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Beowulf in blank verse

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BEOWULF IN BLANK VERSE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English and Comparative Literature

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Robert Andrew Swart

May 2007

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ABSTRACT

BEOWULF IN BLANK VERSE

by Robert Andrew Swart

This thesis translates from Old English into Present-Day English the section in MS Cotton Vitellius A. XV. known as *Beowulf*; the poem has been rendered into unrhymed iambic pentameter (blank verse). This thesis also includes a critical introduction exploring how the monsters in the poem horrify the audience, a brief note about the chosen mode of translation, a listing of the names of both places and people that appear in the work, a genealogical chart of the tribes in the poem, a history and explanation of the war between the Swedes and Geats that is related in the second part of *Beowulf*, and a brief textual history tracing the journey of *Cotton Vitellius A. XV.* from its origins in a medieval monastery to its current home in the British Library.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DEDICATION

I wish to acknowledge the efforts of my thesis director Dr. Nancy Stork for her guidance, knowledge, and encouragement; my second reader Dr. Bonita Cox for her practical advice and support; my poetry professor Dr. Samuel Maio for his teaching me the nuances of blank verse; and Michelle Perry for her proofreading of drafts and assuring me that I would someday regret giving up the project to run away and join the circus.

I remain unconvinced.

I dedicate this thesis to the families of the Hernandezes, Highshoes, Martinezes, Pachecos, Perrys, and Swarts; they have all greatly influenced both my work and my person.

Thank You.

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INTRODUCTION

Grendel, his Mother, and the Drake as Negative Humanity: *Beowulf* as Art-Horror

As part of his seminal study, “The Monster and the Critics,” J.R.R. Tolkien sifts through the various attempts made by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century scholars to classify *Beowulf*. Refuting previous charges that the poet had written a “typical folk-tale,” a work too “thin and cheap” to be considered “serious” literature, Tolkien argues that the poem is a powerful myth, wherein the poet “feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends” (Tolkien 63). He admonishes critics who treat *Beowulf* solely as a historical document or who attempt to categorize the work into an inappropriate genre (54). Tolkien eventually decides that “*Beowulf* is not an ‘epic,’ not even a magnified ‘lay.’ [...] Though if we must have a term, we should choose rather ‘elegy’ (85).” Certainly praise and lamentation, the hallmarks of elegy, abound in this work, for the speaker and the characters notably praise the valor of Beowulf while he rises in the world and lament his death when he is felled by the Drake’s poisonous bite. Consider specifically the strong elegiac sentiment once Beowulf’s body has been interred in his barrow:

Swa hit gedefe bið
þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,
ferhðum freoge þonne he forð scile
of lichaman læded weorðan,
Swa begnornodon Geata leode
hlafordes hryre, heorðgeneatas:
cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga
mannum mildust ond monðwærust,
leodum liðost ond lofgeornost. (3174b-3182b)¹

¹ Text is that of the Mitchell/Robinson edition; the translation is my own.

So it is right
 That a man praise his friend and lord with words,
 He love him with his heart, whenever he
 Shall be led forth out of his body-home.
 The people of the Geats, the hearth-comrades,
 Thus mourned the fall of their lord. They said he was
 The mildest of men and most peaceful world-king,
 The kindest with people, and most fame-keen.

Clearly the poet means for the audience to alternately praise the hero's greatness while lamenting his passing in this sequence, but does the term "elegy" adequately describe the balance of this work? By labeling *Beowulf* "elegy" (indeed the term largely has been accepted, although "epic" still persists) do we as critics distort the work to fit a category to which it only partially conforms, thereby shunting aside those aspects of the poem that are distinctly not elegiac? How do we contend with the protagonist's supernatural strength and the poet's narration both of which reflect "epic," the genre from which Tolkien wishes to extricate the poem? And how do we reconcile the inclusion of both characters from mythology like Weland, the legendary Norse smith, and historical figures like Offa, the Angles 4th century king? Finally, where does the following scene fit into "elegy?"

Ne þæt se aglæca yldan þohte
 ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe
 slæpendne rinc, slat unwearnum,
 bat banlocan, blod edrum dranc,
 synsnædum swealh, sona hæfde
 unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,
 fet ond folma. (739a-745a)

The wretch thought not
 To wait, but quickly seized a sleeping man
 For his first venture, eagerly he slit,
 He bit through the bone-locks, he drank the blood
 Within the veins, he swallowed large cuttings;
 He soon had eaten all the unliving,

Both feet and hands.

Does this imagery of Grendel's devouring a retainer befit "elegy?" No for in this work, the poet has created something beyond the constraints of a single category, a blending of different genres of which "elegy" is but one. The *Beowulf* poet has crafted a genre-defying work in which many different types coalesce to create within the audience a menagerie of emotional effects, one of the strongest being the one depicted within the previous excerpt: horror.

In his study "The Nature of Horror," Noel Carroll analyzes horror literature and motion pictures to determine what about characters such as Dracula and the Alien Queen horrifies us. Carroll decides that "[w]hat appears to distinguish the horror story from mere stories with monsters, such as fairy tales, is the attitude of characters in the story to the monsters they chance upon. In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters that they encounter as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order" (Carroll 52). Carroll clarifies the abstraction "natural order" using Mary Douglas's study *Purity and Danger* in which Douglas argues that something is thought "abnormal" (or outside the "natural order") if it appears physically interstitial, contradictory, incomplete, or formless to the observer (Carroll 55). Likewise, as Julia Kristeva observes about the "abject," for something to horrify it must be an object that "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). In essence then, something horrifies when humans cannot determine easily its place in the natural world. Using Douglas's parameters, the monsters in *Beowulf* readily are classified as "abnormal" (or "abject") to both Anglo-Saxon and contemporary audiences, for the *Beowulf* poet depicts the monsters sharing both human

and animal physical characteristics: Grendel is man-shaped, yet he has claws like an animal; Grendel's mother is like a queen, yet she dwells in water like a fish; the Drake is like a king, yet he has wings, breathes fire, coils like a serpent, and injects venom like an adder. In short, Grendel and his mother are interstitial and contradictory while the Drake could be considered an abomination by all four standards. Compound these physical characteristics with the following examples of their terrifying actions—Grendel's gorging himself upon human flesh; Grendel's mother's beheading one of Hrothgar's thanes; the Drake's injecting adder-venom into Beowulf with his bite—and what becomes evident is that the poet has created creatures that would do any horror novelist proud.

Returning to Carroll's argument, it is seen that he expands his thesis by asserting that for a work to be art-horror the monsters must be both physically and mentally threatening: physically by being a danger to characters' lives, and mentally by being "threats to common knowledge" (Carroll 56). Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the Drake are both, for as noted earlier, they all threaten human life, and they all threaten the "common knowledge" of Anglo-Saxon society: Grendel is the anti-thane, devouring rather than shielding retainers; Grendel's mother is the anti-feminine, avenging rather than mourning her son's death; the Drake is the anti-king, hoarding rather than dispensing riches. All three of these monsters horrify by murdering humans and threatening Anglo-Saxons' presuppositions of human behavior. Therefore, not only does the poet praise and lament a hero, he also forces his audience and characters to view themselves in his monsters, developing these horrifying human negatives with an alchemical combination of imprecise diction, mutual traits, character perspective, and narrative point of view.

Using all of these devices, the poet creates the first of these monsters: Grendel the anti-thane.

Initially, the poet employs vague diction when describing Grendel's nature, casting a shadow over the monster's physical characteristics. Michael Lapidge in "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror" argues that the poet's abstract word-choice makes Grendel physically amorphous, terrifying the audience by invoking its own fear of the unknown (Lapidge 377-80). The audience experiences Grendel's formlessness in the poet's inexact initial descriptions of him, wherein the *Beowulf* poet employs contradictory images to make the monster's physical nature confusing. In this first glimpse, the speaker presents Grendel as something akin to humans while simultaneously separate from them:

Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten
mære mearcstapa se þe moras heold
fen ond fæsten fifelcynnes eard
wonsæli wer weardode hwile [...]. (102a-105b)

That grimsome ghost
Was Grendel named, a hated mark-walker
Who held the moors, the fens, and the fastness.
The black-minded man had guarded all the lands
Of giant-kin a longsome time [...].

The speaker initially describes Grendel as both *grimma gæst* and *mære mearcstapa* ("grimsome ghost" and "hated mark-walker"), which impresses upon the audience the creature's monsterness: he is not human. In the first half of this passage, the poet chooses diction that emphasizes his separation from humanity, reinforcing that Heorot is terrorized not by some discontented warrior, but by a horrific monster. However in the second half of the description, the speaker refers to Grendel as a *wonsæli wer* ("a black-

mindful man”), contradicting the audience’s initial impression while calling Grendel’s monsterness into question. This ambiguity raises doubts in the audience about his physical nature, transcending Lapidge’s argument that Grendel is physically obscure. Not only is Grendel amorphous, he cannot even be defined as human or inhuman. He is both *wer* and *gæst*; he exists between two worlds, simultaneously occupying space in both realms: he is neither completely human nor completely inhuman. For this reason, he is, as Lapidge points out, unknown. Where the *Beowulf* poet clarifies Grendel’s form and nature is in the depictions juxtaposing Grendel with humanity.

In the poem, the poet often juxtaposes Grendel the monster and Beowulf the thane, revealing that the two share similar traits and attributes. For instance, Beowulf, upon killing the Drake, boasts that its treasure-hoard will support the Geats for generations to come. Likewise, Grendel exults in his perceived successes, but rather than finding pride in gold, he finds pride in gore. After he slaughters the thirty warriors in Heorot, he *huðe hremig* (124a), he “boasts of spoils.” Both the thane and anti-thane share this predilection for boasting, particularly at those times when blood has been spilled. As John Hill notes in *The Cultural World of ‘Beowulf,’* “[Boasting] is the central clue to a Beowulfian psychology that ties the actions of monsters to the lives of men so deeply that in the monsters we have human impulses become [sic] externalized and given a creaturely life of their own” (Hill 114). The *Beowulf* poet molds Grendel into a horrific depiction of humanity while incorporating many corresponding traits, including tendentious boasting. Holding a mirror to humanity we find a monstrosity in the reflection.

Such a reflection is observed further through the poet's use of parallel descriptions of Grendel and Beowulf. For instance, the former kills and devours thirty men; is it any accident then that the latter is said to have the power of thirty men in his grip? Clearly the poet intends the audience to perceive a commonality between these two characters: the human and the monster reflect one another. Whereas Beowulf arrives to assist Hrothgar and protect his retainers, Grendel, as John Hill notes, "takes a dark pleasure in his special work; he only devours retainers. Essentially, then, Grendel is seen as both a bad brother and a bad comrade figure, a fantasized, negative hall-thane" (Hill 123). By choosing to devour warriors, Grendel reveals himself to be no random monster terrorizing Heorot; he is the negative retainer coming to feed upon his own. Here the Anglo-Saxon audience begins to see itself in the monster. Subsequently the human characters become hard pressed to differentiate between humanity and monstrosity as demonstrated when Beowulf describes to the Danes his coming battle with Grendel.

During this hypothetical narration, Beowulf refers to the impending fight as *lað wið laþum*. *Lað* is a substantive adjective that translates as "loathsome, hated, hateful, malignant, or noxious." *Lað wið laþum* essentially means, if translating with the etymological descendant "loathsome," "the loathsome against the loathsome." Who is who becomes impossible to determine, for both combatants are depicted identically in a negative light: the human is akin to the monster, and the human knows it. Thus, Beowulf's observation that the *lað* will do battle *wið laþum* and the poet's use of "thirty men" as the gauge to test the strength of the thane and the anti-thane serves to emphasize both the close affinity between the two worlds represented in this work and the

inevitability of their violent meeting, a meeting commencing with Grendel's approach to Heorot.

As mentioned previously, the poet has molded the monsters into abnormal representations of humanity so that while listening to the bard relate Grendel's approach to Heorot, the audience simultaneously senses the anti-thane's coming to feast upon his own. The poet reinforces this dual experience by employing twin points of view.

