to Halfdane’s son, your chief,
and tell my errand to the famous king,
if, at his wish, we might that good man greet.”
- 340 Then Wulfgar spoke; he was a Wendel prince,
his character well known to many men,
his might and wisdom: “I will ask the king,
the friend of Danes, distributor of rings,
about your journey here, as you request;
345 and swiftly shall I bring you that reply
which my good lord will think to give to me.”
- He quickly turned to where old Hrothgar sat,
the hoary king, amid his troop of earls;
that valiant man went up until he stood
350 beside the shoulder of the Danish lord—
the custom of the troop he knew quite well.
Then Wulfgar spoke unto his friendly lord:
“Here have arrived some people of the Geats
who far have sailed across the ocean’s spread,

355 and Beowulf do these warriors call their chief.
They have petitioned that they may with you,
my king, exchange their words. Do not refuse
to offer them your answer, gracious lord;
they seem in war-equipment to be worth
360 an earl's respect; indeed their chief is strong,
who hither led those warriors on the way."

Then Hrothgar spoke, the guardian of the Danes:
"I knew him as a boy; his father's name
was Ecgtheow, to whom Hrethel of the Geats
365 did give his only daughter for his wife;
and now his heir has come in strength, to seek
a trusty friend. The sailors who brought back
the Geatish gift-coins hither for their thanks,
they said he has the strength of thirty men
370 within his hand-grip, and is brave in war.
I think that holy God has sent this man
in mercy to the Danes, against our foe,
the dreadful Grendel. I shall offer gifts
to that good man for daring in his heart.
375 Go hastily, command them to come in
and see the band of kinsmen all together;
and also say these words: that they shall be
most welcome to the people of the Danes."

So Wulfgar to the Geats returned this word:
380 My lord victorious, chief of Danes, has said
that well he knows your line's nobility,
and you, hard-minded men, are welcome here
to meet our lord across the surging sea.
Now may you go ahead and Hrothgar meet,
385 clad in your warlike gear and battle-helms;
but let your shields and wooden shaft of war
await back here the outcome of your words."

The ruler rose—around him many ranks
of men-at-arms, a heap of mighty thanes;
390 some waited there and watched the battle-gear,
as their brave lord had bid. Then swiftly went
the Geats together, as the guard did lead,
beneath the roof of Heorot; in they came,
men brave in battle, hardy under helms,
395 until they stood upon the Danish hearth.

Then Beowulf spoke—on him the mail coat shone,
a net of armor sewn by skill of smith:
"Be well, o Hrothgar! I amthane and kin
of Hygelac the Geat, and in my youth

400 I took on many deeds of glorious fame.
 The matter of this Grendel was made know
 to me in my home country: sailors say
 this hall stands idle, and no man enjoys
 this best of buildings, when the evening light
 405 is hidden under heaven's vaulting veil.
 The best among my people, wisest men,
 advised me thus, king Hrothgar, you to seek,
 because they knew the might of my strong arm:
 they had looked on when I returned from war,
 410 bloodstained from fiends, when I had bound five foes,
 destroyed a race of trolls, and on the waves
 slew water-beasts by night; how I endured
 through dire distress, avenged the evil cares
 of Weather-Geats, and ground their angry foes
 415 to dust—they brought that woe upon themselves!
 And now with Grendel shall I meet alone,
 and hold assembly with that troubling fiend.
 Now I will ask a single boon from you,
 the Scylding's lord and king of the Bright-Danes,
 420 that you will not refuse me, warrior's guard,
 the people's friend, now I have come so far:
 that I alone, and this my troop of earls,
 this heap of hardy men, may Heorot cleanse.
 I also heard that this disturbing wretch
 425 cared not for weapons, out of recklessness;
 so shall I scorn—as Hygelac, my lord,
 may kindly think of me—to wear a sword
 or bear a wide and yellow shield to war;
 but I shall grapple with the fiend by hand
 430 and fight for life against the hated foe;
 whomever death will seize must put his trust
 in judgment of the Lord. If Grendel then
 is given victory, I do expect
 he fearlessly will eat the prince of Geats
 435 within this war-hall, as he often did
 this mighty host of men. My body then
 you need not bury; he will bear me off
 (if death should take me) stained with dripping gore—
 that wanderer shall taste my bloody corpse,
 440 devour unmournfully, and with my blood
 will mark his moor-retreat; no longer shall
 you need to worry for my body's care.
 But if the battle takes me, send away
 to Hygelac this best of battle-shrouds,
 445 this greatest shirt of mail that guards my breast;

it's Weland's work and Hrethel's legacy.
The turn of fate goes always as it must."

Then Hrothgar spoke, the guardian of the Danes:
"For battles, my friend Beowulf, and for grace
450 you sought us out. Your father brought about
the greatest feud by fighting: by his hand
was Heatholaf amid the Wolf-tribe slain.
Then for the fear of war the Storm-Geat kin
could hold him not. The Scylding folk he sought
455 across the rolling waves, the Southern-Danes.
It was still early in my rule, and I
still newly held the spacious Danish realm,
the heroes' treasure-town, since Heorogar,
my elder kin and brother, Halfdane's son,
460 was dead: and he was better far than I!
I settled then that feud with offered gold
and sent the Wylfings ancient treasure-gifts
across the waters; Ecgtheow swore me oaths.
Upon my soul, it gives me pains to say
465 to any man what Grendel has performed,
what harms in Heorot, with his thoughts of hate,
what sudden evil deeds he did to me;
My hall-troop wanes, as fate sweeps them away
in Grendel's terror. Easily may God
470 bring to an end this witless ravager!
How often have my warriors, drunk with beer,
made pledges over ale-cups to await
the war of Grendel with their fearsome swords.
Then in the morning when the daylight shone
475 this mead-hall was all stained with dripping gore
and all the bench-planks wet, suffused with blood;
and I therefore had fewer loyal men
in my dear troop, since death had taken them.
Sit down to feast, and loose your thoughts to men,
480 your deeds of glory, as your heart inclines."

Then in the beer-hall was a bench made clear
for all the Geats together; there they went,
men strong in heart and proud of might, to sit.
Athane, observing duty, bore in hand
485 the plated ale-cup, poured the shining wine.
The bard sang clear in Heorot; no small troop
of Dane and Storm-Geat heroes now rejoiced.

Now Unferth, son of Ecglaf, made a speech,
unbound his fighting words, from where he sat

490 at foot of Scyldings' king. To him the quest
 of valiant Beowulf seemed a great offense:
 for he could never grant that any man
 of middle-earth beneath the heaven's spread
 should care for glories more than he himself:
 495 "Are you the Beowulf who contested strength
 with Breca, swimming on the sea's expanse,
 where you and he for pride and foolish boast
 risked life on ocean depths? No man at all,
 no friend nor foe, could turn you from the deed,
 500 your reckless venture, when you swam the waves.
 The sea-streams you enfolded with your arms,
 traversing water-straits with weaving hands
 and gliding on the ocean. Waves welled up,
 the floods of winter; in the water's grasp
 505 you labored seven nights: he outmatched you,
 and proved his greater strength upon the sea.
 At dawn the sea bore him to Romerike;
 from there he sought his home, the Brondings' land,
 the fair and peaceful town where he did rule
 510 and held his folk and treasures. Beanstan's son
 fulfilled his every vow he made with you.
 So I expect for you a worse result,
 though you succeed in every battle-storm
 and dreadful war, if you should dare to wait
 515 a single night when Grendel's time draws near."
 Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, made reply:
 "Now listen, Unferth, friend: of Breca's deeds
 you've spoken many things while drunk on beer.
 In truth I tell you I have greater might,
 520 more strength upon the waves, than any man.
 As young men we agreed and made a vow—
 for we were yet in youth—that on the sea
 we'd venture life; that vow we carried out.
 We both bore naked swords in our strong hands
 525 when we swam out: we thought to guard ourselves
 from monstrous fish. But he could not swim far
 from me, nor move more quickly on the waves—
 nor would I swim from him. As one we swam
 upon the sea a time of five long nights,
 530 until the waters drove us two apart:
 the welling floods, the coldest of all storms,
 the night descending, and the northern wind
 did battle with us; then the waves grew fierce,
 and ocean fish were roused and stirred to rage.
 535 Against those enemies my shirt of mail,

its hard rings locked by hand, gave me great help;
 the braided battle-mail lay on my breast
 adorned with gold. One dragged me to the depths,
 the hostile fiend, and grimly gripped me fast;
 540 however, it was granted me by fate
 that I should reach him with my war-sword's point—
 the rush of battle carried off my foe,
 the mighty water-beast, through my own hand.
 "These wicked creatures often pressed me hard,
 545 but with my sword I served them, as was fit.
 Those evil-doers took no joy from me,
 to sit around the sea floor at their feast
 and eat their fill, but when the morning came
 they lay upon the waves, beside the shore,
 550 all wounded by my sword, all put to sleep,
 that never more they hinder sailor's ways
 across the ocean deep. Then from the east
 God's shining beacon rose, and brought its light;
 the waves fell still, and I could see the cliffs,
 555 the windy headland walls. Fate often saves
 the man undoomed, who proves his valor well!
 And thus it fell to me that with my sword
 I slew nine water-beasts. I have not heard
 of harder fighting under heaven's arch,
 560 nor more forlorn a man in ocean streams;
 however I escaped alive the grasp
 of hostile foes, though weary of my trek.
 The sea then bore me up on Finnish land,
 the flood and welling waters with the tide.
 565 From you I have not heard at all such deeds,
 such skill in war and in the dread of swords.
 Never has Breca yet, nor either one
 of you in battle-play so boldly worked
 with bloodstained swords—that is no idle boast!—
 570 though you became a killer to your kin,
 your brothers dear: for that you shall in hell
 endure damnation, though your wit avail.
 In truth I say to you, o Ecglaf's son,
 that never Grendel would such horrors wreak,
 575 the dire disturber, on your lord and king,
 such harm in Heorot, if your mind were great
 or soul as fierce in battle as you claim;
 but he has found that he need not much fear
 the dreadful weapons of victorious Danes,
 580 you people's enmity. He takes his toll,
 he spares no Scylding folk, but has his way—

he sleeps, destroys, expects no fight from Danes.
But I shall soon show him my Geatish strength
and warlike zeal. Whoever would return
585 courageous to his mead, let him come back
when morning light, the sun in radiance clad,
shines out tomorrow over sons of men.”

The treasure-giver was in joy at this,
gray-haired and battle-brave; the Bright-Danes’ king
590 believed his offered help; in Beowulf’s words
the people’s guard had heard his firm resolve.

Then heroes’ laughter rose, a pleasant noise,
and words were winsome. Then came Wealhtheow forth,
the queen to Hrothgar; mindful of their ways
595 that lady decked in gold did greet the men
within the hall, and that most noble wife
first gave the cup unto the East-Dane’s lord,
the land’s defense, beloved of his folk,
and bade him cheerful be at taking beer;
600 the mighty king took cup and feast with joy.
The Helming’s lady went around and gave
the precious cup to every group of men,
the band and boy-troop, till it chanced that she,
the queen adorned with rings, to Beowulf bore
605 the mead-cup, virtuous in mind. She met
the Geatish prince, and wise in words gave thanks
to God, for that this joy should come to her:
that she might trust in any man on earth
to be a help against those wicked deeds.
610 The warrior, fierce in battle, took the cup
from Wealhtheow, and he spoke, prepared for war.

Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, made this speech:
“I thought, when I set out upon the waves
and sat the sea-boat with my troop of men,
615 that I would surely work your people’s will
or fall in death, held fast in fiendish grip.
I shall perform a noble deed of strength—
or in this mead-hall live my final day.”

These words well pleased the queen, the Geat’s great boast;
620 the noble lady, gold-adorned, returned
to sit beside her lord.

Within the hall
were brave words spoken, as had been before—
the folk in joy, victorious people’s noise—
until at last the son of Halfdane wished
625 to seek his evening rest; he knew their foe

intended strife against that highest hall,
when sunlight had been seen to fade away
and night had deepened over all the earth,
and shapes of shadow, dark beneath the sky,
630 came gliding out. The troop then all arose.
Hrothgar to Beowulf came, and wished him luck,
gave him control of Heorot, with these words:
“Never have I yielded up this hall,
the great house of the Danes, to any man,
635 since I could raise my hand and hold a shield—
but now to you. Have now and hold it well,
the best of houses: mind your fame, and show
your mighty valor—watch against the foe!
You shall not lack for anything you want
640 if you achieve this mighty deed and live.”

Then Hrothgar, Scylding’s shelter, went away
among his troop of heroes, from the hall;
the war-chief wished to seek Queen Wealhtheow out
for his bed-mate. The glorious King of All
645 against mad Grendel—as men learned—ordained
a hall-guard: he performed that special charge
and for the Danish lord kept watch for trolls.
Indeed the prince of Geats had ready trust
in his bold strength, and the Creator’s grace.
650 He took the iron mail coat from his breast,
his helm from head, and gave his splendid sword,
the best of weapons, to the serving-thane,
and ordered him to guard his battle-gear.
The trusty Beowulf spoke these boasting words,
655 the prince of Geats, before he lay in bed:
“I count myself no less in battle-strength
or warlike deeds, than Grendel does himself;
therefore I will not slay him with my sword
and take away his life, although I could.
660 He has not skill to strike against my life
or hew my shield, though he is strong in war:
therefore this night we shall forgo the sword
if he should dare come weaponless to war;
and so wise God, the holy lord, will give
665 the glory on whichever hand seems best.”

The battle-brave one bent his head to rest;
the bolster then received the warrior’s cheek,
and by him many sailors swift lay down
on hall-beds resting. None of them then thought
670 that he should ever more his dear home see,

his folk, the noble town where he was bred;
for they had learned that violent death had seized
too many Danish men in that wine-hall.
But to the Geats the Lord gave strength in war,
675 his aid and help, that through the might of one
they all should overcome their enemy.
This truth is well made known: that mighty God
has always ruled over the kin of men.

In dark night came the shadow gliding out.
680 The warriors slept who now must hold the guard
of that high-gabled house—all save for one
(for it was known, that sinful foe could not,
if God wished not, draw them into the dark);
and he, in anger, watching for the foe,
685 enraged, abode the outcome of the fight.

On Grendel stalked from moor through misty hills,
who bore God's wrath; the killer thought to snare
no few of mankind's sons in that high hall.
Beneath the clouds he went, until he saw
690 the wine-house very near, all decked with gold;
though many times before he'd ventured out
to seek the home of Hrothgar, never yet
had he those hall-thanes met with harder luck
in all his days of life. The joyless man
695 now reached the hall: the door gave way at once
at his hand's touch, though firm with iron bands;
and, thinking harm, for he was now enraged,
he swung apart the hall-mouth. Quickly then
the fiend in anger trod the gleaming floor;
700 a dreadful light, like flame, shone from his eyes.
He saw within the hall those many men,
the sleeping kin-troop of the warrior-youths.
His spirit laughed; the dread disturber thought
that from those men he'd sever life from breast
705 and feast his fill, before the dawn arose—
yet fate did not allow that he consume
still more of human kind from that night on.
The mightythane of Hygelac beheld
how that base ravager wished to proceed
710 with sudden strikes. Nor did the foe delay,
but at the first occasion swiftly seized
a sleeping man, and rent him without qualm;
he bit the bone-case, drinking blood in gouts,
and swallowed him in chunks; at once he ate
715 the whole of that man's corpse, from foot to hand.

Then, stepping forward, with his hand he seized
the strong-willed man in bed. The fiend reached out—
but swiftly Beowulf grabbed and pressed his arm
with hateful thoughts. And now the wretch discerned
720 that nowhere on the earth, in worldly realms,
in any other man had he yet known
a greater hand-grip. In his mind he quailed,
his heart afraid, yet he could not escape.
He yearned to be away, he wished to flee
725 to cover, seek the company of fiends;
this fight was unlike any that he'd known
in all his days.

The thane of Hygelac,
that trusty man, recalled his evening speech:
he stood upright and seized the monster fast.
730 Then fingers burst—the giant turned to run—
the earl stepped forward. Grendel thought to flee
whereso he might, to reach some distant place
and steal away into his fen-retreat—
he felt the finger-strength in his foe's grip.
735 That was a grievous journey which he made,
the harmful enemy, to Heorot hall.
The house resounded; every Danish earl,
each city-dweller keen let out his ale.
The wardens of that hall both fought in wrath
740 and clamor filled the place; so that it seemed
a wonder that the wine-hall could withstand
those fighters fierce, or that the fairest house
fell not upon the earth; but it was firm
inside and out with bands of iron, smithed
745 with cunning skill. There many mead-benches
all trimmed in gold were pried up from the floor
(so have I heard) where fought those angry two.
No Scylding counsellor had ever thought
that any man in any way might break
750 and shatter that great hall, adorned with bone,
or pull it down by craft, unless hot flame
should swallow all. A new and awful sound
arose at once; the Danes were struck with fear
as each of them heard crying from the hall—
755 a dreadful lay he sang, God's enemy,
the song of his defeat, the slave of hell
bemoaning wounds. He held him firm in hand
who was of all the mightiest of arm,
the strongest man, on that day of this life.

760 That noble guard would not for anything
 allow that murderer to leave alive,
 nor thought his life of use to any folk.
 Then many thanes of Beowulf drew their swords,
 their heirlooms old; their famous prince's life
 765 they would defend in any way they could.
 The hardy-minded warriors did not know,
 when they began to fight, and thought to hew
 on every side, to seek his soul: no sword
 would bite their foe, not even choicest steel
 770 upon the earth—for he had ward off
 all mighty weapons, every edge, by spells.
 Yet still his life-departing was to be
 a wretched end, on that day of this life;
 that alien spirit was to journey far
 775 into the grasp of fiends. Then did he find,
 who formerly had wrought so many sins,
 so many griefs for men—God's foe was he—
 his body would not serve him, for his hand
 was held too fast by Hygelac's bold thane:
 780 each to the other, while he lived, was loathed.
 A mortal wound that dreadful foe received,
 when on his shoulder grew a mighty rend
 where sinews sprung apart, and bone-locks burst—
 and Beowulf had the glory of the fight.
 785 So Grendel, sick for life, was forced to flee
 and seek his joyless home beneath fen-slopes;
 he knew his own life's end had surely come,
 his count of days. So all the Dane's desires
 had come to pass through Beowulf's battle-rush:
 790 and he who had come far, both wise and bold,
 had cleansed and rescued Hrothgar's hall from ill.
 and now rejoiced in his night's work of fame.
 The prince of Geats had proved his boast to Danes
 and mended all the grief and evil care
 795 which they endured, and for their direst need
 had suffered no small misery and pain.
 That was a token clear, when after all
 the battle-bold one laid the hand aloft,
 the arm and shoulder, all of Grendel's grip
 800 together there beneath the vaulted roof.

By morning many warriors (I have learned)
 stood 'round the gift-hall; and from far and near
 across wide ways fared chiefs to see that sight,
 the foot-prints of the foe. His loss of life

805 did not seem sorrowful to those who saw
 the track of his defeat: how he drew off
 with weary soul, in combat overcome,
 death-doomed and put to flight, dragging away
 his bloody foot-tracks to the monsters' mere.
 810 There water welled with blood, a horrid swirl
 of seething waves all mixed with battle-gore,
 with hot blood mingled. Hid in his fen-home
 the death-doomed one, now joyless, laid down life,
 his heathen soul—and hell received him there.
 815 The old companions, just like many youths
 from joyful chase returning, from the lake
 came back astride their mares with spirits high,
 the warriors on white horses. There the fame
 of Beowulf was retold; and many said
 820 that neither south nor north between the seas
 on all the spacious earth was anyone
 beneath the sky's expanse a better man
 to bear a shield, or worthier of rule.
 They did not truly blame their lord at all,
 825 the gracious Hrothgar: he was a good king.
 At times the brave ones let their horses run,
 their fallow mares, and race where ways seemed fair
 to them, the paths well-known for excellence.
 At times the king's good thane, a man possessed
 830 of songs of glory, mindful of past tales,
 who well remembered many sayings old,
 found one word to another truly bound:
 this man began once more to stir up songs
 of Beowulf's venture, and to well relate
 835 a clever tale, exchanging many words.
 He spoke of everything which he had heard
 of Sigmund's deeds of valor, much unknown:
 the Wælsing's battles, journeys far and wide,
 the feuds and fearsome deeds which sons of men
 840 knew nothing of—except for Fitela,
 when he would tell his nephew some such things.
 For they were always, when some strife arose,
 companions to each other in their need,
 and many troll-kin fell before their swords.
 845 No little glory fell to Sigmund's name
 upon his death, that hardy man of war,
 since he had slain a dragon foe, the guard
 of a great hoard. Beneath a hoary stone
 that noble son attempted all alone
 850 the daring deed (Fitela was not there);

it chanced however that his sword struck through
 the splendid worm, so that the lordly blade
 stuck in the wall: the dragon had been slain.
 So by his valor had that fighter wrought
 855 that he might use the ring-hoard at his choice;
 he loaded up the sea-boat, Wæls's heir,
 bore treasures bright into the ship's deep breast—
 meanwhile the dragon melted in its heat.
 He was most widely famed of wanderers,
 860 that warriors' guard, renowned for deeds of might
 in every tribe—so had he prospered much;
 but Heremod's resolve in war had failed,
 his strength and spirit. He had been betrayed
 amid his foes, delivered swiftly up
 865 into their power. Waves of woeful care
 had lamed him for so long: he had become
 a life-long grief to his own folk and kin,
 to all the princes. Many men of wit
 in former times would likewise often mourn
 870 the venture of that mighty-hearted man,
 they who had sought from him relief from harms:
 that he, a prince's son, should flourish so,
 receive ancestral rank, and rule the folk,
 the stronghold and the hoard, the heroes' realm,
 875 the Scyldings' home. The thane of Hygelac
 became a gracious friend to all mankind—
 but sin took over Heremod within.
 Some time they traveled down the fallow track,
 contending on their mares. The light of dawn
 880 rose up and hastened on. Then many men
 went up, with mighty hearts, to that high hall,
 to see the wonder-work. The king himself
 from bridal-bower trod, the ring-hoard's guard,
 the glorious one among a mighty troop,
 885 well-known for excellence; his queen came too,
 traversed the mead-path with her maiden train.
 Then Hrothgar spoke—he came up to the hall,
 upon the step he stood, looked on the roof
 so lofty, trimmed with gold and Grendel's arm:
 890 "Thanks be to the almighty for this sight.
 So much I suffered from this hated foe,
 such grief from Grendel; but the heaven's guard,
 wonder after wonder can he work.
 Not long ago I did not hope to see
 895 relief for any woes, when bloodstained stood

the best of houses, decked in battle-gore,
 and woe reached far and wide to every sage,
 who did not think they might forever guard
 the people's fastness from such hateful things,
 900 from sprites and demons. But a man has now
 performed the deed, through power of the Lord,
 which all of us could never work before
 for all our skill. Indeed, it may be said,
 whatever maiden of the race of men
 905 brought forth that son, if she is still alive,
 the God of Old was gracious unto her
 in bearing of her child. Now, Beowulf, you,
 o best of men, I as a son will love
 and hold in heart; keep well this kinship new.
 910 Nor shall you lack for anything you want
 in my possession. Oftentimes for less
 have I assigned reward to lower men,
 and honored those of weaker war with gifts.
 You have by your own deeds brought it about
 915 that ever shall your glory live in life.
 To you the Lord of All, who glory wields,
 has paid out good, as he has ever done!"

Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 "That fight, the work of glory, we performed
 920 with great good will, and boldly did we test
 a strength unknown. I rather wished that you
 might see the very fiend himself, your foe,
 among these treasures fallen. Him I thought
 to bind in haste upon a bed of death
 925 with hardy grasp, that he for my hand's strength
 should lie in fear of life; but his flesh failed,
 and I could not, for God did not so wish,
 prevent his leave, no matter how I held
 my mortal foe: too mighty was the fiend
 930 in his escape. But he gave up his hand,
 his arm and shoulder both, to save his life.
 The wretched man no comfort bought by that:
 no longer lives your hated enemy,
 oppressed by sins, but in an evil grasp
 935 his wound has clutched him close with deadly bonds;
 so must the man all stained by crime abide
 the mighty judgment of bright-shining God."

Then Unferth, Ecglaf's son, grew quieter
 in boasting warlike deeds, when princes saw
 940 by that earl's craft the hand above the roof,
 the fingers of the foe; each nail before

was most like steel, the heathen talons grim,
 the warrior's arm, unpleasant and abhorred.
 And all then said, no sword of hardy men,
 945 no iron old and good, could touch the foe,
 that it should harm his bloody battle-hand.

Then Hrothgar ordered Heorot be adorned
 by skillful hands; and many were those folk,
 both men and wives, who dressed that house of wine,
 950 prepared the guest-hall. Weavings on the walls
 shone bright as gold, and every man therein
 who looked on them saw many wondrous scenes.
 Though firmly made by iron bands within
 that building bright had been much broken down,
 955 the hinges burst apart; the roof alone
 survived all sound, when that disturber, stained
 by deeds of violence, ran away in flight,
 desperate for life. It is no easy thing
 to flee one's death—let him attempt who will,
 960 yet he shall find the place where sons of men
 and all who dwell below who bear a soul
 are bound to go, where, after this life's feast,
 his form of flesh must sleep on bed of death.

Now came the time when Halfdane's son desired
 965 to go into the hall, and take the feast.
 I have not heard of any other folk
 with greater host, that better bore themselves
 around their treasure-lord. They bowed themselves
 upon the benches, glorious men, rejoiced
 970 in food and feast; their kinsmen, strong in mind,
 Hrothgar and Hrothulf both, did fairly drink
 from many mead-cups there in that high hall.
 With friends was Heorot filled; no evil acts
 the people of the Scyldings yet performed.

975 The king then gave to Beowulf Halfdane's sword,
 a golden sign, a battle-flag adorned,
 a helm and shirt of mail, as a reward
 for his success. Thus many saw him bear
 the famous precious sword before their eyes—
 980 so Beowulf prospered greatly in the hall,
 and needed feel no shame for that reward
 before the warriors. I have never known
 the man who gave four treasures, worked with gold,
 in such a friendly way to any else
 985 upon the ale-bench. On that helmet's crest
 a ridge, all wound with wire, gave strong defense:

no sharpened sword could ever fiercely cleave
 that storm-hard helm, when with his angry foes
 the soldier with his shield must strive in war.
 990 The earl's protector ordered then eight mares,
 their cheeks with splendid bridles decked, be led
 into the hall. On one of these there sat
 a saddle made with skill, adorned with jewels:
 that was the battle-seat of the high king,
 995 the son of Halfdane, when he wished to work
 the play of swords—and when he rode in front
 his well-known strength in battle never failed
 when corpses fell. The Danes' defender then
 to Beowulf gave possession of these gifts,
 1000 of steeds and weapons, bade him use them well.
 So manfully the famous king, the guard
 of heroes' hoard, repaid that battle-rush
 with mares and treasures, that a man who wants
 to speak right truth will never fault his gifts.
 1005 And then the lord of earls to every man
 who crossed the sea with Beowulf gave great gifts,
 an heirloom each, and ordered gold be paid
 for him whom Grendel slew so wickedly—
 and more he would have slain, had not wise God,
 1010 and Beowulf's soul, prevented such a fate;
 For then the Maker ruled the kin of men
 as still he does. So is this knowledge best,
 the forethought of the heart: much must he bear
 of things both good and ill, who will enjoy
 1015 the world for long, in these the days of strife.

There was both song and music all at once
 before the battle-chief: the harp was touched
 and story often told, when Hallgamen,
 the bard of Hrothgar, from the mead-bench spoke
 1020 of Finn's descendant: when that peril struck
 the Half-Dane heroes, and when Hnæf their king,
 the Scylding's lord, must fall on Frisian field.