Grendel's approach commences with the monster's appearing out of the black night, slithering towards Heorot, a sequence which the poet follows with a section relating from where Grendel has come: the misty moors. To this point, the perspective has been one wherein the poet has the audience look out into the night at the approaching Grendel. But when the poet describes the next stage of the monster's advance on Heorot, the narrative point of view shifts dramatically. As Alain Renoir discusses in "Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*,"

with the statement that Grendel 'Wod under wolcnum to þæs þe he winreced, / goldsele gumena gearwost wisse ...,' [went / Beneath the welkin into that wine-house, / That golden hall of men, that bright plated place, / Which knew he best:] the point of view shifts 180 degrees; and, instead of looking from Heorot with the poet, we are now made to look toward it and approach with the monster. [...] [W]e are suddenly made to move toward ourselves with the agent of our own prospective destruction. (Renoir 163)

How horrific for the audience, to watch its monstrous-self striding out of the darkness in the form of Grendel's preying upon the humanity from which he himself is molded. The poet again uses this perspective in the following lines wherein Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm: at the moment of his destruction, the audience is trapped within the body of the monster:

ðā þæt onfunde se þe fela æror

modes myrðe manna cynne,
 fyrene gefremede --he, fag wið god--
 þæt him se lichoma læstan nolde
 ac hine se modega mæg Hygelaces
 hæfde be honda; wæs gehwæper oðrum
 lifigende lað. Licsar gebad
 atol æglæca; him on eaxe wearð
 syndolh sweotol, seonowe onsprungon,
 burston banlocan. (809a-818a)

Then found he that—
 He who ere made much mind-vex for mankind,
 He who had done many a fiery deed,
 He who was stained by god—his body would
 Not last; for Hygelac's daring kinsman
 Had him by the hand; each living one was loathed
 By the other. The horrid wretch endured
 Much body-sore; the grievous wound inside
 His shoulder was clear to him: the sinews sprung,
 The bone-locks burst.

Renoir comments upon this point of view when he writes that “we need no great psychological insight to realize that a killing visualized from the killer’s point of view will have a very different emotional effect than the same killing visualized from the victim’s point of view, even if we disapprove of the action in both cases” (Renoir 157). The killing above occurs from the point of view of the victim, a victim the original audience, and quite likely a contemporary audience, wishes to see destroyed. Yet the poet sets the spectators behind the eyes of the loathsome monster, forcing them to watch powerlessly as the heroic human violently brings life to an end. This scene blends monstrosity with humanity so completely that not only does Grendel reflect humanity, but he also embodies it, for the human audience is encased within the monster’s bone-home. By using this point of view at this moment, the poet has his protagonist murder the spectators. The poet then follows this by filling the audience’s ears at the moment of

its own demise with Grendel's singing, which harkens to the song of the bard that *sang hador on Heorote* [sang brightness in Heorot] at lines 496b-497a. But the anti-thane sings no brightness into Heorot, for he recites only pain and weeping:

	Sweg up astag
niwe geneahhe;	Norð-Denum stod
atelic egesa	anra gehwylcum
þara þe of wealle	wop gehyrdon,
gryreleoð galan	godes andsacan,
sigeleasne sang,	sar wanigean
helle hæfton.	(782b-788a)

A strange new sound arose,
Horrible fear overthrew each North-Dane,
Each one who heard the weeping from the walls,
The terrifying lay, the winless song,
That god's foe sung; hell's slave bewailed his sorrow.

For this scene, the poet switches perspectives back to the humans; here the North-Danes' reactions are highlighted, allowing the poet to create the metaphor of terrifying music ringing throughout the hall (Lumiansky 77) before revealing the actual source of the sound: Grendel's death wail. Had the poet remained within the monster's mind, both the comparison to the bard's song, which demonstrates Grendel's relation to humanity, and the Dane's horror from the "music," a terrifyingly effective piece of horror, would have been lost. Immediately thereafter, Grendel flees from the hall, leaving his arm behind as a trophy for his killer while bearing away the pieces of humanity that are contained, both physically and metaphorically, within himself.

With the death of Grendel, the second representation of monstrous humanity arrives to take his place. Grendel's mother is fertile femininity inverted into murdering matriarch, for she wishes to avenge her son's death. By juxtaposing the actions of Grendel's mother with those of Hildeburh and Wealtheow, the poet reveals how this

second monster, in the words of Richard Butts in “The Analogical Mere: Landscape and Terror in *Beowulf*,” “serves to draw attention to the suggestive affinities between the mothers of warriors and the mothers of monsters” (Butts 120). Intending this, the poet elucidates Hildeburh’s reaction to her own son’s death before introducing the reaction to Grendel’s death of Grendel’s mother. The human queen reacts in a manner that, to an Anglo-Saxon audience, seems befitting a grieving mother:

Het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade
 hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan,
 banfatu bærnān ond on bæl don
 eame on eaxle. Ides gnornode,
 geomrode giddum. (1114a-1118a)

At Hnaef’s pyre, Hildeburh commanded that
 The flame be given her own son to burn
 His bone-holder and that he be put in
 The fire beside the shoulder of his uncle.
 That lady grieved, lamented with a song.

Whereas Hildeburh laments her son’s death with tears and song, Grendel’s mother engages in feudal violence, removing herself from the Anglo-Saxon feminine sphere and realigning herself within the masculine one; to an Anglo-Saxon audience, such breaking of gender barriers would be considered “abnormal,” thus making a monster of Grendel’s mother. The *Beowulf* poet subsequently fulfills the audience’s expectations of how Grendel’s mother should be perceived in light of her being outside the “natural order”:

widcuþ werum þæt gesyne wearþ
 lifde æfter laþum þætte wrecend þa gyt
 æfter guðceare; lange þrage
 ides aglæcwif Grendles modor
 se þe wæteregeþan yrmþe gemunde
 cealde streamas [...] . (1255b-1261a)

Then it was seen, was widely known by men,

Another wrecker lived a longsome time
After the loathsome one, that war-sorrow.
For Grendel's mother, queen, that wretched woman,
Then bore that crime in mind, she who had to dwell
In water-horror, cold streams, [...] .

Thus, while the audience and characters recognize Grendel's mother as a woman, she is still an *aglæcwif*, "a wretched woman." And by dwelling upon the killing of her child and later reacting violently to it, she has taken an active part in a blood-feud, forsaking the traditional feminine sphere. As Paul Acker notes in "Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf*," "[t]hat a female creature and more particularly a maternal one takes this revenge may have highlighted its monstrousness. Unlike Hildeburh and Wealtheow, Grendel's mother acts aggressively, arguably in a fashion reserved for men" (Acker 705). By deciding to take a violent action, Grendel's mother becomes masculine and therefore monstrous, for she is "abnormal," outside the "natural order." She appears wholly divorced from humanity.

However, the poet presents her as a monstrous queen, retaining her as a reflection of humanity by aligning her with Wealtheow, the human queen. Indeed, the Danish queen's coming forth in the hall mirrors and inverts the monstrous queen's approach to Heorot. Compare Wealtheow's entrance:

þa cwom Wealhþeo forð
gan under gyldnum beage þær þa godan twegen
sæton suhtergefæderan; [...] . (1162b-1164a)

Then came forth Wealtheow, walking beneath
A golden ring, to where the good ones sat,
The nephew and uncle; [...] .

To Grendel's mother's appearance just one hundred lines later:

Com þa to Heorote ðær Hring-Dene

geond þæt sæld swæfun. þa ðær sona wearð
edhwyrft eorlum, siþðan inne fealh
Grendles modor. (1279a-1282a)

She came then to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes
Were sleeping in the hall. Then there occurred
A change in fortune for those earls at once,
As soon as Grendel's mother reached within.

The use of the verb *com* ("to come") with the adverb *þa* ("then") in the preceding examples echoes Grendel's earlier approach, in which the poet uses the same formula three times to create the sensation of approaching horror. The poet's desire once again to exploit this image motivates him to reuse this device while depicting the arrival of Grendel's mother to Heorot. However with Wealtheow the poet reverses field (both in syntax and in subject), using the formula not to depict a monster's approach, but rather to evince the arrival of humanity's benefactor: the good queen and proper host coming forth to bear to the conquering hero the cup of friendship. By employing *com þa* ("came then") in this manner, the poet creates clear parallels between the two characters, thus painting a human image (Wealtheow) and her monstrous shadow (Grendel's mother). The former brings friendship; the latter brings violence. Partly because Grendel's mother represents the violent feminine to Anglo-Saxon eyes, she is able to inspire fear in the retainers who witness her vengeful attack on Heorot:

þa wæs on healle heardecg togen
sweord ofer setlum, sidrand manig
hafen handa fæst; helm ne gemunde
byrnan side þa hine se broga angeat. (1288a-1291b)

Then in the hall, the hard-edge was drawn forth,
The sword above the seats, many broad-shields
Were lifted firm in hand; remembered none
His helm or great mail-coat when that terror
Took hold of him.

“That terror,” inspired by the sight of Grendel’s mother’s wreaking her vengeance for her monstrous son’s death, visibly shakes the warriors, causing them to forget their battle gear. Grendel’s mother, as monstrous feminine, both mentally and physically threatens them, thus becoming a horror-monster. Such is the case with both Grendel and his mother: in part they are horrifying because of their relationship with humanity. As Richard Butts notes, “Grendel and his mother represent a horrific and primitive force, something far below the level of the conscious mind; yet the effect of the poet’s description is to identify the monsters intimately with men” (Butts 119). Indeed, the following passage in which Hrothgar relates his people’s tales of the monsters in their moors affirms Butts assertion:

ðæra oðer wæs,
 þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton,
 idese onlicnæs, oðer earsceapen
 on weres wæstmum wræclastas træd
 næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer;
 þone on geardagum Grendel nemdon
 foldbuende; [...] . (1349b-1355a)

Of those, the other was,
 Insofar as they could know, most like a queen;
 The other wretched-shape, in a man’s form,
 Had trod the wracking-path he larger was
 Than any other man; in former days,
 The earth’s inhabitants had called him “Grendel”; [...] .

Here again the poet refers to Grendel’s mother as *ides*, meaning either “queen” or “lady” but in either case something psychologically reserved for descriptions of humans; Grendel is said to have trod *weres wæstmum*, “in a man’s form,” directly aligning him with physical humanity, echoing the previous vague depictions. The poet wants both the characters and audience to compare and relate the two monsters to humans. The mayhem

these two characters cause in the first two-thirds of the poem is not beyond the ken of the human world—it is grounded in it.

The parallels drawn in the second part of the work between the king (Beowulf) and the anti-king (the Drake) begin with the monster's first introduction, an introduction the speaker incorporates with the description of Beowulf's receiving the Geatish throne and his subsequent rule as king:

syððan Beowulfe brade rice
on hand gehwearf; he geheold tela
fiftig wintra --wæs ða frod cyning,
eald eþelweard-- oð ðæt an ongan
deorcum nihtum draca ricsian
se ðe on heaum hope hord beweotode,
stanbeorh steapne; [...] . (2207a-2213a)

The broad kingdom then passed to Beowulf,
Into his hand; he held it properly
For fifty winters—that was a wise king,
Old native-land guardian—until a drake
Began to rule in the dark nights; he who
In his high house, his steep stone-barrow, watched
Over the hoard; [...] .

By introducing the Drake subsequent to describing Beowulf's rule, the poet invites the audience to compare the two hoard-wards. Whereas Beowulf rules wisely and properly—meaning that he protects his people and deals out treasure—the Drake locks himself away on high and guards his hoarded treasure, dispensing none of its riches. By choosing to hoard his wealth, the monster acts in a manner unbefitting a king: greed is an “abnormal” trait for a ruler. When the thief steals the jeweled cup from the Drake's hoard, the greedy anti-king compounds his monstrosity by choosing to avenge himself by attacking nightly the Geatish people, instigating a blood-feud. In response, Beowulf rides

from his hall with a small troop of retainers to battle the Drake in single combat: the last conflict between monstrosity and humanity in this work.

During the battle, the poet reemphasizes the blending of the human and the monstrous by reversing character perspective in the same manner done earlier in Beowulf's fight with Grendel. As the Drake makes the second of his three assaults against the king's position, the poet casts Beowulf in a light different from previous illuminations:

wurm yrre cwom,
atol inwitgæst oðre siðe
fyrwylmum fah fionda niosian
laðra manna. (2669b-2672a)

The wurm, the wicked-guest,
Then came irate a second time within
A flood of shining fire to seek his foe,
The loathsome man.

Here the poet describes Beowulf as a *fionda* (a “foe”) and a *laðra manna* (a “loathsome man”), thus presenting the Drake’s opinion of him. The audience now sees the protagonist as the monsters see him: a loathsome foe, which demonstrates that the monsters view humans as negatively as humans view monsters. But why would Beowulf be loathed by the Drake? Predominately because he is attempting to kill the Drake and steal his hoard, but partly for the same reason the Drake is monstrous to Beowulf—there is something of itself within the hero. When humanity looks into the mirror and sees the monster, the monster looks back into the mirror and sees humanity. Further, by instilling into the Drake opinions and emotions, the poet gives reason to the monstrous. None of the three monsters in *Beowulf* are unthinking beasts: Grendel sits and broods before

attacking, Grendel's mother consciously takes revenge, the Drake judges Beowulf loathsome. They all are rational creatures, a mark of humanity to Anglo-Saxon eyes.

In the third and final rush of the Drake, Beowulf slays the monster with Wiglaf's assistance, thus destroying the last abnormality in this work. When the fighting between these parallel figures ends, the Drake and Beowulf lie dead, their heads, the seats of reason, adjacent to each other: the human/monster combatants have slain one another. Now, as Wiglaf foretells, the Geats will succumb to the ravages of humans seeking to exploit the death of his king: Beowulf destroyed the human-like monsters, but he can do nothing to stop the monster-like humans.

The horror in *Beowulf* arises in large part from both the characters and the audience being subjected to gruesome images of blood-soaked ring-halls, severed heads, and devoured corpses. But the mental horror of the work, the capability of the work to terrify psychologically both the characters and the audience, resides within the monstrous mirror images of humanity: the exulting mark-walker and the boasting retainer; the grim approach of Grendel's mother and the elegant approach of Wealtheow; the greed of the Drake and the wisdom of Beowulf. All of these images come together to create a terrifying dual reality in which the border between the human and monstrous worlds fades. Left to face its unfiltered monstrous self, the human characters respond in one of three biologically expected ways: some are terrified into flight, as are Beowulf's retainers at the sight of the Drake; some are terrified into battle, as is Beowulf at the sight of all three monsters, and some are terrified into inaction, as are Hrothgar's retainers at the sight of Grendel's mother. The physical audience shares the plight of these last, for they can do nothing during the poet's tale other than await the outcome. Perhaps then it is not

surprising that the poet, seeking to terrify thoroughly both his audience and characters, includes a final chilling parallel in this work prior to the burial of Beowulf, one that ties the denouement firmly to the invocation while reinforcing the close relationship between humans and monsters; the Drake's body and Shield Shafing's body are disposed of in like manner: both are given to the ocean's waves. In the case of the former, the Geats:

scufun,
 wrym ofer weallclif, leton weg niman,
 flod fæðmian frætwa hyrde. (3131b-3133b)

shoved the wrym
 Off the cliff-wall—they let the waves him seize,
 The fathoms of the flood enfold the hoard's
 Shepherd.

In the case of the latter, the Danes:

him asetton segen gyldenre
 heah ofer heafod, leton holm beran,
 geafon on garsecg; [...] . (47a-49a)

flew a gold standard high overhead
 For him; they let the sea bear him away;
 They gave him to the waves; [...] .

The twin sea burials of the most ancient Dane and the final monster bookend this work, providing one final reminder of the kinship between humanity and monstrosity and the horror of that kinship for both the poem's characters and audience.

In his 2006 *New York Times* article, "Politically Aware *Beowulf*s Miss an Ancient Delight: Terror," Charles McGrath, discussing recent adaptations of the poem, praises Seamus Heaney's translation and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series

(which borrows liberally from the work) while lamenting that “[m]ost of the subsequent “Beowulf” adapters have flinched a little [...] from what in the poem is the sheer malignance of Grendel and his mother” (McGrath). This seems to be a general trend that has spread into academia. Universities often are loath to offer courses discussing Horror, although nineteenth-century Gothic is a notable exception. In creative writing workshops, horror often is denigrated, classified as “genre” fiction (shelved with other marginalized types such as western, romance, fantasy, and science fiction), and forsaken in favor of “literary” fiction. At a time in literary scholarship when almost everything has been called into question, it would seem we would be eager to question why “horror” largely has been excluded from mainstream study—why it has been deemed a thing both “thin and cheap?” Perhaps with a broader understanding of the horrific in *Beowulf*, the first major literary work in English, academia will become more accepting of the genre as a whole.

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

In translating *Beowulf*, I employed three tactics. The first is that of translating the poem into blank verse. While many Modernist and Post-Modernist writers might find my verse far too regular, many Renaissance and Enlightenment writers would cringe at my willingness to employ both masculine and feminine metrical endings and the occasional trochaic or anapestic foot. Consider this passage from Hrothgar's reply to Wulfgar's request that Beowulf be allowed to enter Heorot:

Now holy god has sent this man to us,
To the West-Danes, to be the honor-staff,
I hope, against the terror of Grendel.

Whereas the first line is perfect iambic pentameter, the second and third eschew the meter: the second line begins with two consecutive spondees while the third finishes with a trochee. While I remained as loyal to blank verse as was reasonable, occasionally other factors would force my hand, coercing me to insert an extra syllable to be faithful to the sense of the original. I am confident that neither Milton and Marlowe nor Lowell and Pound shall forgive my indiscretions.

The desire to retain the sense of the original made my second decision easy: when prudent to do so, I translated with the etymological descendant of a word, forgoing overly Latinate diction. Old English being the ancestor of Present-Day English, I considered it burdensome to rewrite every Old English word into a polysyllabic behemoth when a monosyllabic descendant would work just as well: the original poet was kind enough to go through all the trouble of selecting these particular words, I felt it unnecessary on my part to trifle with his choices; therefore, a "feond" is a "fiend," an "eorl" is an "earl," and a "cyning" is a "king."

Along with my metrical choice and etymological fidelity, I also chose to take advantage of the great variety of syntactic structures permissible in Present-Day English. As such, I have attempted wherever possible and whenever prudent to remain faithful to the poet's syntax in the hope of impressing upon the reader that this is a work of oral artistry, and that it follows its own guidelines. The poet used a vastly more complex syntax than did Old English prose writers; I have thus done the same. This is perhaps most noticeable during Grendel's approach to Heorot, where the poet builds suspense by holding off the subject of the main clause, a device that I attempted to retain in my translation: "Then came, within black night, slithering forth / The shadow-walker."

Finally, it becomes almost impossible to translate *Beowulf* in the twenty-first century without commenting upon the elephant in the room that is Seamus Heaney's translation. For a poem to become an international best-seller is rare; for a poem to do so nine-hundred years after its date of composition is unheard of. I cannot deny the triumph that is Heaney's work; I can only hope to convince my wary reader that I have not written a translation that is already extant. Whereas Heaney sought to commune with the poet (he envisioned the two of them whispering to each other in hopes of creating something new out of something old), I chose to allow the *scop* to do all the talking while I dutifully rephrased for the modern ear his words whenever necessary while predominately staying out of the poet's way. I see myself not so much a translator as a mechanical, dutifully performing my task to create a particular type of output from the data inputted while capturing the diction and syntax of the poem while preserving the intended tone and mood. I leave the final judgment of my general success or failure to my reader.

***BEOWULF* IN BLANK VERSE**

[Part I: Beowulf Beorn¹]

[Prologue (ll. 1-52)]

I speak.²

We have ere heard about the might,
In former days, of Spear-Danes'³ nation-kings,
Of how those noblemen did courageous deeds.

How often Shyld Shafing,⁴ the terror of earls,
Had stripped the mead-benches from throngs of scathers,
From many people after he first rose
A foundling wretch: he bided his relief.
He waxed beneath the welkin, throve because
Of worthy thoughts, until all border-dwellers
Across the whale-road had to heed his words
And pay him tribute. That was a good king!

Later a son was borne into his ken,
A young one in the yard, whom god⁵ had sent
To soothe the folk. He sensed the wicked grief
They suffered before—a long time unkinged.

¹ "The Warrior."

² This and other Anglo-Saxon poems begin with the word "Hwæt." While there is no definitive translation, various renderings include: lo, indeed, yes, now, listen, attend, what, ay, hark, and so. Some scholars believe this word to be no more than an unstressed marker from which the *scop* can begin: essentially a clearing of the poet's throat.

³ Refer to *The Catalog of Proper Names* for further explanation of the various tribes and people mentioned in the poem as well as their relation to each other.

⁴ Literally "Shyld (PDE: Shield), son of Sheaf (PDE: Grain)."

⁵ Scholars debate the extent to which both Christianity and Paganism influence this work. As such, the small "g" god is retained to allow the reader to interpret the poet's intent.

The lord of life, the wielder of wonder,
 For that then gave a worldly boon to them.
 Beowulf,⁶ the child of Shyld, was much renowned,
 His power spread across the Shadowlands.⁷

*So shall a young man forge through noble deeds,
 Through shining gifts of treasure while still close
 To his father's breast, so that his best warriors
 Will dwell with him into his elder days,
 So that when war should come his men will last.
 For honored deeds, a man shall thrive within
 Every nation.⁸*

When Shyld, still very strong,
 Departed at the time so shaped for him
 To go from them into the trust of god,
 His dear retainers bore his body to
 The ocean's course as he himself had bade
 When still the Shyldings'⁹ ruler wielded words—
 That landed lord had kept them a long time.
 There at the landing-place, a ring-prowed ship,

⁶ This is not Beowulf of the Geats, but Hrothgar's grandfather. Many scholars believe that the actual name meant here is Beow—having determined that a scribal error had been caused by confusion between Beowulf, about whom the poem is written, and Beow, who appears in various genealogies.

⁷ Most translators render this as the “north” lands or the “northern” lands. However, the compound translates literally as either “shadow” lands or “shade” lands.

⁸ Throughout the poem gnomic passages will be italicized.

⁹ Descendants of Shyld.

The noble's bier, stood ice-sheathed, set to leave.

They laid their beloved lord—giver of rings—
On the ship's bosom, glorious by the mast.
There many treasure-gifts from far-off lands,
Well wrought armor and arms, were laid with him.

I have heard of no ship more comely dressed
With war-armor, with battle-weaponry,
With blades and coats of mail. A great number
Of worthy ornaments were laid upon
The vessel's lap for him. Those all would go
With him, far into the kingdom of the flood.

They did not give him lesser offerings
From the people's treasure-hoard, than did they who,
In his beginning, when he was a child,
Had sent him out alone across the waves.

They flew a gold standard high overhead
For him; they let the sea bear him away;
They gave him to the waves: The heart mourned him;
The mind sorrowed. The men, the hall-rulers,
The heroes under heaven, could not say
For certain who received that last burden.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a description of an Anglo-Saxon ship burial, see C.L. Wrenn's article, "Sutton Hoo and Beowulf."