No cause indeed had Hildeburh to praise
 the faith of Frisians; guiltlessly was she
 1025 deprived of dear ones at the play of shields,
 of son and brother, they who rushed to fate,
 struck down by spears—that was a mournful wife!
 Not vainly did Hoc's daughter moan that end
 when morning came, when she should look upon
 1030 the murder of her kin, beneath the sky,

where she had had the greatest earthly joy.
 The thanes of Finn had all been carried off
 by battle, save for just a few, so he
 could not fight out upon the meeting-field
 1035 the war with Hengest, prince's thane, nor drive
 those woe-survivors out by force of arms.
 Therefore they made accord: that they would yield
 one-half the floor to him, the hall and throne,
 and they with Frisian sons would share control;
 1040 and at the treasure-giving Folcwald's son
 would every day do honor to the Danes,
 present to Hengest's war-band rings and gifts,
 as much of precious treasure, plated gold,
 as that with which he'd cheer the Frisian kin
 1045 in that beer-hall. So on both sides they made
 a pledge of lasting peace; and Finn, without dispute,
 declared to Hengest valiantly, by oaths,
 that he would honorably rule that host
 of woe-survivors by his council's word,
 1050 that none, by words or works, should break their truce,
 nor ever mention through malicious guile
 how they, the kingless ones, when need compelled
 had followed him who slew their gracious lord;
 if any Frisian by a daring speech
 1055 recalled that murderous hostility,
 then would the sword's edge settle all complaint.
 They raised a pyre then, and shining gold
 they hefted from the hoard; upon the flames
 that best of Scylding warriors was laid out.
 1060 Upon the pyre the blood-stained shirts of mail
 and golden swine on helms, hard iron boars,
 could easily be seen, and many earls
 destroyed by wounds: no few collapsed in death.
 Then Hildeburh commanded on Hnaef's pyre
 1065 her own dear son committed to the flames,
 his bone-case burnt, and in the fire laid down
 upon his uncle's breast. The lady mourned,
 lamenting with sad songs. War-smoke arose
 and wound into the sky; beside the mound
 1070 the pyre of slain ones roared. Heads melted then,
 and gaping wounds and hateful flesh-bites burst
 as blood sprang out; the flame, the greedy guest,
 now swallowed all of those whom war took off
 from both those folk. Their glory had now past.
 1075 Those warriors, reft of friends, to Friesland went
 to seek their houses, homes and stronghold high.

Then Hengest passed a deadly winter there,
 remained with Finn; he eagerly recalled
 his homeland far, though he could not yet leave
 1080 to drive his ring-prowed ship across the sea—
 the waters welled with storm, and fought with wind,
 and winter locked the waves in icy bonds—
 until another year came to those yards,
 as it still does: the springtime, glory-bright,
 1085 its proper season always shall observe.
 Then gone was winter, fair the breast of earth;
 the guest, the exile, yearned to quit the town—
 but now he thought more of revenge for grief
 than of sea-journeys: how he might incite
 1090 a hostile meeting, and within that house
 recall the sons of Jutes—for he did not
 refused the world's advice, when Hunlaf's son
 laid in his lap that battle-shining blade,
 the best of swords, whose edges were well known
 1095 among the Jutes. So on bold-hearted Finn
 again fell sword-destruction in his home,
 when of the grim attack and sorrows sore
 Guthlaf and Oslaf spoke, and blamed their host
 for dealing woe after their sea-crossing;
 1100 their restless rage held not within their hearts.
 Then was the hall made red with life of foes,
 and Finn was slain, the king amid his men,
 and his queen carried off. The Scylding troops
 brought back that earth-king's treasure to their ships,
 1105 the well-wrought jewels and brooches decked with gems
 they found within Finn's home. Across the sea
 they bore that noble lady to the Danes
 and brought her back among her folk again.

The lay was sung, the gleeman's tale at end.
 1110 Again the sound of joy arose and rang
 from every bench; the bearers gave out wine
 from wondrous ewers. Wealhtheow then came forth:
 wearing a golden ring she walked where those two sat,
 the king and his nephew: they both were yet at peace
 1115 and to each other true. At Hrothgar's feet there sat
 his spokesman, Unferth; all of them believed his heart,
 that he was great of mind (though maybe to his kin
 not kind at play of swords). The Scylding lady spoke:
 "Receive this cup, my dear and noble lord,
 1120 who give out treasure. Be in joy, my king,
 gold-friend of men, address the Geatish band

with gentle words, as any man must do.
 Be gracious to them, mindful of the gifts
 you have from far and near. I heard it said
 1125 that you would take this soldier for a son.
 The bright ring-hall of Heorot has been cleansed;
 give many gifts, therefore, as a reward
 while yet you may—and leave to your own kin
 the folk and kingdom, when you must depart
 1130 to meet your fate. My Hrothulf, I well know,
 would rule the youths in honor, friend of Danes,
 if you should sooner leave the world than he;
 I think he will repay our sons with good
 when he recalls what honors we conveyed
 1135 for glory and good will in his own youth.”
 She passed beside the bench where sat her boys,
 Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the heroes’ sons,
 the young men all; the trusty man there sat
 between those brothers, Beowulf of the Geats.
 1140 To him a cup was borne, a summons kind
 was offered him in words, and twisted gold
 presented with good will, a shirt of mail,
 two arm-bands, rings, the greatest collar yet
 that I have heard of over all the earth.
 1145 No better treasure know I under sky,
 no hero’s wealth, since Hama carried off
 the Brosings’ necklace, jewel and precious brooch,
 to his bright stronghold—he who fled the snares
 of Eormenric, and chose eternal gain.
 1150 That ring bore Hygelac on his last quest,
 old Swerting’s grandson, when beneath his sign
 he fought to save his treasure, guard his spoils;
 but fate took him away when he for pride
 sought woe and warfare in the Frisian lands.
 1155 He bore that collar on the bowl of waves,
 a mighty prince adorned with mighty jewel—
 and fell beneath his shield. Then to the Franks
 his body, armor, and the ring all passed.
 And lesser warriors rummaged through the slain
 1160 after the carnage; Geatish dead filled up
 that place of corpses.
 Now the hall again
 swelled up with noise. Then Wealhtheow spoke these words,
 and said before the troop: “Enjoy this ring,
 young man, dear Beowulf, with good fortune use
 1165 this shirt of mail, the wealth of Danish folk,
 and prosper well, and prove yourself with skill,

and generously counsel both my boys—
 for that I shall remember your reward.
 You have so well performed that far and near
 1170 for generations men shall praise your name,
 as widely as the sea surrounds the earth,
 the wind-home and the walls. Be joyful, prince,
 while yet you live; for you I wish good things
 and precious treasure. You who hold our joy,
 1175 be just in dealing with my noble son.
 Here every earl is to the others true,
 gentle in mind and loyal to his lord;
 the thanes are one, the people all prepared:
 these drunken men shall do as I command.”
 1180 She went then to her seat. The best of feasts
 began, and men drank wine. They knew not fate,
 the grim decree of old, as it would fall
 on many earls when evening came that day,
 and Hrothgar went to rest in his own house.
 1185 A mighty host of earls guarded the hall,
 as they had often done. They cleared the boards
 and spread out beds and bolsters on the floor.
 One of those beer-drinkers, a fated man
 soon to depart, lay down upon his bed.
 1190 They set beside their heads their battle-shields,
 the bright board-wood, and on the benches lay
 tall battle-helms and coats of iron rings
 and mighty wooden spears above their lords.
 It was their custom to be thus prepared
 1195 and geared for war, at home and in the host,
 for such a time as hardship should befall
 their lord, the king: that was a goodly folk.

 They sank down into sleep. But one paid sore
 for evening rest, as it had often chanced
 1200 when Grendel guarded that gold-hall, and did
 unrighteous deeds, until his end came on,
 death for his sins. But it was soon revealed,
 made known to men, that an avenger yet
 survived that foe, long after grievous strife—
 1205 that Grendel’s mother dwelled on misery,
 a hostile lady, forced to make her home
 in dreadful waters and cold streams, since Cain
 struck down his only brother with a blade,
 his closest kin; thus marked with murder’s stain
 1210 he fled men’s joy, and roamed deserted lands.
 From him rose many spirits, doomed of old,

of which was Grendel one, a hateful foe,
 a savage outcast, who at Heorot found
 a watchful man awaiting war and strife.
 1215 There did the enemy lay hold of him,
 yet he remembered then his mighty strength,
 the ample gift which God had given him,
 and trusted in the Lord of all for aid,
 for help and comfort: thus he overcame,
 1220 laid low the fiend of hell, that foe of men,
 who fled in misery, deprived of joy,
 to seek his death-house—yet his mother lived,
 unsated, sad in mind, and ventured on
 a fatal journey to avenge her son.
 1225 She came to Heorot then, where Ring-Danes slept
 around the hall. At once a change of fate
 befell the earls, when Grendel's mother reached
 within. That horror was the less, as weak
 as is a maiden's might, a woman's war
 1230 beside a man-at-arms, when blood-stained sword,
 strong-edged and hammer-forged, and wrapped with gold,
 shears through the boar-crest helm. Then swords were drawn
 from every seat, and many great round shields
 were raised in hand—but helms were left unsought,
 1235 broad coats of mail, when terror seized them all.
 She was in haste, and wished to flee the hall
 to save her life, when she was found therein;
 quickly she caught one lord and held him fast
 and to her fen she ran. The man she took
 1240 was dearest to the king of all his troops
 between the seas, a man of lasting fame,
 a strong shield-fighter, whom she crushed in sleep.
 But Beowulf was away, for to the Geat
 was other lodging given, after gifts
 1245 had been bestowed. A cry in Heorot rose,
 for she had stolen Grendel's bloody hand;
 so grief renewed, and sorrow fell on homes.
 That was no good exchange, that on both sides
 they paid with lives of friends.
 Then was the king,
 1250 the warrior gray and wise, in stormy mood
 when he had learned his chief and dearest thane
 was dead. So from his room was Beowulf fetched,
 victorious man. At dawn that earl went out,
 the noble champion with his fellow-troop;
 1255 and Hrothgar wondered whether God would work
 a change for better after news of woe.

The man, in war most worthy, crossed the floor
amid his hand-troop—hall-planks clattered loud—
and there he asked the wise lord of the Danes
1260 if night had been agreeable to him.

Then Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Danes:
“Ask not after my joys! Renewed is grief
for Danish people: Æschere is dead,
to Yrmenlaf the brother, and to me
1265 my counselor and my advisor true,
a fellow at my shoulder when in war
we’d shield our heads, when foot-troops clashed and struck
against boar-crested helms. As earls should be,
so Æschere, the prince, was ever good.
1270 A restless, bloody spirit slew him here
in Heorot—yet I know not where she went,
the horrid thing, exulting in her food,
made bold by feasting. She avenged that deed,
when you killed Grendel with your grasp last night
1275 in savage combat, for he had too long
diminished and destroyed my Danish folk.
In war he fell, and forfeited his life—
but now another mighty reaver comes
her son’s death to avenge, and far has wreaked
1280 her vengeance, our distress—for so it seems
to many thanes, whose spirits weep for him
who gave them treasure—now that hand lies dead
which freely gave to you all you desired.

I have heard landsmen say, my countrymen
1285 and my hall-counsellors, that they have seen
two such march-stalkers guard deserted moors,
two alien ghosts. The second of these was,
as they must surely know, in woman’s guise;
the other wretched one tread exile-tracks
1290 in form of man, though greater far in size
than any other man; in days of old
earth-dwellers named him Grendel; they knew not
his father, whether any secret ghost
was born before him. In a hidden land
1295 they dwell on wolf-slopes and on windy cliffs,
in fearsome fen-paths, where the mountain stream
flows down below the darkness of the bluffs,
beneath the earth. That mere does not lie far
by mark of miles; above are rimy groves,
1300 whose rooted trees hang over waters dark.
There evil portents may be seen each night,

fire on water; among the sons of men
lives no wise man who knows the depth of it.
Although the stricken stag of mighty horns,
1305 pursued by hounds, seeks out the wood's defense,
he will abandon life there on the bank
before he goes therein to save his head—
that is no pleasant place. There surging waves
rise black into the sky when wind stirs up
1310 the loathsome vapors, so they choke the air
and heaven weeps. Now is our hope again
on you alone. You do not know that land,
that place so perilous, where you may find
that sinful man; but seek it if you dare!
1315 I shall repay you for that dreadful deed
with ancient treasures, as I did before,
with twisted gold, if you come back alive.”

Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
“Grieve not, wise one: far better for a man
1320 that he avenge his friend than mourn too much.
For each of us must live to see the end
of this world's life; let he who can work out
his fame before his death: that will be best
for warriors when they fall. Arise, good lord,
1325 the kingdom's guard, and let us quickly fare
to look upon the track of Grendel's kin.
I promise you that he shall not escape
in depths of earth, nor in the mountain wood,
nor on the ocean floor, go where he will.
1330 Bear patiently each woe you have this day,
as I expect you shall.”

The ancient man
leapt up at once, and thanks he gave to God,
the mighty Lord, for what that man had vowed.