Fitt I (ll. 53-114)

Then Beowulf Scylding, the beloved king,
 Famed with his folk, a long time held the halls
 (His father went elsewhere: the lord left the yard)
 Until to him awoke lofty Half-Dane;
 That old war-rager held the glad Scyldings
 The length of his long life. Four bairns in all
 Awoke within the world for that troop-leader:
 Heorogar, and Hrothgar, and good Halga;¹¹
 I heard too that Yrse was Onela's queen,
 The Battle-Shylfing's beloved bedfellow.¹²

Then victorious troops, worthy war-minds,
 Were given to Hrothgar; his dearest kin
 Heeded him earnestly until the youth
 Had raised a mighty host. It after ran
 Into his mind that he then wished to rule
 The hall of halls; he ordered all his men
 To make a greater mead-house than any
 Of which the bairns of men had ever heard,
 And from inside there he would deal out all,
 To young and old alike, that god him gave:

¹¹ Literally "army-spear," "glory-spear," and "holy" respectively.

¹² Onela is a Swedish prince. See *The Catalog of Proper Names* for the interrelationship of these two clans.

But not the shared folk-lands, nor lives of men.

I heard then that he bid the many peoples
 From all throughout this middle-earth adorn
 The homestead with their works. In time it came—
 Fast as men reckon—that the grandest hall
 Arose ready for him; at last, he who
 Had widely wielded power with his words,
 Then shaped the name of Heorot for his home.¹³
 He did not leave his promise unfulfilled:
 He dealt out rings and jewels at a great feast.
 The hall stood high—its gables curved like horns—
 Awaiting the battle-surge's loathsome flame.
 Not long after, the man-sworn hatred of
 The son-in-law arose for slaughter-strife.¹⁴
 The mighty ghost who dwelt inside darkness
 Then sorely bided his time each day he heard
 The loud joy in the hall: the harp's music
 The bard's clear song. The one who knew the long-
 Ago story of men's first shaping said
 That wrought the earth the almighty one had;
 With water enclosed the beauty-bright land.

¹³ Literally "Hart," possibly named for antlers that would have been fixed to the roof's apex.

¹⁴ I have attempted to stay as true to the manuscript as possible in this rendering. Most translators render these lines in a manner similar to the following: "It was not long yet that the sword-hate between father-in-law and son-in-law would arise after the violent murder."

Triumphant one then set the sun and moon
 As lights to shine down for the land-dwellers,
 And he bejeweled all corners of the earth
 With limbs and leaves, and also life he shaped
 For every kind of living thing that moves.

 The lordly men thus richly lived in bliss,
 Until a certain fiend in hell began
 To do his fiery deeds. That grimsome ghost
 Was Grendel named, a hated mark-walker
 Who held the moors, the fens, and the fastness.
 The black-minded man had guarded all the lands
 Of giant-kin a longsome time, since when
 The shaper had condemned him with Cain's kin.
 The everlasting lord avenged that death
 On him who slew Abel. He was not pleased
 By that his feud, but drove him far away,
 Out of mankind: his fate for wickedness.¹⁵
 Each one of the unborn awoke from him—
 The ettins, and elves, and orcs, and giants.
 They battled against god a longsome time,
 And so for that he paid them their reward.

¹⁵ See Genesis 4.1-16.

Fitt II (ll. 115-188)

When night had come, he set then out to see
 Just how the Ring-Danes fared in that high house
 Once they had drunk their beer. Inside he found
 The host had gone to sleep after the feast:
 They knew no sorrow, that dark shape of men.

The wight of those unwhole, the reeking-fierce,
 The grim and greedy one, was set at once,
 And seized for himself thirty thanes at rest.
 He after left from there and went back home
 With loud boasts of his loot: he sought his place
 With all that slaughter-load.

Then in the light

Before the day, was Grendel's battle-craft
 Unhidden for those men. After the feast,
 Their weeping rose up, a great morning-cry.
 Their splendid lord, their king ancient and good,
 Then sat un-blithe: his great strength suffered much;
 He lived throughthane-sorrow the moment that
 They saw the wicked spirit's loathsome track.
 That hardship was too strong, loathsome, and long.

It was not a much longer time until—
 After the passing of a single night—

He then committed a more baleful murder,
And never mourned his feud and fiery deeds:
He was too fixed in those. Then afterwards
It was then easy to find him who went
To rest in bed somewhere else far away
Within the outer halls, since—truth be told—
The hate of the hall-thane was shown to him
By that clear sign. He who escaped the fiend
Then kept himself farther and safer both.

Thus Grendel ruled and warred with what was right,
Alone against them all, until the best
Of houses stood idle. Much time then passed;
For twelve full winter-tides the Shyldings' lord
Then felt the tear of each woe and much sorrow.
Therefore in songs sadly sung it became
Unhidden knowledge to the bairns of men
That Grendel fought with Hrothgar a long time,
He bore the heavy weight of battle-hate,
Of fiery deeds and feuds, for many years
Of everlasting strife. He did not wish
For peace with any in the Danish force,
Nor to remove that baleful state of life,

Nor to decide that war with land or wealth;¹⁶
 There was no wiseman who had any cause
 To hope for bright relief from baneful hands;
 That wretch the hunter was, the dark death-shade
 Of fighters old and young; he sat and schemed.
 He held the misty moors in endless night;
Men do not know to where hell-scribes slither
In their turnings.

Thus mankind's fiend, the terror
 Who goes alone, then often carried out
 His many fiery deeds of brutal pain.
 He dwelt in Heorot, hall that gleamed with jewels,
 In swarthy night. He could not touch the throne,
 That wealth for god; he did not know his love.¹⁷

That greatly wracked the Shyldings' kindly lord,
 It broke his spirit. Many noble lords
 Often sat down to secret talks to hear
 Advice about what was best for strong-wills
 To do against those fearsome fast attacks.

¹⁶ Medieval Germanic and Anglo-Saxon law held that a murderer could atone for his act by paying the victim's family *were-gild*, a blood price that varied with the slain's social rank.

¹⁷ These lines are much debated for several reasons: it is unknown if "he" refers to Grendel or Hrothgar; it is unclear whether the undetermined he could not "touch," "attack," or "approach" the throne; the preposition "for" in "treasure for god" could mean "because of," "in the presence of," or "intended for." Further, Wrenn and Bolton suggest these two lines actually belong with the Cain and Abel episode, specifically between lines 110 and 111 in the MS.

At times they vowed war-rites at pagan shrines,
 With words they bid the bane of souls to help
 Them with the people's pain. Such were their ways,
 The hope of heathens bearing thoughts of hell
 In mind and soul, they did not know of fate,
 The judge of deeds, nor know of noble god,
 Nor even know to praise the heavens' helm,
 The wielder of wonder.

Woe be to them

*Who shall through horrid hatred thrust their soul
 In fire's embrace: do not of comfort dream
 Nor any change at all!*

Well be to them

*Who may seek out the lord after death-day
 And wish for peace in the father's embrace.*

Fitt III (ll. 189-257)

The son of Half-Dane ceaselessly thus seethed
 About those grievous times; the wise and hale
 Could not unwind himself from misery—
 That hardship was too strong, loathsome, and long,
 That spiteful vengeance, violent and grim,
 That worst of baleful nights, which came to them.

From his far home the thane of Hygelac—¹⁸
 Good with the Geats, renowned and great, he who
 The strongest was in all mankind in those,
 Days of this life—had learned of Grendel's deed.
 He ordered that a good wave-rider be
 Made ready for him, said he wished to seek
 The fighter-king, that famous lord, across
 The swan-road, since he had great need of men.
 The clever councilmen could find few faults
 With that venture though he be loved by them;
 They whetted his strong mind; they omens saw.
 The good man chose the best of champions,
 The keenest he could find among the Geats;
 One of the fifteen sought the ship's sound wood;

¹⁸ Hygelac literally means "mind-play." His "thane" is Beowulf, though he will not be named for another one hundred lines.

The warrior, the ocean-crafty man,
 Then led them to land's edge; the time had come.
 The boat was on the waves beneath the cliff;
 The fighters eagerly boarded the prow;
 The sea-stream beat the sound against the sand.
 The men then bore bright treasure, splendid arms
 Onto the ship's bosom; The shore-men shoved
 The bound wood out, the men on their venture.
 The wind then drove them over ocean-waves—
 The foamy-necked floater most like a bird—
 Until the time upon the second day,
 The wound-stemmed ship had waded so far that
 The seafarers saw land, the high steep hills,
 The shining sea-cliffs, the airy headlands;
 The sound was crossed, the journey at its end.
 The Weders¹⁹ quickly stepped onto the land;
 They moored the sea-wood ship (their armor shook,
 Their battledress); they sent up thanks to god
 Because that water crossing had been smooth.

The Shyldings' guard, he who the sea-cliffs held,
 Then saw them from the wall, they bore bright shields
 And ready battle-gear down the gangplank:

¹⁹ Literally "Weather." Also another name for the Geats.

A burning thought broke through his thinking mind—
Who were those men? Then Hrothgar's thane set out,
He rode his horse to where they stood onshore
While fiercely shaking his mighty spear at hand;
With formal words he asked of them, "Who are
You armor-bearers shielded in ring-mail
Who have thus come across the ocean's road,
Who lead that high ship here across the waves?
A long while have I been the end-watcher:
I hold the water-guard in order that
No loathsome thing can scathe us with warships
On Danish land. Shield-holders never tried
To come more openly; you surely do
Not know the battle-makers' words of leave,
The good-will of kinsmen. I never saw
A greater noble of any on earth
Than is that one of yours, that armored man.
That is no mere hall-man, for weapons praised,
Unless his looks, his peerless face, have lied.
Now I must know about your former kin
Before you may go any farther hence,
Before you cunning spies may farther go
In Danish lands. Now you far-dwelling ones,

You water-goers, hear my one-fold thought:

Haste is best for saying whence have you come.”

Fitt IV (ll. 258-319)

The eldest answered him; the wise leader
 Of those fighters unlocked his word-hoard then:
 “We are kinsmen within the Geatish race,
 The hearth-companions of dear Hygelac.
 My father was well known amongst the folk,
 A glorious front-fighter named Ecgtheow.²⁰
 A great many winters he lived to see
 Before he, ancient, went out of this land;
 Each wiseman far and wide throughout the earth
 Remembers surely him. With friendly hearts
 We come to seek your lord, the people’s shield,
 The son of Half-Dane; be you to us
 Good with your lore! We have a great message
 For that famed man, the ruler of the Danes.
 There nothing shall be hidden, I expect.
 If it is truly as we have heard said
 Then well you know that, within the Shyldings—
 I, of the scathers, do not know which one—
 A secret one of hateful-deed doing
 Reveals through horror, slaughter, and through shame,

²⁰ Literally “sword-servant.”

Its spite unknown. I can advise Hrothgar,
 Through my mind's depths, how he, the wise and good,
 Can overcome that fiend, *if* turning back
 That baleful work should ever happen for him—
 Relief to come thereafter—and if all
 Those boiling cares will cool, or if he must
 Forever bear those violent throes while there
 On that high place the best of houses dwells.”
 The guard, the servant unafraid, then spoke
 Replied from where he sat upon his horse:
*“A sharp shield-warrior, he who thinks well,
 Must know the difference between words and works.*
 I hear this troop is loyal to the lord
 Of Shyldings. Go forth bearing your weapons
 And your war-dress; I will show you the way.
 I will command my young fighters to hold
 With honor your newly-tarred boat, your ship
 Upon the sand, against each kind of fiend,
 Until the time when your winding-prowed ship
 Will bear your beloved men across the sea
 To Wedermark—*For those kinds of good deeds,
 It has been fated that the hale will live
 Through the war-rush.*”

Then they themselves went forth.

The boat stayed still, the broad-embracing ship
 On ropes it swayed, fastened to its anchor.
 The gleaming, fire-hard figures of boars
 Were shining over their gold-sheathed cheek-guards—
 That grim war-mind held guard over their lives.²¹
 The men hastened, together they all marched,
 Until they could perceive the timbered hall
 Adorned with gold and gloriously built;
 That was the foremost hall for ground dwellers
 Beneath the sky. In there the ruler bided;
 That gleam had shone above many a land.
 The battle-brave one pointed out to them
 The courageous ones' noble hall so that
 They could go straight to it; the battle-man
 Then turned his horse and after spoke a word:
 "The time has come for me to leave you all;
 May the all-wielding father hold you safe
 In your adventures with his honor-staff;
 I go to guard the sea from wrathful bands."