A horse was put to bit for Hrothgar king,
1335 a steed with braided mane. That wisest prince
rode richly dressed; shield-bearing footmen walked
behind him. Footprints then were widely seen
along the forest-path, upon the plain,
directly where their foe had fared across
1340 the murky moor, and bore away that thane,
bereft of life, the best of all those men
who with King Hrothgar watched over their home.
That noble son rode over steep stone-slopes
and narrow stairs, and lonesome tracks unknown,
1345 and high, sheer cliffs, and many monster-dens;

he rode with certain knowledgeable men
 to scout the plain, until he soon had found
 the mountain trees that shadowed hoary stone,
 the joyless forest; water stood beneath
 1350 disturbed and dreary. Painful was it then
 to all the Danes, the friends of Scylding kin,
 a grief in mind to everythane and earl,
 when there they met the head of Æschere
 upon that sea-cliff. Water welled with blood
 1355 and hot gore, as folk saw. The horn sang out
 an eager war-song; foot-troops all stood down.
 They saw throughout the water serpent-kin
 and many strange sea-dragons in the waves;
 likewise upon the slopes lay water-beasts
 1360 who watched for fatal journeys on the sea
 at morning-time, those worms and creatures wild.
 They rushed away, enraged and fierce; they heard
 the war-horn sounding clear. A Geatish man
 with bow and arrow struck away the life
 1365 from one such swimmer, and the hard war-dart
 stood from its gut; and slower did it swim
 as death dragged it away. They caught it then,
 assailed with barbed boar-spears upon the waves,
 quickly and hard, and drew it to the bank,
 1370 the wondrous wave-roamer; men gazed upon
 that strange and horrid thing.

With noble mail

did Beowulf gird himself, feared not for life;
 the war-shirt, broad and skilfully bedecked
 and linked by hand, must dare the dreadful sea
 1375 and ward his bone-case, that the battle-grip
 and hostile clutches of his angry foes
 could not harm heart or life; and the bright helm
 would guard his head, a helm adorned with jewels
 and wrapped with splendid bands, which must attempt
 1380 the surging waves and stir the water's depths.
 So wrought the weapon-smith in days of old
 who formed it wondrously, and on it set
 the images of boars, that ever since
 no blade nor battle-sword could bite that helm.
 1385 And that was not the meanest mighty help
 which Hrothgar's spokesman, Unferth, gave at need:
 that hilted blade was Hrunting called by name,
 without a peer among all treasures old;
 the iron edge was marked with serpent-shapes,
 1390 made hard by blood; it never failed the man

who gripped it with his hands, who dared to go
 on dreadful journeys into fields of war—
 for that was not the first time it must do
 a work of glory. Ecglaf's son, indeed,
 1395 mighty in strength, remembered not the words
 he spoke when drunk with wine, when now he lent
 that weapon to a better swordsman's hand;
 he dared not risk his own life in the waves
 to do the deed of valor: there he lost
 1400 renown and fame. That was not so for him
 who now prepared himself to go to war.
 Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 "Think now, you famous son of Halfdane king,
 now that I am prepared to go, wise prince,
 1405 gold-friend of men, on what we two have said:
 that, should I lose my life for your great need,
 you'd be for me as father in my death.
 Protect my kindred thanes, friends at my side,
 if battle takes me off; and send those gifts,
 1410 the treasures which you gave me, to my lord,
 to Hygelac. So Hrethel's son may know,
 when he observes that wealth, that shining gold,
 that I had found a treasure-giver true
 and I enjoyed his kindness while I could.
 1415 And give to Unferth, well-known man, my blade,
 my heirloom old, my splendid wave-marked sword
 of hardy edge; I shall with Hrunting work
 my glorious deed—or death will take me off."

With these words said, the prince of Weather-Geats
 1420 in valor rushed, no answer would abide;
 the sea-surge closed around the warrior's form.
 It was some time till he could see the ground.
 At once that one who'd held the lake's expanse
 a hundred seasons, ravenous and fierce,
 1425 the grim and greedy one, perceived some man
 swim down to reach that home of alien beasts.
 She reached for him and seized the warrior firm
 in horrid grip—yet she could do no harm
 to that sound body: mail surrounded it,
 1430 and she could not cut through that battle-shirt,
 that coat of links, for all her awful claws.
 That she-wolf of the sea then bore him down,
 that prince of rings, and to the bottom came,
 to her own home: for he could wield no sword,
 1435 no matter what his rage, while many beasts,

sea-monsters strange, harassed him in the waves,
 pursued their foe, and struck his battle-shirt
 with warlike tusks. And soon the earl perceived
 that he was in some kind of hostile hall
 1440 where water did not harm him, and the flood's
 fearsome attack could not reach through the roof;
 firelight he saw, a brightly-shining beam.
 The good man saw that outcast of the deep,
 the mighty mere-wife; and a forceful thrust
 1445 he gave with his war-sword, held nothing back,
 that on her head the ring-marked sword sang out
 a greedy battle-song. That guest perceived
 the flashing blade would bite her not at all,
 nor harm her life: the sword-edge failed that prince
 1450 in time of need. Great battles it endured,
 had sheared through many helms and shirts of mail
 of fated men; that was the only time
 that precious treasure failed to win its fame.
 Yet still was Hygelac's great kinsman firm,
 1455 mindful of fame, unceasing in his zeal:
 the wave-marked sword, all wrapped in ornaments,
 he threw aside, the warrior in his wrath,
 and on the earth it lay, strong and steel-edged;
 his strength he trusted then, his mighty hand.
 1460 So must he do in war who thinks to gain
 enduring praise, who cares not for his life.
 The War-Geat prince, not fearful of the deed,
 caught Grendel's mother by her shoulder firm;
 the battle-hardy man, now in his rage,
 1465 threw down his mortal foe upon the floor.
 She swiftly paid him back with her grim grip
 and pulled him down; and, weary with the fight,
 that strongest warrior toppled to the floor.
 She set upon that hall-guest, drew her knife,
 1470 broad and bright of edge; she would avenge
 her son, her only child—but on his limbs
 the woven breast-net lay, and guarded life
 from point and edge, withstood the dagger's thrust.
 He would have perished then, good Ecgtheow's son,
 1475 the champion of the Geats, beneath the earth,
 had not that battle-garment been his help,
 the hardy net of war, and holy God.
 The Lord all wise wields victory in war,
 the heavens' king—and rightly did he judge,
 1480 an easy choice: for Beowulf rose again.

He saw with other arms an ancient sword,
a giant blade victorious, firm of edge
and worthy for a warrior, best of arms—
but it was more than any other man
1485 might bear to battle-play, splendid and strong,
a giant's work. The belted hilt he seized,
the Scylding warrior, fierce and battle-grim,
and drew the ring-marked sword, hopeless of life,
and struck in anger, that the sword gripped firm
1490 against her neck, and broke the bone-rings all;
the blade sheared through her form of mortal flesh
and to the floor she fell; the sword was stained
with gore; the warrior in his work rejoiced.

The beam of light flashed out, and gleamed within,
1495 as clearly as the heaven's candle shines.
He gazed around the den, walked by the wall,
and raised the weapon firmly by the hilt,
angry and resolute. Not useless yet
was that great sword to him, for he would now
1500 avenge on Grendel all the fierce attacks
he'd wrought upon the West-Danes more than once,
when Hrothgar's hearth-companions in their sleep
he slew, and fifteen Danish men devoured
and others carried off, a loathsome spoil.
1505 He paid him back for that, the champion fierce,
when on a bed he saw his lifeless foe,
war-weary Grendel lying, wounded sore
from strife at Heorot—then the corpse burst wide
when after death he suffered a new stroke,
1510 a sword-swing hard—for Beowulf took his head.
At once those men, who gazed with Hrothgar king
upon that lake, could see the surging waves
all swelling up, and water stained with blood.
The gray-haired, ancient men together spoke
1515 about good Beowulf: no more hope they had
to see that prince return in victory
to seek their famous king; for many thought
that she-wolf of the sea had cut him down.
The ninth hour came. The valiant Scyldings all
1520 gave up the cliff; the warriors' gold-friend turned
and left for home. His guests still kept their seat,
all sick in soul, and stared upon the mere;
they wished, but did not think, to see again
their friend and lord.

The sword began to drip

1525 in metal icicles, the war-blade bathed
in Grendel's blood; that was a wondrous thing,
that iron melted just like ice, when first
the Father loosens all the bonds of frost,
unbinds the waters' chains, the one who rules

1530 both time and season; he is truly God.
The prince of Weather-Geats took nothing more,
no other precious treasure, from that house,
though many there he saw, except the head
and jewel-encrusted hilt—the blade was gone,

1535 the patterned steel burnt up: so hot the blood
of that strange poison ghost who died therein.
Soon Beowulf swam the waters, who had seen
the death in battle of his angry foes.
He rose up through the sea; the tossing waves

1540 were all made clean, those vast domains wherein
that alien spirit let his life-days go,
and left this passing world behind for good.
He swam to shore, that shield of sea-farers,
rejoicing in the heavy load of gifts

1545 he'd brought up from the sea. They rushed to him,
his mighty heap of thanes, gave thanks to God
in joy, that they should see their lord unhurt.
Then quickly were the helm and mail coat loosed
from that strong man. The lake subsided now,

1550 the water under clouds, all choked with gore.
They set out on the path with joyful hearts,
traversed the trail of earth, the well-known street;
as bold as kings they bore from that sea-cliff
the monster's head, though it was hard for them,

1555 those warriors brave: four men it took to bear
the head of Grendel, carried on their spears,
to that gold-hall, where they arrived at last,
those fourteen bold and warlike Geatish men;
the lord, courageous, trod amid his troop

1560 across the mead-hall plain. He went inside,
that chief of thanes, that man of daring deeds
with glory honored, hero brave in war,
to greet King Hrothgar. Grendel's head was dragged
by hair across the floor where men drank beer,

1565 a splendid sight, a terror for the earls
and for that lady too: the men looked on.

Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
“To you, o Halfdane's son, o Scylding prince,

we gladly brought this sea-loot as a sign
 1570 of victory, which here you look upon.
 Not easily did I pass through alive
 that war beneath the waves, and dared this deed
 through hardship; right away our fight would have
 been finished then, had God not shielded me.
 1575 I could not in that battle work at all
 with Hrunting, though that sword is strong and good;
 but he who rules all men granted to me
 that I should see a fair and ancient blade,
 immense in size, which hung upon the wall;
 1580 haste urged me on, thus friendless as I was,
 to seize that weapon. In that fight I slew
 the guardians of the house, for it was then
 made possible for me. That warlike blade,
 the pattern-welded sword, melted entire
 1585 when blood gushed out, the hottest battle-gore.
 I carried from the fiends this hilt, avenged
 those wicked deeds, the murders of the Danes,
 as it was just. I promise to you now
 that you may sleep in Heorot free from care
 1590 amid your troop of men, with everythane
 among your people, youths and warriors all,
 that from that foe you need have no more fear,
 no dread for death of earls, as once you did.”
 The golden hilt, that ancient giants’ work,
 1595 was given to the gray old warrior’s hand,
 the hoary war-chief; so it passed to him,
 the lord of Danes, after the devils’ death,
 the wondrous work of smiths; and when that man,
 the angry-hearted enemy of God,
 1600 guilty of murder, and his mother too
 gave up this world, that work then passed
 into the ownership of earthly kings,
 to him, the best of all between the seas
 who in the Danish countries deal out wealth.
 1605 Then Hrothgar spoke; he gazed upon the hilt,
 the ancient heirloom. Written on the shaft
 he read the origin of ancient strife;
 when floods and rushing oceans overcame
 the giants’ kindred, and they suffered much;
 1610 a folk estranged from everlasting God,
 for which the Ruler gave that last reward
 through surging waters. On the golden hilt
 in runic signs set down and rightly marked

was told for whom that sword had first been wrought,
 1615 the choicest iron blade with twisted hilt
 and dragon ornaments. The wise man spoke,
 the son of Halfdane, while all silent stood:
 “It may be said by him who speaks the truth,
 does rightly by the folk, remembers all
 1620 far back, the old home-guard: this earl was born
 of nobler blood. Your glory is raised up
 for far and wide, friend Beowulf, and your fame
 in every nation praised. With patience you possess
 both strength and spirit-wisdom. I shall carry out
 1625 the friendly vow I made. Great comfort shall you be,
 a long-enduring solace, to your kin,
 a hero’s help.

Not so was Heremod
 to Honor-Scyldings, sons of Ecgwela.
 He did not work to please, rather to kill
 1630 and slaughter Danish people, his own folk.
 In rage he cut down table-fellows, friends,
 companions at his side, until alone
 that famous king turned from the joys of men.
 Though mighty God exalted him above
 1635 all other men in joy of strength and rule
 and furthered him, there grew within his heart
 a soul of blood-lust: rings he would not give
 to Danes for deeds of glory; joylessly
 he suffered for that strife distress and wrack,
 1640 his people’s lasting harm. Learn from this tale
 and virtue know; I who am wise in years
 say this of you.

Most wonderful it is
 how mighty God, through his most spacious heart,
 deals out to mankind wisdom, earlship, land;
 1645 he wields all power. Sometimes he allows
 a man of famous race to think of joy,
 and gives him earth’s delight in his own land,
 to rule the towns of men; he makes wide realms
 and worldly regions subject to his sway—
 1650 in his unwisdom, then, that king believes
 no end may come. He lives abundantly;
 no age or sickness hinders him at all,
 no evil care grows black within his heart,
 no strife or sword-hate shows in any place,
 1655 but all the world to his contentment turns,
 and nothing worse he knows—until within
 some share of arrogance will wax and grow;

then sleeps that guard, the warden of the heart;
 too deep that slumber, bound by busy care—
 1660 the slayer very near, who from his bow
 shoots cruelly. Then the bitter shaft is stuck
 into his heart, and strikes beneath his helm—
 he cannot save himself from strange commands,
 the crooked biddings of accursed ghosts.
 1665 What he has held so long seems little now:
 in angry mind he covets, gives no rings
 or treasure for a boast; he soon forgets
 to mind his future state, for God bestowed
 so great a share of worthiness on him.
 1670 But in the end it happens as before:
 his borrowed body fails, and falls to fate;
 another takes his place, who without care
 will deal his treasures and his ancient wealth,
 and heed no terror. Guard yourself, therefore,
 1675 from this great evil, choose the better part,
 eternal gain; and pay no heed to pride,
 dear Beowulf, best of men. For though you now
 have glory by your might for this short time,
 soon shall it be, that sword or sore disease,
 1680 or fire's embrace, or water's surging tide,
 the stroke of blade or flight of hostile spear,
 or awful age, shall part you from your strength;
 bright eyes shall dim and darken; and at last
 yourself, great warrior, death shall overcome.
 1685 So I have ruled Ring-Danes beneath the sky
 a hundred seasons, guarded them with war
 from many nations on this middle-earth,
 from ashen-spear and sword-edge, that I thought
 no people under heaven could oppose me.
 1690 What! In my own home there came a turn of fate,
 a grief after my joy, when Grendel came,
 our mortal foe, invading; ever since
 I bore great anguish for his grim assaults.
 For this may God be thanked, eternal Lord,
 1695 that after strife so long I should still live
 to cast my eyes upon his bloody head.
 Now take a seat, and taste the joyful feast,
 war-worthy man; between us shall be shared
 great many treasures, when the morning comes."
 1700 The Geat was glad in mind, and went at once
 to seek his seat, as wise old Hrothgar bade.
 A fair feast was aranged, as was before,
 for those hall-sitters, brave in deeds of war.

The veil of night grew dark over those men.
 1705 The troop arose; the Scylding, old and gray,
 would seek his bed. The Geat, the warrior bold,
 desired unmeasured rest, weary of toil;
 a hall-thane led that foreigner away,
 who out of reverence saw to every need
 1710 the warlike traveler should have that day.

That man of spacious heart then went to rest;
 the vaulted hall stood high, all decked in gold,
 the guests asleep within. The raven black
 announced with happy heart the heaven's joy—
 1715 bright beams then shone and over shadows passed;
 the warriors stirred, the princes were in haste
 to fare back to their folk; far off they wished,
 courageous visitors, to seek their ship.

The hardy man commanded Hrunting borne
 1720 to Ecglaf's son, and bade him take his sword,
 the precious iron; thanked him for the loan,
 and said he reckoned it a trusty friend
 in battle, strong in war, blamed not in words
 the weapon's edge; he was so brave a man.

1725 And, eager to depart, the warriors then
 were geared in armor; honored by the Danes
 one prince went to the other on the throne:
 the hero, brave in battle, Hrothgar hailed.

Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 1730 "We sailors, now, who came thus far away,
 would eagerly seek out our Hygelac.
 Well were we treated here, our wishes filled;
 you have done well to us. If I may earn
 still more of your heart's love upon this earth
 1735 than I have done so far, by works of war,
 o lord of men, I shall at once be here.
 If I should learn across the flood's expanse
 that neighbor peoples threaten you with fear,
 as did your foes before, a thousand thanes
 1740 I'll bring for help. I think that Hygelac,
 the lord of Geats, though he is young as yet,
 the folk's defender, he will further me
 by words and works, that I may honor you
 and bear in aid a forest-full of spears,
 1745 a mighty help, if ever you need men.
 If Hrethric ever, child of the king,
 should think to venture to the Geatish court

he shall find many friends; a foreign land
 is good to seek, for one who would do well.”
 1750 Then Hrothgar spoke to him in answer thus:
 “These words of yours the wisest Lord has sent
 into your heart; I have not heard a man
 so young in years who spoke with wiser thought.
 You are most strong in might, and wise of mind
 1755 and speech. I think, if it should come to pass
 that spears or sword-grim battle, age or steel,
 should take off Hrethel’s son, your lord and chief,
 the folk’s defender, while you yet have life,
 that no king better could the Sea-Geats choose,
 1760 a hoard-guard for the heroes, should you wish
 to rule your kinsmen’s realm. I better like
 your spirit, Beowulf, as I know you more.
 A common peace you’ve forged between our folks,
 the Geatish people and the Spear-Danes’ kin:
 1765 the strife, the hostile deeds they once performed
 shall rest again, and treasures shall be shared
 as long as I shall rule this kingdom wide—
 across the gannet’s bath with good things all
 one man shall greet another; over seas
 1770 shall ring-prowed ships bear gifts and signs of love.
 I know that folk to be firmly disposed
 with both their foes and friends, and customs old
 and ancient manners blamelessly are kept.”
 The earls’ protector, Halfdane’s noble son,
 1775 gave treasures twelve to Beowulf in that hall;
 he ordered him to take with him those gifts
 and seek his folk in health, and soon return.
 That king of noble goodness, Scyldings’ prince,
 embraced that best of thanes, and held his neck;
 1780 and on his aged face the tears ran down.
 That man so old and wise expected then
 two things, but one more so: that from that time
 they two, bold men, would never meet again.
 That man was very dear to him, that he
 1785 might not forbear the welling of his breast,
 but, held in mental bonds, within his heart
 a hidden longing burned in all his blood
 for that dear man. So Beowulf left him then—
 the gold-proud warrior trod the grassy earth,
 1790 exulting in his wealth; the ship abode
 its lord and owner, rode at anchor still.
 The gifts of Hrothgar, much esteemed, went out
 upon the way; he was a peerless king,

and blameless every way, until old age,
1795 which harms us all, deprived him of his joy.

They came then to the sea, that band of youths
so brave in spirit, bearing ring-net shirts,
limb-armor linked by hand. The shore-guard saw
those earls returning, as they had gone out;
1800 no harm at all he offered to those guests
when from the cliff he came, but toward them rode
and said they would be welcome to the Geats,
those bright-armed warriors, faring to their ship.
Upon the waves the curving sea-craft stood,
1805 the ring-necked ship, laden with battle-gear,
with mares and treasure; over Hrothgar's gifts,
that hoard of precious wealth, the mast stood high.
Then Beowulf gave a sword all wound with gold
to that boat-guard, who was made worthier
1810 upon the mead-bench for that precious gift,
that heirloom old. The ship departed thence
and drove deep waters, left the Danish land.
The sail was fastened to the mast with ropes;
the ship-wood thundered; wind across the waves
1815 did not divide the vessel from its course;
the sea-traversing ship sailed forth, and flew
with foaming prow across the ocean streams—
until they soon perceived the Geatish cliffs,
the well-known headlands; forward pressed the ship
1820 and, driven by the wind, it made the land.
The shore-guard at the sea was soon alert,
who long had watched those currents eagerly
for that dear man; he moored upon the sand
the wide-hulled ship, with anchor-bands made fast,
1825 lest mighty waves should wreck that pleasant wood.
Then Beowulf bade them bear those princely gifts,
that wealth of beaten gold; not far away
they sought their treasure-giver Hygelac,
the son of Hrethel, where he dwelled at home
1830 with his companions, near the seaward wall.

The house was grand, the king so nobly bold,
high in his hall, and Hygd full young in years,
great Hæreth's daughter, excellent and wise,
though but few winters had she passed as yet
1835 inside the stronghold; lowly was she not,
nor miserly of precious gifts of wealth
to Geatish people.

Fremu, willful queen,
 committed awful sins: no warrior bold
 except the lord himself dared ever look
 1840 or cast his eyes on her by light of day,
 else bonds of death were clapped upon his hands
 (so it was thought) and he was quickly seized
 and by the sword dispatched—the patterned blade
 cut through the man, and manifest his death.
 1845 That is no queenly thing for her to do
 who should weave peace, though peerless she may be,
 depriving some dear man of life and limb
 for feigned insult. But Offa, Hemming’s kinsman,
 hobbled her in that: ale-drinkers said
 1850 that she committed fewer hostile acts
 and harms upon her people, when as wife
 to that young champion she was given up,
 adorned in gold, and dear in noble line,
 she who had journeyed on the fallow sea
 1855 to Offa’s hall, by her father’s advice.
 She well enjoyed her life there afterward
 upon the throne of men, famous and good,
 and held high love with him, the heroes’ prince,
 the best of all mankind between the sea.
 1860 For this was Offa honored, spear-keen man,
 by gifts and battles, ruled his homeland well
 by counsels wise; to him was Eomer born
 a help to heroes, Hemming’s kinsman bold
 and Garmund’s grandson, able man of war.
 1865 The hardy man set out with his hand-troop
 along the sand, and paced the seaward plain,
 the shore’s expanse. The heavens’ candle shone,
 the sun ran north. They traveled quickly up
 to where they knew that good defense of earls,
 1870 the young war-king, the bane of Ongentheow,
 dealt out his rings. Soon Hygelac was told
 of Beowulf’s journey, that he came alive
 into the town; unhurt from battle-sport
 that shield-companion marched up to the house.
 1875 At Hygelac’s command men quickly cleared
 the floor within the hall for guests on foot.

 Then, kin with kindred, with his folk he sat
 who had survived that strife; then Hygelac
 addressed that loyal earl in formal speech
 1880 and careful words. With draughts of mead went Hygd,
 great Haereth’s daughter, through that well-built hall

to please the people, bore the cup of wine
 to heroes' hands. Then Hygelac began
 to question Beowulf there in that high hall;
 1885 for he was pressed with wonder then to learn
 how had the journeys of those Sea-Geats fared:
 "What happened to you, then, upon the way,
 dear Beowulf, when you suddenly bethought
 to seek a battle far across the sea,
 1890 a fight at Heorot? Did you at all assuage
 the well-known woe of Hrothgar, famous king?
 For that I seethed in sorrow-surging care
 and did not trust this quest of yours, dear man;
 I hoped that you would shun this bloody ghost
 1895 and let the South-Danes settle by themselves
 the war with Grendel. I give thanks to God
 that thus I see you sound again, and well."
 Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 "It is no secret, Hygelac my lord:
 1900 that meeting is well-known to many men,
 when I and Grendel fought upon the plain
 where he had worked so many miseries
 on mighty Scyldings, sorrows for an age;
 yet I avenged them all, that not a one
 1905 of Grendel's kin around the earth will boast
 of that night's uproar—if one yet survives
 among that hateful kin, beset by fear.
 "I came at first into that ring-hall high
 to meet with Hrothgar; soon that famous man,
 1910 the son of Halfdane, once he knew my mind,
 showed me a seat beside his noble son.
 The troop was joyful; never have I seen
 more mead-cheer under heaven's vaulting roof
 for sitters in a hall. At times the queen,
 1915 the people's pledge of peace, passed through the hall
 and urged the young lads on; and many times
 she gave them rings before she took her seat.
 Then Hrothgar's daughter sometimes bore the cup
 to earls from end to end; hall-sitters named
 1920 her Freawaru, I heard, whenever she
 gave studded treasure to the heroes there.
 That gold-adorned young maiden is betrothed
 to Froda's gracious son; the Scyldings' friend,
 the kingdom's guard, has settled on that suit,
 1925 and reckons by that wife to settle some
 of his most deadly feuds. But fatal spears
 rest only shortly after vicious wars

and falls of nations, though the bride avail.
 The War-Beards' king and all that people's thanes
 1930 may take offense, when to their hall should come
 a Danish scion tending to that maid.
 Some old, ancestral sword will shine on him,
 ring-marked and hard, a War-Beard treasure once
 when yet they held those blades, until the day
 1935 they brought them to the clash of linden shields
 and lost their comrades—and their very lives.
 Then one at beer, who sees that sword, will speak,
 an old spear-fighter, who remembers all
 the battle-deaths of men (his soul is grim)—
 1940 that mournful man will test the mind of one,
 a champion young, to wake the harms of war
 through heartfelt thoughts, and so he makes this speech:
 'Can you, my friend, that weapon recognize,
 which your own father bore into the fight
 1945 on his last venture, with his battle-mask,
 where valiant Scyldings slew him, Danish men
 who ruled the field, once Withergyld lay dead
 after the fall of heroes? Now some son
 of those, the slayers, prideful of this loot
 1950 parades our floor, and boasts of murders past,
 and bears the treasure you should wield by right.'
 He urges and reminds at every chance
 with words so sore, until the time should come
 that bridesman, for his father's former deeds
 1955 will die from bite of swords, all stained with blood,
 and forfeit life; the slayer thence escapes
 alive, who knows the land so well.
 Then are the warrior's oaths on both these sides
 all broken; Ingeld wells with deadly hate,
 1960 and woman's love to him grows cooler now
 for all his surging care. So I trust not
 the War-Beard's loyalty, their peace with Danes
 or friendship fast, to be without deceit.
 "I shall speak more of Grendel, that you know
 1965 how passed our battle then, my treasure-lord,
 our heroes' hand-fight. When the heavens' gem
 had glided over earth, that angry ghost,
 the awful evening-foe, came out to seek
 where soundly we defended Hrothgar's hall.
 1970 There Hondscioh in the battle met his death,
 that fated man; he died foremost of all,
 a girded champion; there that famous thane
 was killed in Grendel's mouth, the dear man's corpse

he swallowed whole. The slayer, bloody-toothed
 1975 and thinking evil, would not homeward go
 with empty hands from Hrothgar's golden hall,
 but, strong in might, he had a go at me
 and grasped with ready palm. A huge, strange glove
 hung down beside him, strong with clever bonds;
 1980 it was prepared with skill and devil's craft
 and made of dragon-skins. Within this glove
 the evildoer fierce would put both me
 and many guiltless men—yet he could not,
 for I in anger stood upright at once.
 1985 Too long it is to tell how I repaid
 that people's foe for every evil deed;
 I honored well your people by my works.
 He then escaped away—yet he enjoyed
 the pleasures of this life but little more,
 1990 for he had left behind at Heorot hall
 his stronger hand, and fled away abject—
 and, sad in mind, he fell into the mere.
 “The Scyldings' friend rewarded me with gold
 and many treasures for that battle-rush,
 1995 when morning came and we sat down to feast.
 Then song and glee arose; the aged Dane,
 so very learned, told us ancient tales;
 at times that battle-bold one touched the harp,
 at times a song he uttered, true and sad,
 2000 at times a wondrous tale he told aright,
 the roomy-hearted king; at times again
 the ancient warrior, bound by age, began
 to mourn for youth and war-strength; then his heart
 welled up within, when he of winters wise
 2005 recalled so many things. So we therein
 took pleasure all day long. The second night
 fell down on sons of men; then Grendel's mother,
 yearning for revenge, came forth in grief,
 since death and Geatish war-hate seized her son.
 2010 That dreadful woman then avenged her child,
 and boldly slew a man; there Æschere,
 the wise old counsellor, was robbed of life.
 Nor could the Danish folk, when morning came,
 burn up the dead in flames, nor load the pyre
 2015 with that dear man: she bore away his corpse
 in fiendish grasp beneath the mountain stream.
 That was the cruelest grief for Hrothgar king
 of all which long befell that people's lord.
 That prince, in troubled mind, implored my aid

2020 upon your life, that I would nobly act
 upon the throng of waves, and risk my life,
 and glory win; he promised me rewards.
 Therein I found the grim and dreadful guard
 of that deep water, which is widely known;
 2025 therein we fought together, hand-to-hand;
 the water welled with gore, and in her hall
 I, with a giant sword, sheared off her head.
 With hardship thence I came away alive—
 I was not fated yet—and Halfdane's son,
 2030 the earls' defender, gave me many gifts.
 "That king thus lived in his accustomed way;
 I was denied no gifts, rewards of strength,
 but Hrothgar gave me treasures, such as I
 myself should choose—and these I bring to you,
 2035 my warrior-king, and show them with good will.
 All kindness, Hygelac, depends on you:
 I have no kinsman nearer than yourself."