²¹ The image of the boar likely was honored in Anglo-Saxon culture and has been found adorning various unearthed helmets.

Fitt V (ll. 320-370)

The street was made of stones, the path that led
 The men all together. The war-mail shone,
 The hard hand-locks, the splendid iron-rings
 Sang of their craft when they first came to go
 Up to the hall in terrifying gear.
 The sea-worn set their sturdy-hard broad-shields
 Against the wall, then sank down on the bench.
 The ring-mail coats, the battle-gear, rang out;
 The throwing spears, the arms of the seamen,
 All stood together, a gray-tipped ashen holt;
 The iron threat made worthy with weapons.
 A bold hero²² then asked those fighting men
 About their heritage: "Whence do you bring
 Those plated shields, those gray shirts and grim helms,
 Those many battle-shafts? I am Hrothgar's
 Attendant and herald. I have never seen
 So many foreign, high-spirited men.
 I trust that for the sake of daring mind,
 Not for the sake of wracksome wanderings,
 But for the sake of mighty hearts, you have
 Our Hrothgar sought." Then noble bravery

²² Later revealed to be Wulfgar.

Answered that charge, the Weders' daring man,
 Hard under helm, then after spoke these words:
 "We are the table-friends of Hygelac;
 My name is Beowulf. I wish to speak
 My message to your elder, Half-Dane's son,
 Your famous lord, if grant he will us that,
 So we may greet him just as good."

Then spoke

Wulfgar,²³ a member of the Wendels' race,
 His mind's spirit was shown many a time,
 His war and wisdom—"Of that I will ask
 The keeper of the Dane's, the Shyldings' lord,
 The ring giver, just as you now request—
 Will ask the famous king about your quest
 And straight away relate to you the answer
 That noble man then thinks to give to me."
 He went then quickly to where Hrothgar sat,
 Hoary and old amongst his court of lords;
 The strong and brave then went inside to stand
 Next to the shoulder of the Danish king:
 He knew the customs of nobility.
 Then Wulfgar spoke to his kind friend and lord:

²³ Literally "wolf-spear."

“Some Geatish men have ferried themselves here,
Have come from far across the sea’s expanse;
The sons of war call the eldest Beowulf.
My lord, they are petitioning that they
Be given leave to exchange words with you.
Do not confer refusal upon them
When, gracious Hrothgar, you your answer make.
They in their battle-gear seem worthy of
The noblemen’s esteem; indeed, their lord
Is worthy, he who led those war-men here.”

Fitt VI (ll. 371-455)

Then Hrothgar spoke, the Shyldings' lord and helm:

"I knew him when he was still just a boy.

His honored father's name was Ecgtheow,

To him within his home, the Geats' Hrethel²⁴

Had given his only daughter; and now

His hardy child has come here, for he sought

A loyal friend. Further the sea-sailors,

Those who have ferried money-gifts to the Geats

In thanks, have said that he, renowned in war,

Has thirty men's might-craft in his hand-grip.

Now holy god has sent this man to us,

To the West-Danes, to be the honor-staff,

I hope, against the terror of Grendel.

I shall bestow treasure on that good man

For the force of his mind. Be you in haste,

Command those men to go inside to see

The army of kinsmen all together;

And also say to them with words that they

Are welcome within the people of the Danes."²⁵

²⁴ Hrethel was Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.

²⁵ In the original manuscript, this half-line does not alliterate with the subsequent one, but there is no gap in the manuscript. It is possible that two half-lines similar to the following have been omitted: *þa to dura healle / Wulfgar eode*. "Then Wulfgar went to the door of the hall." It also may be that *leodum* has been miswritten in place of some other alliterating word.

He then announced that word inside the hall:
 “My victorious lord, the East-Dane’s elder,
 Has ordered me to tell you that he knows
 Of your nobility, and that to him
 You hard-mind men, from over the surging sea
 Are welcome here. You are allowed to go,
 In your war-gear, beneath your battle-masks
 To see Hrothgar, but let your battle-shields
 And wooden slaughter-shafts remain out here
 During this council’s words.”

The mighty one

Arose, near him were many warriors,
 A host of splendid thanes; one stayed to guard
 The battle-plunder as the hardy man
 Had ordered him to do. As that man led
 They hastened together beneath the roof
 Of Heorot, [the battle-fierce one went,]²⁶
 Hard under helm, ‘til in the hall he stood.
 Then Beowulf spoke (his mail-coat shone on him,
 His armor-net by smith’s cunning was sewn):
 “Be you, O Hrothgar, hale! I am kinsman

²⁶ Although there is no gap in the MS, a half-line has been omitted. Editors propose various emendations such as the following by von Schaubert, which is translated above: *eode hilde-deor*.

And thane to Hygelac; I have performed
 A deal of glorious deeds in my youth.
 This thing with Grendel has become well-known
 To me in my homeland. Sea-sailors say
 This hall, the best of buildings, stands idle
 And useless for all once the evening-light,
 Beneath the brightness of heaven, becomes
 Unseen. My people then, the best and wisest
 Of councilmen, advised me, lord Hrothgar,
 That I should seek you out, for they all knew
 My power's craft; for they themselves have seen
 Me when I came from war, bloodstained with fiends,
 Where I bound five, the kin of ettins killed,
 And slayed the sea-beast in the waves at night,
 Endured the daring straits, avenged the ills
 Of the Weders (they sought out woe), I ground
 It down with wrath, and now alone I shall
 Finish this thing with Grendel, with that wretch,
 With that monster. I wish to ask you now,
 The Bright-Danes king, the Shyldings' lord, for this,
 A single boon: that you, the fighters' lee,²⁷

²⁷ The sense here is that Hrothgar acts as a shield from harsh attacks as the lee of a building will shield an individual from the wind.

The folk's dear friend, will hinder not my task
 Now that I thus have come here from afar;
 That I alone, with my own fighter-host,
 This hardy band, may purify Heorot.
 Moreover, I have heard the wretched one,
 Because of his thought-void, will no weapon heed.
 Therefore, I too will scorn that I should bear
 A sword or shield, embossed with gold, to war,
 But I shall grapple with that fiend by hand—
 In order that my liege-lord Hygelac
 Be blithe of mind with me—and fight for life,
 The loathsome with the loathed; He whom death takes
 Then will have to trust to the lord's judgment.
 I feel that if he is granted power
 Over the battle-hall, he unafraid
 Will eat the Geatish men, the strong Hrethmen,²⁸
 As he has often done. You will not need
 To hide my head if death carries me off,
 For he will have me stained in my own blood.
 And then he bears away my bloody corpse,
 He thinks to taste, the lonely walker eats
 Without remorse; he marks that hidden moor.

²⁸ Literally "glory-men."

No, you no longer need to worry for
My body's care. If battle should take me,
Send Hygelac the best of battle-shrouds,
The best of mail-armor, that shields my breast;
That Hrethel's heirloom is, a Weland-work.

Forever fate goes as it must."

Fitt VII (ll. 456-498)

Hrothgar,

The helm and lord of the Shyldings, then spoke,
 “My friend Beowulf, you have us sought for fights
 And for the honor-staff. Your father brought
 About the greatest feud, for he became
 The bane of Heatholaf²⁹ among the Wylfings;
 When kinsmen of the Geats, for war-terror,
 Would keep him no longer, from there he sought
 The South-Danes’ folk, the Honor-Shyldings’ race,
 Across the rolling waves. When first I wielded,
 And in my youth first held, this jeweled kingdom,
 This hoard-hold of heroes, for Danish folk,
 At that time, Heorogar, bairn of Half-Dane,
 Was dead, my elder brother unliving—
 He better was than I. I soon had soothed
 That feud with wealth; I sent then treasures old
 Across the water’s ridge to the Wylfings;
 He swore then oaths to me. It sorrows me
 In my own heart to say to any man
 What shame and fearsome grief has Grendel made

²⁹ Literally “war-heirloom.”

For me in Heorot with his hateful thoughts.
 My own floor-troops, my own war-band, have waned;
 On Grendel's terror fate swept them away.
 With ease is god able to halt the deeds
 Of that mad-scather. Often battle sons
 When drunk with beer, have boasted over cups
 Of ale that wait they would with fearsome swords
 In the beer-hall for Grendel's nightly war.
 But then at morning-tide, when day shone down,
 Was this mead-hall a blood-stained princely house,
 The bench-boards all were wet with blood, the hall
 With that sword-gore; I then possessed fewer
 Beholden friends, of the dear noble host,
 For death had taken them away from me.
 Now sit down to the feast, unseal your thoughts,³⁰
 Triumphant-victories among all men
 As your spirit may whet."

A bench was cleared

In the beer-hall for all the Geatish sons;
 The strong of mind, the bold with might, then sat.
 A thane attended to his duty there,

³⁰ The word *meoto* (here translated as "thoughts") is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old English corpus; therefore its meaning is disputed.

The one who bore the jeweled ale-cup in hand,
Poured out the bright sweet drink. At different times
A bard would brightness into Heorot sing.
There was the bliss of warriors, the host
Unlittle of the Danes and Weders both.

Fitt VIII (ll. 499-558)

And then did Hunferth³¹ speak, the bairn of Ecglaf³²
 Unbound his battle-words (the adventure
 Of Beowulf, of that brave sea-faring man,
 Had caused much jealous-thought inside of him,
 For grant he did not any other man
 Of middle-earth should ever strive for fame
 Beneath heaven any more than himself):
 “Are you that Beowulf, he who labored
 With Breca in the wide sea; did you swim
 About the ocean’s sound, where for your pride
 Both of you tried the sea, for a fool’s boast
 You both risked your lives in that deep water?
 No man, no matter loved or loathed, could keep
 The two of you from that sorrowful journey
 Once you both had rowed out into the sound.
 There you both grasped the flood-stream with your arms,
 Traversed the high sea-road, raced with your hands,

³¹ Possibly “un-peace,” “un-reason,” “un-mind,” “un-intellect,” “un-soul,” “un-spirit,” “un-life,” or “un-person.” The best interpretation of his name may be “inhuman.” While the MS has “Hunferth,” most translators/editors render his name as “Unferth,” for it always alliterates with a vowel in its adjacent half-line. Assuming oral composition, this could indicate that while the poem’s original composer dropped his velar fricatives (“h”) when they were followed by a high-back vowel (“u”) and alveolar nasal (“n”) combination, the scribe understood them to be present, and therefore preserved the spelling. Note also that at MS line 1390 the poet alliterates *rices* with *hrape*, indicating further that the velar fricative, while present in a word’s spelling, was regularly dropped in pronunciation.

³² Literally “edge-remnant” or “sword-heirloom.”

And glided over the sea-warrior;
 The sea welled up with waves, the winter's storm.
 You both struggled within the water's wealth
 For seven nights; he bested you in the sound,
 He had the greater might. The morning-tide
 Then bore him to the Heathoreams'³³ shoreline;
 From there he sought his own sweet native home,
 Beloved by his people, the Brondings'³⁴ land,
 That fair safe fortress where he ruled the folk,
 The hall, the rings. The son of Beanstan³⁵ had
 Truly fulfilled all of his boasts with you.
 I thus predict an end far worse for you—
 Although you have always retained your strength
 In battle-rush, within such grim warfare—
 If you should dare await Grendel's approach
 The span of this long night."

Then Beowulf spoke,

The bairn of Ecgtheow: "Lo, many things,
 My dear friend Hunferth, drunk with beer, you spoke
 About Breca, you told of his journey.
 I tell the truth, that I had more sea-strength,

³³ Literally "battle-raisers."

³⁴ Possibly "brandings."

³⁵ Literally "bean-stone."