He bade them bring inside the boar's-head sign,
 the tall war-helm, the ring-shirt of gray steel,
 2040 the splendid war-sword, and he spoke this tale:
 "Hrothgar bestowed on me this battle-garb,
 that wisest prince, and bade me in a word
 to tell you first the meaning of this gift:
 he said that Heorogar, the Scylding prince,
 2045 had owned it long; and yet he would not give
 that armor to his son, to Heorowearð,
 though he was true to him. Enjoy all well!"
 I heard that four swift apple-fallow mares,
 each like the others, followed in the path
 2050 behind the treasure; he bestowed those gifts
 of horses and of wealth on Hygelac.
 So must a kinsman do, not weave a net
 of guile for others, not prepare the deaths
 of hand-companions by some secret plot.
 2055 So was that cousin loyal to his king,
 the battle-hardy Hygelac, and each
 was mindful of the other's benefit.
 I heard he gave the necklace to Queen Hygd,
 the wondrous treasure splendidly adorned
 2060 which Wealhtheow gave him, daughter of a king,
 with three lithe horses, brightly-saddled steeds;
 her breast was honored for that precious gift.

So did the son of Ecgtheow prove himself
 a man renowned for war and deeds of good,

2065 pursuing fame: he never slew in drink
 his hearth-companions, nor was his soul fierce,
 but with the greatest strength he held those gifts
 which God had given him in ample store.
 For long he had been lowly, for the Geats
 2070 did not consider him a trusty man,
 nor was he honored by the Storm-Geat lord
 upon the mead-bench: for they thought him lax
 and lacking in resolve, a slothful prince.
 But to the man by victory so blessed
 2075 a change of fortune came, and end to grief.
 The earl's defender, battle-valiant king,
 commanded Hrethel's heirloom to be fetched,
 adorned with gold; there was among the Geats
 no sword more treasured, no more precious blade;
 2080 he laid that weapon onto Beowulf's lap
 and gave him seven thousand hides of land,
 a hall and royal seat. The rights of land
 and heritage they shared between them both
 within the realm—though greater was the share
 2085 of Hygelac, more noble as he was.

In later days it came to pass, through wars
 and battles-dins, when Hygelac lay dead,
 that Heardred under shield-defense was slain
 by swords of war, when hardy Battle-Swedes
 2090 assailed the nephew of bold Hereric
 among his glorious folk, and struck him down
 with hostile blows. Then into Beowulf's hand
 the spacious kingdom passed. He held it well
 for fifty winters—wise was he, the king,
 2095 the old home-guard—until in darkest night
 a dragon came to rule, who in high court
 kept watch upon his hoard, a stark stone berg,
 beneath which lay a path unknown to men.
 Some man (I know not who) there ventured in
 2100 and crept right up beside the heathen hoard;
 his hand took easily some artifact
 of precious make. Nor did the dragon hide
 that while he slept he had been robbed by craft
 of cunning thief: the townsfolk of the Geats
 2105 learned soon enough the measure of his wrath.
 The man who had so sorely wounded him
 had not approached the worm-hoard for desire,
 but out of pressing need that unknown slave
 of sons of men had fled from hostile blows

2110 and, homeless and distressed by many sins,
 he broke into the barrow-mound at once—
 and there that guest looked on the dreadful worm
 asleep before him; yet the wretched man,
 afraid at heart when peril fell to him,
 2115 still risked his life to take a precious cup.
 So many ancient treasures lay within
 that earthen hall: the vast inheritance
 of noble kindred, which in days of old
 some unknown man concealed in thoughtfulness,
 2120 those precious treasures. Death had seized them all
 in times long gone—and one of that folk's troop
 who lived the longest, mournful for his friends,
 expected that he likewise would enjoy
 that ancient wealth for only a short time.
 2125 The barrow, all prepared, in waiting stood
 upon the plain beside the water's waves,
 new-built beside the headlands, and secured
 by narrow passes; there the ring-guard bore
 the noble treasures, plated all in gold
 2130 and worthy of the hoard, and spoke few words:
 "Hold now, o earth, this property of earls,
 now that our folk may not. See, from yourself
 those good men took it once; but death in war
 and fearsome life-destruction seized them all,
 2135 each man of my own folk; they left this life
 and saw the last of hall-delights and joys.
 No one is left to me who wears a sword,
 or bears the chalice forth, adorned with gold,
 the precious cup; the troop has passed away.
 2140 The hardy helm shall be bereft of gold
 and beaten ornament; the keepers sleep
 who should have burnished battle-masks for war;
 likewise the shirt of mail, which in the fray
 and crash of shields withstood the bite of swords,
 2145 decays upon the man. The rings of mail
 may no more travel by the hero's side,
 nor with the warrior go. No joy of harps
 remains, no play upon the gleeful strings,
 no loyal hawk yet flies around the hall,
 2150 no swift mare stamps the steading. Bloody death
 has sent away so many living kin."
 Thus, sad in mind, bemoaning many sorrows,
 one for all, he lived unhappily
 both day and night, until the surge of death
 2155 had touched his heart.

The ancient enemy
then found that hoard of joy, which stood agape—
the burning one, who seeks out barrow-mounds,
a hostile dragon, flying in the night
by fire enfolded; landsmen fear his flight.
2160 That earthen temple he shall then invade,
where heathen gold he watches, wise in years—
but he is none the better for his hoard.

Three hundred years that nation-killer ruled
the earthly treasure house, immense in strength,
2165 until one man enraged him, bore away
a gilded cup unto his former lord
and sued for peace. The hoard was plundered then,
that wealth of rings, and to the wretched man
was pardon given, when the lord looked on
2170 that ancient work of men for the first time.
But when the worm awoke, strife was renewed;
he sniffed along the stone, stark-hearted, found
his foeman's footprints; by the dragon's head
with secret skill he had so nearly stepped.
2175 So may a man unfated thus survive
both woe and exile, he who holds the grace
of heaven's lord. The guardian of the hoard
searched swiftly on the ground, and wished to find
who gave this wound to him while still he slept;
2180 then, hot and fierce in mind, he searched around
outside the cave: there was no man at all
in that waste-land—yet he rejoiced in war,
the work of battle, went inside the mound
and sought the treasure-cup, and soon found out
2185 that someone had indeed disturbed his gold,
his noble wealth. The hoard-guard bided time
impatiently until the evening came;
he was enraged, the barrow's guardian grim,
and would repay them for that precious cup
2190 with burning flame. The day passed by at last,
which pleased this worm; he would abide no more
within his walls, but out he came with fire,
suffused with flame. That day was terrible,
a dread beginning for that nation's folk:
2195 for soon an end would sorely come to pass
upon their treasure-giver, lord and friend.

That guest, the worm, began to spew forth flame
to burn bright dwellings; gleams of fire-light shone
and terrified mankind—the flying foe

2200 wished not to leave a single thing alive.
That serpent's warfare then was widely seen,
oppressor's brutal envy, near and far,
how he laid low and hated Geatish folk,
the battle-foe; before the dawn of day
2205 he sped back to his secret hall and hoard.
He wrapped that country all in burning flame,
in baleful fire; he trusted in his cave,
his walls and war-strength—but his hope proved false.

To Beowulf then that horror was relayed,
2210 made quickly known, in truth: that his own home,
the best of buildings, burned in surging fire,
the Geats' gift-throne. For that the good king grieved
within his heart, his thoughts most sorrowful:
the wise man thought he had offended God,
2215 the Lord eternal, over ancient law;
his breast welled up within with shadowed thoughts
unlike himself. The fiery worm had wrecked
the people's fastness, all the outer coast,
their earthly stronghold ruined by the flame;
2220 For this the war-king, prince of Weather-Geats,
himself devised revenge. The lord of earls,
defense of warriors, bade his smith construct
a splendid war-shield, all of iron forged;
no forest-wood, he thought, would ever help
2225 against the flame. The traveler must see
his end of days and worldly life, that prince
so good of old—he, and the worm as well,
though he had held so long that hoard of wealth.
The ring-lord scorned that he should seek his foe,
2230 the flying dragon, with a troop of men
or army vast: he did not dread the fight,
but reckoned all the war-craft of the worm
worth nothing much, his strength and spirit both;
for he had dared distress, and passed alive
2235 through many dangers and the crash of war,
since he, the man with glory blessed, had cleansed
the hall of Hrothgar, crushed in war the kin
of Grendel's hated clan.

Not least was that
of all his battles, where his king was slain,
2240 when Higelac the son of Hrethel died
in Friesland, beaten by the bloody sword
and rush of war, the people's lord and friend.
Thence Beowulf swam away by his own might
and carried thirty shirts of war upon his arm

2245 when he pushed to the sea. But little cause
 had Franks to glory in their victory,
 when they bore shields against him: few who fought
 that warlike man returned to seek their homes.
 The son of Ecgtheow swam the sea's expanse,
 2250 a wretched man alone, back to his folk;
 there Hygd, the queen, offered both hoard and realm,
 the rings and kingly seat; she did not trust
 that her own son could hold his homeland's throne
 from foreign hosts, now Hygelac was dead.
 2255 Yet by no means that people destitute
 could tempt the earl to be young Heardred's lord,
 or choose the royal rule; but Beowulf served
 with grace and honor, gave him friend's advice
 until the prince grew up, and ruled the Geats.
 2260 The exiled sons of Ohthere the Swede
 sought out King Heardred then, across the sea;
 they had rebelled against the Scilfing's lord,
 the best of those sea-kings who deal out wealth
 in Swedish lands. That was the end of him:
 2265 for aiding them the son of Hygelac
 obtained a mortal wound, a sword-stroke hard,
 and Ongentheow's bold son returned again
 to seek his home, when Heardred lay in death,
 and gave the royal seat of Geatish rule
 2270 to Beowulf's hold; and he was a good king.
 In later days he bore in mind that woe,
 his people's fall, and thought to pay it back.
 To Eadgils he became a friend in need,
 and came across the ocean with his folk
 2275 to help Ohthere's son with arms and men;
 he wreaked his vengeance then, by journeys cold
 and full of care, and robbed the king of life.

 So Ecgtheow's son survived through every ill,
 each fearsome slaughter, every glorious deed,
 2280 until the day when he must fight the worm.
 The Geatish lord went then as one of twelve,
 enraged by grief, to seek the dragon out;
 for he had learned then how the feud arose,
 that baleful hate of men: the treasure-cup
 2285 had come to him from the informer's hand.
 The thief who first began that strife war
 was thirteenth in the troop, the mournful slave
 who wretchedly must lead them to the plain.
 Against his will he went where he alone

2290 could find that hall, a cave beneath the earth
 beside the sea; that place was filled within
 with golden wire and wealth. The awful guard,
 a ready warrior, held that ancient gold
 beneath the earth; it was no purchase cheap
 2295 for any man to win that treasure-hoard.
 The battle-hardy king, the Geat's gold-friend,
 sat on the cliff and wished good health on all
 his hearth-companions. But his heart was sad—
 it wavered, drawn to death; the fate so near
 2300 which now at last must meet that ancient man
 and seek his spirit's treasure, split apart
 his life and body; for his noble soul
 no longer would be bound within his flesh.
 Then Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke these words:
 2305 "In youth I passed through many times of war
 and battle-rushes; I remember all.
 When seven winters old, the treasure-guard,
 the people's lord and friend, took me away
 from my own father; so King Hrethel raised
 2310 and guarded me, and gave me wealth and feasts
 for kinship's sake. I was no more his foe,
 a man within his town, than were his sons,
 Herebeald, Hæthcyn, or Hygelac.
 A bed of death was spread unfittingly
 2315 for one, the eldest, by his kinsman's deed,
 when Hæthcyn struck him down, his friend and lord,
 with shaft from horn-bow, missed his mark at sport
 and shot his brother with a bloody spear.
 That was a death which could not be repaid,
 2320 a crime that saddened hearts: that noble son
 must lose his life, yet still be unavenged.
 "So mournful is it for an ancient man
 to see his youthful boy sway on the tree.
 He utters then a song, a painful lay,
 2325 when his own son hangs there to gorge the crows,
 and he may help him not by any means,
 so very old; each morning calls to mind
 his child's departure; he cares not to wait
 for other heirs and children, when that one
 2330 has met his end of deeds through needful death.
 He sorrowfully looks on his son's room,
 the empty wine-hall and the wind-swept bed,
 lamenting and bereaved; the rider sleeps,
 the hero in the grave; there is no sport,
 2335 no sound of harp in hall, as once had been.

He goes into his room, and one by one
he sings sad songs; too empty seem to him
the homestead and the plains.

- “So Hrethel bore
- 2340 such seething grief in heart for Herebeald;
he could not right that wrong of kindred slain,
nor hate that warrior for his loathsome deed—
though no more was he well-beloved by him.
In sorrow, he on whom such pain came down
gave up the joy of men, and chose God’s light;
- 2345 he left his heirs the land and people’s town,
as does a blessed man—then passed from life.
“Then was there sin and conflict, common strife
and warfare hard between the Swedes and Geats
across wide waters after Hrethel’s death:
- 2350 for Ongentheow’s bold sons were warlike then
and would not stay on friendly terms with folk
across the sea, but dealt malicious cuts
near Hreosna Hill. My kinsmen-friends avenged
that crime and feud, as it was later learned;
- 2355 though one bought victory with his own life,
a hard bargain—to Hæthcyn, lord of Geats,
the war proved fatal. Then I learned at dawn
his brother wreaked revenge upon his bane
by edge of sword, when Ongentheow the king
- 2360 confronted Eofor, who unseamed his helm—
the aged Swede collapsed, pale from his wounds;
the hand that still remembered feuds enough
held nothing back, but swung the mortal stroke.
“In battle I repaid those gifts of wealth
- 2365 my king had given, as I was allowed
to work with shining sword; he gave me land,
estates and joys of home. He had no need
to seek less worthy warriors, bought for price,
among the Gifthas, or the Spear-Danes’ folk,
- 2370 or from the Swedish realm; I always wished
to go before him in the troop on foot,
alone in front—and so I always shall
engage in battle, while this sword endures
that often served me both before and since,
- 2375 when I in honor struck down Day-Raven,
the Hugas’ champion—he could not bear off
that precious necklace to the Frisian king,
but in the camp he fell, the banner-guard,
a prince in glory; nor did I slay him
- 2380 with weapon’s edge, but by my battle-grip

I broke his bone-house, burst his surging heart.
And now the sword, the hand and hardy blade,
must fight to win the hoard.”

So Beowulf spoke,
and gave a word of promise one last time:
2385 “In youth I ventured into many wars—
and still I shall, the wise guard of the folk,
seek out revenge, and work a glorious deed,
if from his earthen hall that guilty foe
will dare to seek me out.”

For one last time
2390 the valiant helm-bearer addressed his men,
his comrades dear: “No sword would I have borne,
no weapon to the worm, if I had known
how else I might have grappled with that foe
for glory’s sake, as I with Grendel fought;
2395 but I expect his war-flames shall burn hot,
his breath and venom; thus I bear with me
a shield and shirt of mail. I shall not flee
one step from that cave-guard, but in our fight
before the walls mankind’s Creator shall
2400 assign our fates. I am so bold in mind
that I forgo a boast against this worm
who flies to war. Await me on the hill,
my men-at-arms, defended by your mail,
and watch which of us two endures his wounds
2405 after the battle-rush. This venture is not yours,
and no man’s measure save for mine alone:
that he should trade in blows against this foe,
performing noble deeds. That gold shall I
with valor win, or war shall take me off,
2410 and fearsome life-destruction seize your lord.”

He rose up with his shield, that warrior bold,
the hardy man in helm, and in his mail
approached the stony cliff, trusting the strength
of just one man—that is no coward’s act!
2415 Beside the wall the good and virtuous man,
who had endured so many battle-dins
when footmen clashed, observed an arch of stone
through which a stream broke outward from the cave;
the water boiled so hot with battle-fire
2420 that he could not for any length of time
go deep inside unburned or reach the hoard
for dragon’s flames. The prince of Weather-Geats,
now in his rage, let words burst from his breast,

a stark-heart shout; beneath the hoary stone
 2425 is voice became a roaring battle-cry.
 Then hatred was aroused; the hoard-guard knew
 the voice of man; now there was no more time
 to sue for friendship. First blazed out the breath
 of that opponent from the stony cave,
 2430 the war-flow hot; the earth rang out with noise.
 The man beneath the barrow, lord of Geats,
 then swung his shield against the awful flame;
 and so impelled the curling serpent's heart
 to seek the fight. The good war-king had drawn
 2435 his ancient heirloom sword, unblunt of edge;
 each feared the other, filled with thoughts of hate.
 Firm-minded stood the king with lofty shield,
 defense of friends; while quickly curled the worm
 together tightly, he abode in mail.
 2440 The burning one in coils came slithering
 and rushed to meet his fate. The shield served well,
 but warding life and body somewhat less
 than he, the famous king, had hoped at heart,
 if he had been allowed to rule the day—
 2445 but fate did not assign him victory
 or battle-glory. Swift he raised his hand,
 the Geatish lord, and struck the horrid foe
 with shining sword—but the bright edge gave way
 and glanced on bone, the blade less strongly bit
 2450 than he had need, the king hard-pressed by cares.
 The barrow-guard grew savage in his mind
 after that battle-blow, and spouted flames
 and deadly fire: the lights of war leaped forth.
 The gold-friend of the Geats did not rejoice
 2455 in glorious victory; his war-sword failed
 as it should not have done, that trusty steel
 in battle bared. That was no easy thing,
 that Ecgtheow's famous son should be compelled
 to leave the earth, and must against his will
 2460 take lodging elsewhere—just as every man
 must leave his fleeting days.

It was not long
 until those adversaries met again.
 The hoard-guard then took heart, his breast welled up
 anew with breath; and he who ruled the folk
 2465 was seized by searing flame, and suffered much.
 His troop of hand-companions, princes' sons,
 stood not in warlike virtue by their lord,
 but ducked into the wood, to save their lives.

The soul of one, however, surged with grief:
2470 for kinship never may be put aside,
nor changed at all, by one who rightly thinks.

Wiglaf was he called, a Swedish prince,
the son of Weohstan and Ælfhere's kin,
beloved shield-fighter; he saw his lord
2475 beneath the war-mask suffer in the heat.
He then remembered all the oaths he'd sworn,
the wealthy homestead of the Wægmundings,
the rights of rule his father had once held;
he could not then hold back—hand took up shield
2480 of yellow linden, drew the ancient sword,
the blade of Eanmund, Ohthere's bold son:
for Weohstan had in battle slain that man,
that friendless exile, with his weapon's edge,
and brought back to his kin his shining helm,
2485 his coat of rings, and his old giant sword;
his kinsman, Onela, gave him that blade
and gear of war—not mentioning the feud,
though Weohstan had laid low his brother's son.
He held that treasure, sword and shirt of mail,
2490 for many years, until his boy could do
his noble deeds, as had his forefathers;
amid the Geats he gave him untold gifts
of battle-garments, when he passed from life,
wise on his way. Now this was the first time
2495 the youthful champion ventured with his lord
to battle's rush. His spirit did not melt,
nor did his father's sword fail in the fight:
so found the worm, when face-to-face they came.

Then Wiglaf spoke to his companions ten
2500 these words of counsel (mournful was his soul):
“I still recall the time, when we drank mead
and in the beer-hall promised our dear lord,
who gave these rings to us, that for his gifts
of battle-harness we would pay him back,
2505 if he should need our helms and hardy swords.
For this he chose us from among his host
for this adventure, by his will alone;
he reckoned us as worthy of that fame
and gave us treasures, thought us trusty men,
2510 helm-bearing spearmen bold—although our lord,
the people's guardian, sought to do alone
this glorious deed, for he among all men
performed great works of fame, foolhardy deeds.

Now has that day arrived, when our own lord
 2515 has need of strength and faithful men of war;
 let us go forth, and give our war-chief help
 while he endures the grim and awful flames.
 God knows how much more dear it is to me
 that with my gold-giver the flame's embrace
 2520 should grasp my flesh. It seems not right that we
 should bear our shields back home, unless we first
 can fell the foe, and save our prince's life,
 the king of Weather-Geats. I know it well,
 that he has not deserved, for any deed,
 2525 to suffer pain alone of all the Geats
 and sink in war; his sword, then, shall I share,
 the helm, the mail-shirt, and the shroud of war."
 He plunged through deadly smoke to help his lord,
 bearing his battle-helm, and spoke few words:
 2530 "Dear Beowulf, king, perform all duty well,
 as you said long ago in days of youth
 that while you lived you would not fail in fame;
 now, bold in deeds, you must preserve your life
 with all your strength: I serve you to the last!"

2535 Upon these words the angry worm advanced
 a second time, the horrid enemy
 alight with surging fire sought out his foes,
 those men he hated. Flame came forth in waves
 and burnt his shield to boss. The spearman's mail
 2540 could give no help to him, but that young man
 ducked quickly down behind his kinsman's shield,
 when flames had burnt away his own defense.
 Then yet the king, recovering his mind,
 with mighty strength struck with his battle-sword,
 2545 that on the head it fell with violent force—
 but Nægling burst apart, and Beowulf's sword
 failed in the fight, the ancient steel-gray blade.
 No iron edge could give him aid in war:
 his hand was far too strong, and overtaxed
 2550 all blades with mighty swings (so I have heard),
 when to the fight he bore his blood-hard sword—
 no better was he for the weapon's edge.
 The people's foe then made his third advance:
 the fiery dragon, bearing hate in mind,
 2555 rushed on the bold one, hot and battle-grim,
 now that he had the space, and seized his neck
 with biting teeth. The king was drenched in gore,
 his life-blood welling from the wound in gouts.

Then, as I learned, that earl who stood beside
 2560 his king at need revealed his valiant soul,
 how mighty and how brave his nature was.
 He did not heed the head, but burned his hand,
 that man of spirit, when he helped his kin—
 the man in armor pierced the enemy
 2565 a little lower, that his sword sank in,
 gleaming and gilded, that the fire began
 to fail and falter. Then the king himself
 regained his wits, and drew the battle-knife
 he wore upon his armor, strong and sharp,
 2570 and carved all through the middle of the worm.
 They felled the fiend—their strength drove out its life—
 and both of them had cut the dragon down,
 those noble kinsmen; so a man should be,
 a thane at need! But for the king it was
 2575 the last of victories by his own deeds,
 his worldly works.

His wound began to swell
 and burn like fire, which that earth-dragon struck;
 at once he knew that wicked poison welled
 within his breast. The youthful prince sat down
 2580 beside the wall, and, wise in thought, he looked
 upon that giants' work, the ancient hall
 held fast by arches and huge posts of stone.
 The thane, so very good, then washed by hand
 the bloody war-wounds of his lord and friend,
 2585 the battle-weary king, and loosed his helm.

Then Beowulf spoke over his mortal wound—
 he knew full well that he had lived through all
 his time of earthly joy; his count of days
 had passed forever, death extremely near:
 2590 “Now would I give my son this battle shirt,
 had any such an heir been born to me
 of my own flesh. I held this people long
 for fifty years; no other king was there
 of any folk around who dared approach
 2595 my realm with warriors, threaten me with fear.
 I lived out in my home my span of time
 and ruled my people well, not seeking strife
 nor swearing any false, unrighteous oaths.
 For all of this I may rejoice, though sick
 2600 with mortal wounds: because there is no need
 for mankind's Lord to charge me with the death
 and murder of my kin, when flies my soul,

my life from body. Quickly, go within,
 and see the hoard beneath the hoary stone,
 2605 beloved Wiglaf, now the worm lies dead,
 asleep from painful wounds and robbed of gold.
 Go now in haste, that I may see the hoard,
 the ancient golden treasure, and appraise
 the brilliant gems: so, for that precious wealth,
 2610 I may more softly lay aside my life
 and people's realm, which I have held so long."

The son of Weohstan quickly then obeyed
 his wounded, war-sick lord, after these words,
 and in his woven battle-shirt he went
 2615 beneath the barrow's roof. The brave young thane
 saw many precious jewels and shining gold
 and wonders on the walls, when he came near
 to where the worm had lain, the dragon's den,
 the old night-flier's lair; there vessels stood,
 2620 the cups of ancient men, deprived of jewels,
 with none to polish them; there many helms,
 all old and rusty, arm-rings worked with skill.
 So wealth and gold may easily escape
 from each and every man, hide it who will.
 2625 He saw a golden standard hanging high
 above the hoard, the greatest work of hands,
 woven with skill; from this a light shone out,
 by which he saw the whole floor of the cave,
 and looked upon the splendor. Of the worm
 2630 there was no sign: the sword had cut him off.
 The Wiglaf plundered treasures from the hoard
 within the cave, the ancient giants' work
 by one man robbed, who heaped upon his breast
 both cups and dishes, which he chose himself;
 2635 the flag he also took, that beacon bright.
 The sword of that old lord, all iron-edged,
 had stricken him who long had held that wealth,
 and waged such fiery terror, surging fierce
 at midnight for his hoard, 'till he was slain.
 2640 The herald hastened, yearning to return
 and eager in his spoil, beset by doubts
 as whether he, stout-hearted man, would meet
 the Storm-Geats' king alive upon that plain
 where he had left him, sick and wanting strength.
 2645 He, with those treasures, found the bloody king,
 his very lord, whose life was at its end,
 and splashed him then with water, until words
 broke from his breast.

The ancient warrior-king,
the man in sorrow, saw the gold and spoke:

2650 “For all these treasures that I gaze upon
I give my thanks to God, eternal lord,
the glorious king: that I have been allowed
to win such wealth for my dear people’s use
before my day of death. My own life’s end

2655 I wisely sold to buy this treasure-hoard.
You still must carry out our people’s needs;
I may no longer stay. Command the men
renowned in war to build a splendid mound
after my pyre, upon the seaward cliffs;

2660 so shall it rise memorial to my folk
upon the Whale’s Headland, that sailors since
shall call it Beowulf’s Barrow, those who drive
their barques upon the darkness of the sea.”

The king, so bold in mind, doffed from his neck

2665 the golden ring, and gave it to his thane,
the youthful spearman, with his gold-worked helm
and shirt of mail, and bade him use them well:
“You are the last remaining of our kin,
the Wægmundings; for fate has swept away

2670 my kinsmen all, to seek their destined end,
the earls in valor; I must follow them.”
That was the final word of the old man,
his heart’s last thought before he chose the pyre,
the burning battle-flames; and from his breast

2675 his soul went out to seek its rightful doom.