More troubles on the waves, than any man.
We being boys had said and boasted that
(We were still young in life) we two would risk
Our lives out upon the sea-warrior,
And so we did. We had our naked swords
Hard in hand when we rowed onto the sound;
We thought to guard ourselves against whale-fish.
He never could swim far away from me
On the flood-waves, be swifter in the sea;
I did not wish to be away from him.
Then we two were together in the sea
The space of five full nights, until the flood
Had driven us apart, the welling seas,
The coldest weathers, the darkening night,
The north-wind, war-grim, turned against us both;
The waves were rough; the mind of sea-fish raged;
My body's coat of mail, the hard hand-locks,
Against those loathsome creatures was my help;
The braided gold war-gear lay on my breast.
A fiendish scather dragged me to the ground;
The grim one had me firmly in its grasp;
However it was granted to me that
I then should reach the wretch with my sword-point,

My battle-blade; the war-rush carried off
The mighty sea-creature through my own hand.

Fitt IX (ll. 559-661)

The loathsome flayers often in that way
 Severely threatened me. I then them served
 With my dear sword as it was right to do.
 By no means had they the joy of that fill,
 Those guilt-makers, which they received from me;
 They sat around a feast near the sea-floor;
 But in the morning, wounded by my blade,
 They were then cast on land by the sea-waves,
 Were sent to sleep by sword. After that time
 They never have the seafarers hindered
 From sailing their course around the waters high.
 The light, god's bright beacon, came from the east;
 The surf became still so that I could see
 The ocean-ness, could see the windy walls.
Fate often saves the warrior un-doomed
When his courage is strong.

But that aside,

It came about for me that I had slain
 Nine of those water-monsters with my sword.
 I have not heard of a harder night-fight
 Beneath the heavens' arch, nor of a man

More pitiable upon the ocean-stream;
 Nevertheless, I survived those foe's fangs,
 Had kept my life, was weary from the fight.
 The sea then bore me off into Finland,
 The flood after the stream, the welling water.
 I have not heard of any such war-cunning,
 Of such terror of blades, about you said.
 Breca has not yet done so bold a deed,
 Neither of you two have, with shining swords
 At battle-sport, though boast I not of that.
 Indeed you did become your brother's bane,
 That head-kinsman; for that you must be dragged
 Through torment, though your wit be strong, in hell.³⁶
 I speak the truth to you, son of Ecglaf:
 Grendel, that horrid wretch, would never have
 Created so much terror for your lord,
 In Heorot harm, if had your soul, your heart,
 Been just as battle-grim as you yourself tell.
 For he has found that he has little need
 To fear that feud, that terrible sword-storm,
 Of your people, the Victory-Shyldings;

³⁶ Only traces of the concluding *e* in *helle* ("hell") remain in the MS; the word has been restored from the copy made by Thorkelin's scrivener. However, the copyist regularly confuses *æ*, *a*, and *e*, indicating this word may be *hælle* ("hall"). Therefore it is unclear whether Hunferth should be tormented in hell or in the hall for his brother's murder—either would be acceptable in this context.

He takes his toll, he spares none of the Danes,
 But carries his delight, he sleeps and eats;
 Expects he not the Spear-Danes to make war.
 But soon now I shall show him strength and courage,
 The Geats' warfare. Then afterwards the one
 Who may will go with pride unto mead
 Right when tomorrow's morning-light, the sun
 Then wearing brilliance, from southward shines
 Above the bairns of men."

Then was the giver

Of jewels, old-haired and battle-strong, in joy;
 The Bright-Danes' lord had counted on his help,
 The folk-herd found in Beowulf firm-wise thoughts.
 The heroes' laughter was there, winsome words
 That clamor made a melody of sound.
 The queen of Hrothgar, Wealhtheow³⁷ went forth,
 The golden lady mindful of customs,
 Then went and greeted those inside the hall,
 And then the free woman proffered a cup
 First to the East-Danes' homeland guardian,
 She bade that he, the people's beloved,
 Be blithe in drinking beer. Delighted he,

³⁷ Possibly "foreign-captive" or "Welsh-slave."

The victory-strong king, received the feast
 and filled hall-cup. The Helmings'³⁸ queen went round
 To each one in that host, both old and young;
 She passed the treasured cup until the time
 Befell that she, the circlet-adorned queen,
 Mature in mind, the mead to Beowulf bore;
 She greeted the Geatish man, with wise-firm words
 She thanked god that her will had come to pass,
 That trust she could in certain noblemen
 To bring them solace from those fiery deeds.
 The slaughter-storm fighter received that cup
 From Wealhtheow, and once ready for war,
 Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:
 "I had resolved, when set I out to sea,
 When sat I in the sea-boat with my troops,
 That wreak I would all of your people's will
 Or else I would go down in battle in
 That fiend's firm grasp. I shall perform that work
 Of noble strength, or await my end-day
 In this mead-hall."

Those words, that Geat's boast-speech,
 Were liked well by that lady; gold-adorned

³⁸ Literally "children of helm."

She went, the free folk-queen, to sit beside
Her lord.

Then was it after as it was
Ere in the hall: some mighty words were spoken,
The people in their joy, triumph-folk's sound,
Until at once the son of Half-Dane wished
To seek his evening-rest; he knew the wretch
Was planning to make war on that high-hall,
From when they could the light of the sun see
Until the darkening night covered them all,
The shapes of shadow-helms, the dark beneath
The welkin came to slither. The host all rose.
And then one of the men addressed the other,
Then Hrothgar to Beowulf, and bade that he
Be hale, the wine-hall wield, and with a word
He said: "I have not left to any man
Before, since heave I could my hand and shield,
The Danes' might-home—except to you just now.
Now have and hold the best of houses safe,
Remember glory, show your mighty strength,
Keep you the watch against the wrothful one.
You will not want for wealth if you survive

That daring work of courage with your life."

Fitt X (ll. 662-709)

Then Hrothgar did, the Shyldings' rampart, go
With all his fighter-host out from the hall;
The battle-first wanted to seek Wealhtheow,
The queen in bed. The honor-king had set,
So men have heard, a hall-warder against
Grendel, to hold a special office for
The Danish lord, to be the giant-ward.
Indeed the Geatish man so firmly trusted
His high-spirited might, the favor of fate,
That he removed his iron coat of mail,
His helmet from his head, gave his jeweled sword,
That iron best, to his attending-thane,
And ordered that he hold his battle-gear.
That noble fighter, Beowulf of the Geats,
Then spoke some boasting-words before he went
To bed: "I do not think myself to be
The worse in battle-form, within war-works,
Than Grendel does himself; therefore I will
Not put him to sleep, rob him of his life,
Using my sword, though certainly I might.
He does not know of those good things with which
He may against me strike, may hew my shield,

Even though he is brave in slaughter-works;
 But we two shall forgo the use of swords
 Within the night if dares he to seek out
 This war without a weapon; then wise god,
 The holy lord, may glory grant upon
 Whatever hand as seems proper to him.”
 With that the battle-bold himself laid down,
 The cheek-cushion received the hero's head,
 And many swift seamen at hall-rest lay
 Near him. Not one of them thought he after
 Would go from there to seek his beloved-yard,
 His folk or free stronghold, where he was fed,
 For they had heard that slaughter-death had seized
 Before, too many people of the Danes
 In the wine-hall. But now the lord bestowed
 The web of war-triumph upon them all,
 The Weders' men received refuge and help,
 So that they all could overcome their foe
 Through one man's craft, the might he bore himself.
The truth has been made known, that mighty god
Has ruled and wielded mankind forever.

Then came, within black night, slithering forth
 The shadow-walker. The shooters slept, those who

Were to have held the horned-hall—all but one.

It was well known to men that the sin-scather

Was not to drag them under the shadows

When fate did not desire him to do so;

But he who stood watch for the wrothful one

In anger bided, mind filled with war-deeds.

Fitt XI (ll. 710-790)

Then came, from the moor under misty hills,
Grendel walking—he bore the ire of god;
The wicked-scather thought to snare someone
Of mankind within that high-hall. He went
Beneath the welkin into that wine-house,
That golden hall of men, that bright plated place,
Which knew he best: that not the first time was
That he had sought the home of Hrothgar out.
Never before or since in his life's days
Did he harder fortune find, harder hall-thanes.

Then came he to the hall, the fighter treading,
Deprived of bliss. The door, the firm fire-bound,
Gave way once he had touched it with his hand;
The baleful-minded one, once he had swung
The mouth of the hall open, swelled with rage.
The fiend then trod, the ire-minded went,
Onto the shining floor; an unfair light
From his eyes started, most alike to fire.
He saw many a fighter in the halls,
The band of kinsmen sleeping together,
A troop of fighting-sons. Then laughed his mind;
The horrid wretch had thought he could sever

The life from living flesh of each of them
 Before the day would come—his hope then for
 A filling feast would come to pass for him.
 But it was not his fate that he should eat
 The more of mankind once that night had gone.
 The much-strong man, kinsman of Hygelac,
 Beheld the way that wicked-scather wished
 To work his fearsome grip. The wretch thought not
 To wait, but quickly seized a sleeping man
 For his first venture, eagerly he slit,
 He bit through the bone-locks, he drank the blood
 Within the veins, he swallowed large cuttings;
 He soon had eaten all the unliving,
 Both feet and hands. He then onward stepped forth,
 He seized by hand the strong-souled man at rest,
 The fiend then reached out towards him with his hand;
 He quickly seized upon him with harsh thoughts
 And sat against his arm.³⁹ With that the keeper
 Of fiery deeds then found he had not met
 A greater hand-grip in another man
 Across this middle-earth. Within his mind

³⁹ Although the poet does not state that this is Beowulf seizing Grendel's arm, it becomes apparent in the following lines that the Geatish warrior has turned the tables on Grendel at this point.

Within his heart, he then was terrified;
 Yet he could not go forth. Though his mind longed
 For him to get away, he wished to flee
 To his dark-place, to seek the devils' mob;
 His greeting there was not as he had met
 Before in his life's days. Then that good man,
 Then Hygelac's kinsman, recalled to mind
 That evening's speech so that he stood upright
 And took firm hold of him; his fingers burst.
 The giant turned out; further stepped the earl.
 The infamous one thought to move farther,
 To wherever he could, he thought to flee
 Away from him to his fen-hold; he knew
 His fingers to be held by a fierce grip.
 That was a harsh journey the harmful scather
 Had taken to Heorot. The din echoed
 About that lordly hall; to noblemen,
 To town-dwellers, to every keen person,
 To all the Danes, ale-share had come to pass.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ These lines are much debated, for the word *ealuscerwen* is a *hapax legomenon* whose meaning is disputed. The word seems to mean "dispensing of ale," which appears to be out of context with the poem's action here. Various translations/interpretations have been proposed; summaries can be found in the Mitchell-Robinson edition (167 n12), Wrenn-Bolton edition (232 at *ealu-scerwen*), and Klaeber edition (156 n769). My own interpretation looks to the previous and following section's emphasis on the noise level in the hall while considering the extensive use of the dative case in this passage. It appears the poet employs the "dative of reference," explaining how the events in the hall appear to the immediate onlookers:

Both of the vicious hall-wards were irate;
 The hall resounded. A great wonder was that
 The wine-hall had withstood the battle-bold,
 That the fair earthen-building never fell
 Upon the ground; but it was firmly smithed,
 Both within and without, with iron-bands,
 With skillful-thought. There many a mead-bench,
 Adorned with gold, was turned over on the floor,
 So have I heard, where fought those raging ones.
 The wisemen of the Shyldings never ere
 Had thought the always firm and bone-adorned—
 By any man's measure—could break apart,
 Thought that it could be pulled apart by craft,
 Unless it had been swallowed in the heat
 Of fire's embrace. A strange new sound arose,
 Horrible fear overthrew each North-Dane,
 Each one who heard the weeping from the walls,
 The terrifying lay, the winless song,
 That god's foe sung; hell's slave bewailed his sorrow.
 He who among men had the strongest might
 Within those days of this life held him fast.

to them it looked and sounded like a raucous celebration, but in the ironic sense that they find little pleasure in what they see.

Fitt XII (ll. 791-836)

The lee of noblemen would not let go
 The killing-comer for any reason,
 His days in life were never thought to be
 A benefit to any of those men.
 Then straightaway the earls of Beowulf
 Their ancient heirlooms drew,⁴¹ they wished to shield
 The life of the lord of lords, of that famous king,⁴²
 In any way they could. They did not know,
 Those hard-minded war-men, that when they joined
 The fight and thought to hew the sin-scather
 On each one of his sides to seek his soul,
 That none of the best irons over earth,
 No battle-blade, would touch him, because he
 Had foresworn all the weapons of triumph,
 Each edge of sword. His sundering-from-life
 On that day of this life had to be cruel,
 And that strange-ghost had far from there to go
 Into the fiends' wielding. Then found he that—
 He who ere made much mind-vex for mankind,
 He who had done many a fiery deed,

⁴¹ I.e. swords.

⁴² In the MS, the previous lines speak of a single earl drawing his sword, which is incongruous with the following lines that speak of all the noblemen together.

He who was stained by god—his body would
Not last; for Hygelac's daring kinsman
Had him by the hand; each living one was loathed
By the other. The horrid wretch endured
Much body-sore; the grievous wound inside
His shoulder was clear to him: the sinews sprung,
The bone-locks burst. Thus battle-glory was
Then given to Beowulf; thence Grendel fled
Life-sick beneath the fen-slopes, to seek out
His joyless home; because of that, he knew
More certainly his life's end had been reached,
The sum-day of his days. For all the Danes,
After that slaughter-rush, their will had come
To pass. He who before came from afar
Had cleansed, strong-willed and wise, the hall of Hrothgar,
Had saved it from that feud. The Geatish man
Had carried out his boast to the East-Danes,
He likewise cured all pains, all wicked sores,
They had endured and suffered there before,
Un-little grief because of dire threats.
A clear signal beneath the vaulted roof
Was that after the battle-bold had laid
Down Grendel's hand; his arm and shoulder both;

Together there was all of Grendel's grasp.

Fitt XIII (ll. 837-924)

I have heard said that many fighting-men
 Had in the morning been near the gift-hall;
 The folk-leaders had fared from far and near,
 Throughout the wide-stretched ways,
 To see that wondrous sight, the loathsome one's
 Last trace. His severed life was never thought
 A sorrow to any one of those men
 Who saw the troddings of the honor-less,
 How weary-minded he went thence away—
 Fated and fleeing, overcome by feud—
 Into the mere of water-monster-kin
 While bearing his life's lasts. The water there
 Was welling up in blood, the waves' dire swirl
 All stirred up with hot gore, the sword-blood welled.
 The death-doomed hid—for now he bliss-less was—
 Laid down his life within his fen-fortress,
 Gave up his heathen soul; there hell him seized.

The old comrades, likewise many young ones,
 After thence went from that glad-wandering,
 They rode their horses proudly from the mere,
 The men atop white steeds.

From there the fame

Of Beowulf was told; thus many said
 That neither south nor north, between the seas,
 Across the wide ground, under heaven's vault,
 Among shield-bearers, that no other one
 Was the more worthy of his own kingdom.
 Yet they not at all blamed their friend and lord,
 Gladsome Hrothgar, for that was a good king.

At times the battle-famed riders would let
 Their fallow horses leap, to fare in flight,
 To where they thought the earthen-way fairest,
 The best of well-known ways. At times the king's thane,
 A boastful man ever thinking up tales,
 He who remembered all too many of
 The old sayings, would find some other words
 That truthfully were bound; wisely that man
 Began to tell The Journey Of Beowulf,
 And skillfully retold, exchanged with words,
 The apt story.

He spoke of everything
 That he had heard said of the mighty deeds
 Of Sigemund,⁴³ many uncanny things,

⁴³ Literally "victory-hand." The poet shifts from Beowulf's journey to Sigemund's exploits in order to aggrandize the Geats' deeds through comparison with another famous Germanic hero. See *The Volsung Saga* for Sigemund's saga.

The struggle of Waels' son: his journeys wide,
 His feuds and fiery deeds, all of those things
 The bairns of men knew not entirely,
 Except for Fitela⁴⁴ who was with him—
 When something of such things he wished to say,
 The uncle to his nephew—for they were
 Always comrades in need in every feud;
 They many ettin-kin had slain by sword.
 No little honor rose after death-day
 For Sigemund, since he had killed in war
 The hardy wyrm, the hoard shepherd. Beneath
 The hoary cavern-stone, that noble's bairn
 Had ventured in that daring deed alone,
 For Fitela was not with him that time.
 Yet still it turned out for him that his sword
 Went through the wondrous wyrm, that in the wall
 That noble iron stuck. For murdering,
 That drake had died. The fierce-fighter had gone
 With courage forth so he could use the ring-hoard
 In self-judgment;⁴⁵ He loaded the sea-boat,
 Onto the ship's bosom Wael's son then bore

⁴⁴ A kenning for "wolf."

⁴⁵ *Selfes dome* is an Old Norse legal term indicating that the criminal will determine his own punishment for his crime. However in this instance, Sigemund took the treasure to use in whatever manner he saw fit.

The bright treasure. The hot wyrm had melted.
 He was the most widely renowned exile
 Throughout the lands, the lee of warriors,
 For all his daring deeds (he had prospered
 From that before), since Heremod's⁴⁶ war ceased,
 His courage and hardship. Among the Jutes,⁴⁷
 He was betrayed into his foes' wielding
 And quickly sent away. His sorrow-surge
 Then hobbled him too long. For his people,
 For all his noblemen, he then became
 A great distress; also many wise men,
 Those who believed in him to ease their bale,
 Had often mourned his strong-willed ways before,
 That the bairn of a king should thrive, should take
 His father's noble rank, should hold the folk,
 The hoard, and lee-hold, the heroes' realm,
 The Shyldings' land. He, Higelac's kinsman,
 Became to all his friends and all mankind
 The fairer lord; a fiery deed seized him.⁴⁸
 Competing, they went along the fallow street
 On horseback went. The morning-light then shoved

⁴⁶ Literally "army-mind."

⁴⁷ *Eotenum* can be either "giants" or "Jutes" (a Germanic tribe).

⁴⁸ This refers back to Heremod.

And sped them.⁴⁹ Many strong-thinking ones went
To that high hall to see that cunning-wonder;
Likewise the king himself, the ring-hoard's ward,
He, formed with honor, trod from the bride-bower
With Wealtheow's great host, the choicest known,
And with his queen, he crossed the mead-hall path.

⁴⁹ The sense here is the warriors realize the day is slipping past and begin to hurry.

Fitt XIV (ll. 925-990)

Then Hrothgar spoke (he to the hall had gone,
Had stood upon the stairs, had seen the roof—
Both steep and bright with gold—and Grendel's hand):
“For this one sight let thanks be given to
The all-wielder with haste. I had to live
Through many loathsome acts, through many sorrows,
Because of Grendel; god, the glory-shepherd,
May wonder after wonder always work.
It was not long ago that I could not
Imagine ever within my lifetime
Relief for me from any of those woes,
Back when the best house stood shining with blood,
With sword-gore stained, a wide-spread misery
For each wiseman, those who did not believe
That they could ever guard the people's land-work
Against the loathed, against the ghouls and ghosts.
This man has finished, through the might of god,
That deed which we all could not do before
With our wisdom. Behold! She can well say,
Whatever maiden brought forth this young man
Into the race of men—if yet she lives—
That fate was kind to her in childbearing.

Now Beowulf, best of men, I will you love
Within my heart, for you are son to me;
Guard well this new kinship. You will not want
For any worldly things that I now wield.
I often have bestowed rewards for less,
Have judged a weaker warrior hoard-worthy,
One worse in war. You have performed those deeds
Alone; that will forever live. With good
May the all-wielder repay you, as he
Just now has done.”

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn

Of Ecgtheow: “We did that courage-work,
That fight, with much delight, we boldly braved
The strength of the unknown, I wish that you
Had been allowed to see the fiend, fall-weary,
In treasured gear. I thought to bind him quickly
Onto his slaughter-bed with my hard clasps
So that he should lie life-distressed for my
Hand-grip, unless his body could escape.
Since fate did not wish it, I could not stop
His flight; I did not hold him, that life-foe,
Firmly enough for that; the fiend was far
Too mighty in his run. Yet he let go

His hand to save his life, that last remained,
 His arm and shoulder both. With that he bought
 Himself no help, as though he were a poor man;
 The loathsome flayer longer will not live
 Pressed hard with sins, because a wound has seized
 Him tightly with its grip, its baleful bond.
 The mighty foe must wait his great doom there,
 Because of his misdeed, how shining fate
 Will judge him.” Then the son of Ecglaf was⁵⁰
 A man more silent in his boasting speech
 About war-works after the nobles saw
 The hand, the fingers of the fiend, atop
 The roof through that earl’s craft. Each finger-front,
 Each nail-place, had been the most like steel;
 That heathen battle-warrior’s hand-spur
 Was a fierce claw. Everyone said that no
 Hard sword, no first-good iron, would him touch,
 Or weaken would the bloody battle-hand
 Of that monster.

⁵⁰ Referring to Hunferth.

Fitt XV (ll. 991-1049)

It then was ordered soon
 That Heorot be dressed inside by hand.
 For that there were many women and men
 Who readied that wine-hall, that great guest-house.
 Adorned with gold, the woven wall-works shone
 With many wondrous sights for every man
 Who looks upon such things. That building bright,
 All within it, was utterly broken;
 The solid iron-bound hinges had burst.
 The roof alone survived completely sound
 When the monster, the foe with fiery deeds,
 Had turned in flight despairing of his life.
It is not easy to flee away from that—
Let him try, he who will—but forced by need,
He has to seek the place made ready for
All of the soul-bearers, the bairn of men,
The ground-dwellers, the place his body-home
Will sleep after the feast, fast in its deathbed.
 Then came the set and suitably right time
 For Half-Dane's son to go into the hall;
 The king himself wished to partake of the feast.
 I have not heard of a people within

A greater host who better bore themselves
 About their jewel-giver. The glory-holders
 Then sat upon the bench, rejoiced in feast;
 Those kin strong-thinking, Hrothgar and Hrothulf,⁵¹
 Fairly partook of many mead-full cups
 In that high hall. Heorot was filled inside
 With friends; the People-Shyldings did not make
 Their false-oaths then.⁵² He gave him Half-Dane's sword,
 A golden sign of triumph, to reward
 Beowulf: a decorated hilt-banner,
 A helm and coat, a famous treasure-sword—
 All these many saw borne before the man.
 Beowulf received the cup within the hall;
 He never had reason to be ashamed
 Of that rich-gift in front of his shooters.
 I have not heard of four gold-girded treasures
 That many men have given more friendly,
 One to the other, while at the ale-bench.
 About that helmet's roof, that head-refuge,
 Wires had been wound to shield the outer ridge,
 So that the leavings of files, shower-hard,

⁵¹ Literally "glory-wolf."

⁵² The poet's denial that the *facenstafas* were made then implies that at some point in the future the Shyldings may perform some treachery to which the poet here alludes.

Could not severely scathe him at those times
 That shield-fighter should go against the cruel.
 The lee of noblemen commanded that
 Eight horses with gold-plated head-armor
 Be led into the hall, inside the house.
 One of those saddles was artfully adorned,
 Made worthy with jewels; that was the battle-seat
 Of the high-king, whenever Half-Dane's son
 Wished to engage in sword-play. While at the front,
 The well-known warrior was never slain
 When corpses fell. And then Ingwines' lord⁵³
 Bestowed on Beowulf for him to wield
 Both horses and weapons; he ordered that
 He use them well. That hoard-ward of heroes,
 The famous king, so manfully repaid
 That battle-rush with both treasure and mounts,
 So that no man, he who desires to say
 The truth by what is right, will ever find
 A fault with them.