So painful was it to one young in years
and yet unwise, that he should see the man
most dear to him on earth fare wretchedly
at his life’s end. His killer also lay

2680 bereft of life, that dragon of the earth,
oppressed by violent death. The coiling worm
no more held sway over the hoard of rings:
for iron edges, hard and battle-sharp,
the work of hammer-blows, had cut him off—

2685 the wide-flyer, affixed with mortal wounds,
plunged to the ground beside his treasure-house.
No longer did he fly aloft at night,
nor show himself, nor boast of all his wealth,
but fell to earth by warrior’s handiwork.

2690 Few mighty men, though they may dare all deeds,
have so excelled that they could have advanced
against the poison breath, or could have stirred

the ring-hoard with their hands, if they had found
 the watchful warden dwelling in his cave.
 2695 That share of lordly treasure was repaid
 to Beowulf for his death; those enemies
 had brought each other's end of fleeting life.
 It was not long until those craven men
 gave up the wood, ten traitors, late for war,
 2700 who had not dared to cast their javelins
 at their lord's mighty need, but bore their shields
 and shirts of mail in shame to where he lay,
 the ancient man, and looked on Wiglaf there.
 The weary champion sat beside his lord
 2705 and, splashing water, sought to wake the king—
 but he did not succeed. No more on earth,
 though well he wished to, could he hold the life
 of that spear-chief, nor change at all the will
 of heaven's lord: the doom of God would rule
 2710 the deeds of every man, as it still does.
 The young man gave a grim reply to those
 who'd lost their courage. Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
 with pain in heart spoke to those unloved men:
 "Let him who wishes to speak truly say
 2715 that this good lord, who gave you all those gifts
 and horsemen's gear, which here you stand in now,
 when on the ale-bench he would often give
 his hall-companions helms and shirts of mail,
 a chieftain to his thanes, the mightiest
 2720 that anywhere he found, both far and near—
 that he completely, rashly, threw away
 that gear of war, when battle came to him.
 He has no need to boast of war-comrades,
 this people's king; but God has granted him,
 2725 the Lord of glory, that he should avenge
 himself, alone, when he had need of strength.
 In battle I could give him little aid
 to save his life, and yet I undertook
 above my measure to defend my kin;
 2730 but ever was I weaker when I struck
 the mortal foe with sword, and weaker flames
 surged from his head. Too few defenders thronged
 around their king, when came his time of need.
 Now shall the gifts of treasure and of swords,
 2735 all joys of home, all gladness of your kin
 fail all at once; and every man must leave
 his kindred's town, deprived of rights of land,
 when princes from afar learn of your flight,

2740 your deed inglorious. Death is better far
for every earl than life lived in disgrace!”

He then commanded tidings of the fight
be given to the fort, above the cliff,
where all the morning long the noble troop
of shield-bearers had sat in mournful mood,
2745 expecting either the dear man’s return
or end of days. The man who rode the heights
did not at all keep silent of his news,
but truly said, in hearing of them all:
“Now is the Geatish lord, who gave out joy
2750 to all our people, fast in his death-bed,
and lies in final rest by dragon’s deed;
beside him lies that mortal enemy
struck down by dagger-blows; the sword could not
work any kind of wound upon that foe.
2755 At Beowulf’s side sits Wiglaf, Weohstan’s boy,
a living earl beside another dead,
and holds the death-watch over friend and foe
in weary mind.

“Now may our folk expect
a time of war, when our king’s fall is known
2760 to Franks and Frisians. Strife was strongly stirred
against the Hugas, when fared Hygelac
with ships of war onto the Frisian land,
where Rhineland Franks attacked him valiantly
and overwhelmed him with a greater force,
2765 so that the mail-clad king must sink and fall
amid his troop—no treasures did the chief
give to his warriors. Ever since that day
the Merovingian has denied us grace.

“Nor do I hope from Sweden peace or trust,
2770 for it is widely known that Ongentheow
deprived our Hæthcyn, Hrethel’s son, of life
near Ravenswood, when first the Battle-Swedes
attacked the Geatish folk for their affront.
At once Ohthere’s father, old and wise
2775 and full of terror, gave him such a blow;
he cut the sea-king down, and saved his wife,
the ancient lady all bereft of gold,
mother to Onela and Ohthere—
and then pursued the Geats, his mortal foes,
2780 until they had escaped into the wood.
In dreadful straits and lordless as they were,
he there besieged them with his mighty host,

those leavings of the sword, weary with wounds;
 he promised woe to all that wretched band
 2785 the whole night long, and said when morning came
 he would destroy them with the edge of swords,
 and some would hang on trees, to feed the crows.
 But comfort came to mournful men with dawn,
 when from afar they heard the trumpet-sound
 2790 of Hygelac's own horn, when that good prince
 came to support them with a troop of men.
 "Then was the bloody swath of Swedes and Geats,
 the deadly rush of warriors, widely seen,
 how they stirred enmity among themselves.
 2795 Good Ongentheow, so wise from many woes,
 retreated to the fastness with his kin;
 he knew the battle-skill of Hygelac,
 that proud man's war-craft, trusted not his strength
 to long resist against those sailing-men
 2800 or guard the hoard, the Swedish wives and sons,
 against the warlike Geats; and so he fled
 behind his earthen walls. The Geats gave chase
 to Swedish folk; the sign of Hygelac
 crossed over fortress walls, when Hrethlings thronged
 2805 into the fort. Then gray-haired Ongentheow
 was brought to bay by sword-edge, that that king
 to Eofor's judgment must submit alone.
 The son of Wonred, Wulf, struck angrily
 with his war-sword, that by his stroke the blood
 2810 sprang out in streams from Ongentheow's forehead.
 Yet he was not afraid, the ancient Swede,
 but quickly he repaid that deadly blow
 with worse exchange, when he, the people's king,
 had turned to face him. Nor could the lively Wulf
 2815 give counter-blow against the aged man,
 for he had sheared the helm upon his head,
 and made him fall, blood-stained, upon the earth;
 he was not dead, but yet recovered health,
 although the wound had hurt. The hardythane
 2820 of Hygelac, his brother thus laid low,
 broke through the shield-wall and the giant helm
 of Ongentheow with his enormous sword,
 his ancient hafted blade; the king sank down,
 the people's guard, when life was struck from him.
 2825 Then many bound Wulf's wounds, and raised him up,
 when it was given them to rule the field.
 One warrior stripped the other: Eofor took
 from Ongentheow the iron shirt of mail,

the hardy hilted sword and battle-helm,
 2830 and bore the old man's arms to Hygelac.
 He took that treasure, and he fairly vowed
 to give reward to him amid his folk,
 and stood beside that oath: the Geatish lord,
 good Hrethel's son, repaid the battle-rush
 2835 of Wulf and Eofor, after he came home,
 with treasure in excess: he gave to each
 a hundred thousand hides of land and hand-locked rings—
 no man on middle-earth has cause to blame the king
 for that reward so glorious, which they won in war—
 2840 and gave to Eofor his own daughter's hand
 as pledge of grace and honor to his home.
 "That is the feud and deadly enmity
 which I expect: the Swedes shall seek us out,
 the valiant Scilfings, when they learn our lord
 2845 lies lifeless now, who long held hoard and realm
 against our foes after the heroes' fall,
 he who advanced the people's benefit
 and further yet performed such noble deeds.
 Now haste is best, that we should look upon
 2850 our people's king, the man who gave us rings,
 and bring him to the pyre. Nor shall we burn
 one thing alone with him, the hearty man:
 there is a hoard of treasure, gold untold
 so grimly purchased, rings he bought at last
 2855 with his own life. These shall the flames devour
 and fire consume—no earl shall wear his wealth
 in memory, nor any maiden bright
 shall wear a worthy ring upon her neck,
 but all shall go in mourning, robbed of gold,
 2860 to walk in foreign lands—not only once—
 now that our war-lord has laid laughter down,
 all games and gleeful joy. Thus shall the spear
 be clutched in hand in many morning chills;
 no sound of harps shall wake the warriors up,
 2865 but with the eagle shall the raven dark
 speak eagerly above the dead, and say
 how at his meal he thrives and has his fill,
 while with the wolf he feasts upon the slain."

 So told that valiant man his hateful tale,
 2870 and did not lie at all in word or fact.
 The troop arose; unhappily they went
 beneath the Eagle's Headland, welling tears,
 to see the wonder. On the sand they found

the lifeless one upon his bed of rest,
 2875 their lord who gave them rings in time before;
 the trusty man had reached his end of days,
 and he, the prince of Geats, the warrior-king,
 had died a wondrous death. Beside him there
 they gazed upon that beast so strange, the worm
 2880 upon the plain, the foe now lying dead;
 the fiery dragon was so grimly stained
 and scorched by flames; full fifty foot-marks long
 he measured as he lay. The joys of air
 he ruled while night had lasted, coming down
 2885 again to seek his den—and now by death
 he was held fast, and he enjoyed no more
 his caves of earth. Beside him vessels stood,
 those cups and dishes, and those precious swords
 consumed with rust, which in the breast of earth
 2890 had dwelt a thousand winters, since that hoard,
 that gold of ancient men, was bound by spells,
 that none might reach into that hall of rings,
 unless the King of glory, God himself—
 who is mankind's defense—should give to one
 2895 of his own choice to open up the hoard,
 to whatsoever man he thought was meet.

That course (as it was seen) had not availed
 the one who so unrightly hid that wealth
 beneath the walls. The guard slew only one;
 2900 thus was that feud avenged so wrathfully.
 It always is a wonder, when an earl
 so bold in courage reaches to the end
 of his life's course, when he no longer may
 abide among his kin in his mead-hall.
 2905 It fell to Beowulf, when he sought a fight
 against the barrow's guard (not knowing how
 his parting from this world must come to pass),
 just as those glorious kings who left that hoard
 so deeply swore until the Day of Doom,
 2910 that he would be held guilty of great sin,
 confined by devils, fast in bonds of hell
 and punished for his crime, who robbed that place.
 Had he not been so eager for the gold,
 he would more readily have sought before
 2915 the favor of the one who owned that hoard.

Then Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke these words:
 "Often, for one man's will, many an earl
 must suffer wrack: so has it chanced for us.

We could not give out dear beloved king,
 2920 our kingdom's guardian, any good advice—
 that he should not go out to meet that worm
 who guarded gold, but let him lie alone
 where long he was, and dwell within his house
 until the world's ending; but he held on
 2925 to his high fate. The hoard is now revealed
 and grimly won, the destiny too strong
 which drove our people's king to seek the gold.
 I went within, and looked upon them all,
 that house's trappings, when I was allowed,
 2930 though not as friend did I thus venture in
 beneath the earthen wall. In haste I took
 much treasure with my hands, a mighty load
 of hoard-wealth, bore it hither to my king.
 He yet was living, and still had his wits;
 2935 he spoke, that ancient man, of many things
 in sorrow, ordered me to bid you build
 upon his pyre a barrow, high and great,
 in memory of all his friendly deeds:
 for he was worthiest of men in war
 2940 around the earth so wide, while he enjoyed
 his stronghold's wealth. Let us now hasten on
 a second time to see and seek that heap
 of precious gems and wonders under walls;
 I now shall lead you, so that you shall see
 2945 much gold and rings. Let now the burning pyre
 be promptly made, when we come out again,
 and carry forth our lord, that man so dear,
 where he shall long remain in God's embrace.”
 The son of Weohstan, hero bold in war,
 2950 announced to all the men, the hall-rulers,
 that they should carry firewood from afar
 to where the good man lay: “Now shall the pyre
 with darkened flame consume the warriors' chief,
 who many times endured the iron hail
 2955 when storms of arrows, urged by bowmen's strength,
 shot over our shield-wall, the shaft held true,
 the feathered arrow serving eagerly.”
 Then Weohstan's son so wise called from the troop
 the seven best of all the royal thanes;
 2960 these eight went in beneath the hostile roof,
 those men of war; and one bore in his hand
 a burning torch, and walked before them all.
 All eager were they, plundering that hoard,
 when they perceived a portion of that wealth

2965 lie in the hall unguarded, perishing;
none mourned at all, when hastily they bore
those precious treasures out; the worm they shoved
over the cliff, let waves take him away:
the flood embraced the guardian of the hoard.
2970 Then was the twisted gold on wagons laid,
an untold sum, and thus the prince was borne,
the hoary warrior, to the Whale's Headland.

The Geatish people then prepared for him
a pyre upon the earth, a splendid blaze,
2975 all hung with helms and warlike battle-shields
and shirts of shining mail, as he had asked;
amidst it all they laid their famous king,
those heroes all lamenting their dear lord.
Upon the hill the warriors then began
2980 to stoke a mighty fire; wood-smoke rose black
above the flames; the blaze made roaring noise
mingled with weeping—surging winds died down—
until his bone-house had been broken through,
heat in his breast. His folk, mournful in mind,
2985 bemoaned their chieftain's death; and likewise sad
a Geatish woman, with her hair bound up,
sang out in mournful care for Beowulf king;
she said she sorely feared invaders' wrath
and many slaughters, terrors of the host,
2990 humiliation and the captive's lot.
Heaven swallowed the smoke.

The Weather-Geats

then built a grave upon that headland high;
it was so tall and broad as to be seen
by sailors on the waves; and in ten days
2995 they timbered Beowulf's monument, enclosed
the pyre's remains with walls, as wisest men
could worthily devise it. In that mound
they placed those jewels and rings, all ornaments
which had before been taken from the hoard
3000 by daring men; they let the earth receive
that noble treasure, gold beneath the ground,
where yet it lies, as useless now to men
as ever it had been. Around the grave
men bold in battle rode, the princes' sons,
3005 twelve men in all, who wished to sing their grief
and to bemoan their king: they uttered songs
and spoke about that man; they praised his deeds,
and all his noble works they highly deemed—

as it is fitting that a man should praise
3010 his friend and lord with words, and love with heart,
when he must be led forth from form of flesh.
So did the people of the Geats lament
their fallen lord, companions at his hearth:
they said that he had been of any worldly king
3015 the mildest man of all, and the most gentle lord,
most gracious to his folk, most yearning to win praise.

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