⁵³ Literally "Ing's friends." Ing was a mythical Danish king.

Fitt XVI (ll. 1050-1124)

And then the lord of earls,
 To each one on that mead-bench who had rowed
 The ocean-course with Beowulf, gave a gift,
 An heirloom, and commanded that the one,
 The thane who Grendel killed in wickedness,
 Be paid for in gold—⁵⁴ he would have done more
 If god and that man's mind had not stopped fate.
Fate wielded all mankind, as still it does.
Therefore understanding, the mind's forethought,
Is always best. A person shall abide
Much love and loathe, he who will long make use
Of the world here within these days of toil.
 Then song and sound were both together there,
 Before the war-wise leader of Half-Dane,
 The mirth-wood greeted, the song did often urge,
 When Hrothgar's bard, among the mead-benches,
 Had to recite hall-joy about Finn's sons,⁵⁵
 About the fearsome fight begot for them;
 The Half-Danes' hero, Hnaef of the Shyldings,
 At Freswael⁵⁶ had to fall. Yes, Hildeburh⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This is an example of *weregild* or "man-price." Germanic law required that a murdered individual's family be paid a blood-price for the crime. The individual amounts were normally determined by social rank.

⁵⁵ The fragmentary *Fight at Finnsburh* contains the only other account of this tale.

Had no good cause to praise the truth of Jutes;⁵⁸
 Un-sinful she had lost beloved kin,
 Her sons and brother, in that battle-play;
 Their wounds were rushed into labor by spear.
 That was a sad woman! Hoc's⁵⁹ daughter did not
 Bewail that fateful shaft without good cause
 Since when the morning came that she could see
 The baleful murder of her dear kinsmen
 Beneath the sky where she before had held
 The most delight within the world. That war
 Had seized all of Finn's thanes except a few,
 So that he not at all could fight the war
 Against Hengest⁶⁰ upon that gathering ground,
 Nor save those woeful few through further war
 With that lord's thane. But bid they terms to them:⁶¹
 That they should yield a second house to them,
 A hall and high-seat both; so they might wield
 One half of it with the bairns of the Jutes;
 The son of Folcwalda⁶² should honor Danes

⁵⁶ Either the name of a battlefield or a compound whose meaning would render this line, "had to fall in a Frisian-slaughter."

⁵⁷ Literally "battle-fort."

⁵⁸ See n47.

⁵⁹ Literally "hook."

⁶⁰ Literally "horse."

⁶¹ The pronouns do not specify who bid the terms to whom, but the following lines reveal a humiliating agreement: The Danes will now be subjugated to a leader who has killed their own lord.

With treasure-gifts each day, should entertain
 Hengest's band with rings, with wealth and riches
 Adorned with gold, even as much as he
 Would cheer the Frisians' kin in the beer-hall.
 They on both sides entrusted themselves then
 To that fixed peace accord. Finn named his oaths
 To Hengest with courage un-contentious:
 That with his wisemen's judgment he would hold
 Those woeful few; that not a man should break
 That treaty either through his words or works,
 Nor ever should make known through wicked means
 That lord-less they followed their ring-giver's bane
 Since it was forced on them; however, if
 A Frisian, with his hostile speech, were to
 Recall that hateful murder, then it must
 Be settled with the edges of their swords.

The oath was made, and splendid gold was brought
 Up from the hoard. The best of battle-lords
 Amongst the War-Shyldings was ready for
 The fire. The blood-stained ring-mail shirt was seen
 With ease within that funeral pyre, the swine
 All golden, image iron-hard of a boar,

⁶² Literally "folk-wielder."

The nobleman injured with many wounds;
They all had died upon the field of slaughter.
At Hnaef's pyre, Hildeburh commanded that
The flame be given her own son to burn
His bone-holder, and that he be put in
The fire beside the shoulder of his uncle.
That lady grieved, lamented with a song;
The battle-man arose; the greatest fire
For all the slain up to the welkin's wound;
It roared before the mound; their heads did melt;
The wound-gates burst, the body's loathsome bites,
Then blood sprang forth; the flame—the greediest
Of ghosts—it swallowed all of those there whom
That fight had snatched away from both peoples;
Their breath was gone.

Fitt XVII (ll. 1125-1191)

The warriors then left
 To seek their lands; bereft of friends, they sought
 Friesland, their homes and high strongholds. Disturbed,
 Hengest remained with Finn that slaughter-stained
 Winter; he thought of home. Though he could have ⁶³
 Driven the ring-prowed ship across the sea,
 The water welled with storms; it fought the wind;
 The winter locked the waves in icy-bonds,
 Until the next year came into the world—
 Just as it still does now, that splendid-bright
 Weather that always watches for its season.
 When fair earth's lap had shaken off winter,
 The wretched guest then wished to leave that court,
 But thought more of grief-vengeance than sea-lanes,
 If he a meeting of revenge could force:
 He kept the bairn of Jutes in mind for that.
 So he did not refuse those worldly terms
 When Hunlafing, ⁶⁴ the battle-gleaming sword,

⁶³ Most editors and translators emend the manuscript by adding OE *ne* (MnE “not”) in order to make Hengest’s decision to remain with Finn appear unwilling. However, the line does not need emending; the following lines explain why the Danish lord chooses to wait out winter.

⁶⁴ Possibly “un-leaving.” *Hunlafing* may either be the name of the sword (as interpreted here), or the name of a retainer who put the sword on Hengest’s lap. These lines would then read: “When Hunlaf’s child laid the battle-gleaming sword, / The best of blades, upon his lap.” In either case, Hengest has the sword with which he plans to enact his revenge.

The best of blades, was laid upon his lap;
 Its edge was well renowned among the Jutes.
 Likewise that cruel sword's bale later befell
 Heart-daring Finn within that home of his,
 As soon as Guthlaf and Oslaf⁶⁵ recalled
 Their sorry state, that grim assault, after
 Their sea-voyage, bemoaned their deal of woes;
 The restless spirit never could forbear
 It in its breast. The hall was then adorned
 With lives of enemies, and Finn was slain,
 The king within his court; the queen was seized.
 The Shyldings' shooters bore back to their ships
 All the hall-riches of that earthly king,
 Such as they might find of cut-gems and jewels
 Within Finn's home. They bore his noble wife
 Across the ocean-lane, back to the Danes;
 They led her to the people. A lay was sung,
 The gleeman's song. Thereafter, joy arose,
 The bench-noise sounded brightly in the hall;
 The cupbearers gave wine from wonder-cups.
 Then came forth Wealtheow, walking beneath
 A golden ring, to where the good ones sat,

⁶⁵ Literally "war-heirloom" and "divine-heirloom" respectively.

The nephew and uncle; then was their peace
 Together still, each true to the other.
 And there as well was Hunferth the thyle,⁶⁶
 He sat at the feet of the Shylding's lord;
 Each of them trusted that in his spirit
 He had a mighty mind, though he had not
 Been honor-fast to kinsmen in swordplay.
 The Shyldings' queen then spoke: "Take this filled cup,
 Free-lord of mine, distributor of jewels.
 Be glad, gold-friend of men, and speak to the Geats
 With gentle words, as men must do. Be glad
 With the Geatish men, and mindful of the gifts
 From near and from afar that you now have.
 It has been said to me that you would have
 This army-leader as your son. Heorot,
 The bright ring-hall, is cleansed; enjoy while you may
 These many gifts, and leave the folk and rule
 To your kinsman; you forward have to see
 To fated end. I know my kind Hrothulf,
 That he will hold the young with dignity,
 If you, the Shyldings' friend, should leave this world

⁶⁶*Dyle*, whose meaning is uncertain, appears to be Hunferth's title. Most translators interpret it either as "speaker," or "jester."

Before he does; I think he will repay
Our heirs with goodness, if he bears in mind
All of those glories we have done before
To please and honor him when he was young.”
She turned then to the bench where were her sons,
Hrethric and Hrothmund both,⁶⁷ and heroes’ bairns—
The young ones together; the good man sat,
The Geat’s Beowulf, beside the brother’s twain.

⁶⁷ “Glory-power,” and “glory-hand” respectively.

Fitt XVIII (ll. 1192-1250)

To him the ale-filled cup was borne, and friendship
 Was offered with their words, and twisted gold
 Was then presented to him with good will:
 Two arm-bands, clothes and rings, the best neck-ring
 Which I have heard about upon the earth.
 I have not heard of a better treasure-hoard
 Of warriors beneath the sky, since Hama
 Had borne the Brosinga necklace, the jewel,
 And prized cup to his army-bright stronghold;
 He fled the battle-craft of Eormenric,⁶⁸
 He chose eternal gain. So Hygelac
 The Geat, the nephew of Swerting⁶⁹ possessed
 The ring while on his final journey out,
 When he defended his treasure, guarded
 His slaughter-plunder, underneath his sign;
 But fate carried him off, since for his pride
 The feud with the Frisians he asked for woe—
 That mighty lord, he wore those treasured jewels
 Those sacred-stones, across the wave-filled cup;
 Beneath the boss of shield, he fell in war.

⁶⁸ Literally “immense-power.” Little is known of Hama other than he stole the Norse goddess Freya’s magical necklace from the Gothic king Eormenric.

⁶⁹ Literally “son of black.” This individual’s noble name evinces that he must possess the finest of moral characters.

Into the grasp of Franks the king's life passed,
 His breast-armor and ring together both;
 Those lesser war-bold⁷⁰ rifled through his corpse
 After the cut of war. The Geat's men held
 The dead's abode.

The hall received that sound.

Then spoke Wealtheow, she before that host:
 "Enjoy this ring, beloved Beowulf,
 Young man, with health, and make use of this coat,
 This people's wealth, and rightly grow to greatness,
 Declare yourself with strength, and to these boys
 Be lithe in lore counsel; for that I will
 Remember to reward you. You have fared
 So that both far and near, for their lives' length,
 Will all men praise you, even as long as
 The sea, the home of winds, surrounds the shores.
 Be, so long as you may live, a blessed lord.
 I wish you well with your bejeweled treasures.
 Be you to my sons dutiful in deeds,
 And keep them joyfully. Here every earl
 Is true to every other, mild in mind,
 A lee unto their liege; the thanes as one,

⁷⁰ I.e. The Franks.

The troop alert, the drunken noblemen
Do as I bid." She went then to her seat.
There was the best of feasts; the men drank wine.
They did not know their fate, their old grim doom,
As it was to come for many an earl
Once evening came and Hrothgar had returned
To his own hall, the ruler to his rest.
Unknown numbers of earls guarded that house
As often had they done before. They cleared
The bench-board; beds and bolsters were then spread
Out over it. One of the beer-servants,
Willing and fated, lay upon the floor.
They set their battle-shields, their bright board-woods,
Next to their heads; above the nobleman,
There on the bench, was seen most easily
The towering war-helm, the ring-mail coat,
The mighty brutal-spear. It was their way,
That they were often ready for warfare,
Both at home and on raids, for each of those,
At all times when great need their liege-lord bound:
That was a good people.

Fitt XIX (ll. 1251-1320)

They sank to sleep.

One sorely paid for his evening rest,
 As oft occurred when Grendel guarded had
 That golden hall, had done un-right, until
 The end had come, his death after those sins.
 Then it was seen, was widely known by men,
 Another wrecker lived a longsome time
 After the loathsome one, that war-sorrow.
 For Grendel's mother, queen, that wretched woman,
 Then bore that crime in mind, she⁷¹ who had to dwell
 In water-horror, cold streams, since when Cain⁷²
 Became the sword-bane to his only brother,
 His father's kin; he left, shining with blood,
 Was marked with murder, fled the joys of man
 To guard the wastes. Thence woke the old-fate ghosts:
 Grendel was one, that hateful sword-outlaw;
 He found in Heorot the watching man
 Awaiting war. The wretch had grabbed at him,
 But then he brought to mind his mighty strength,

⁷¹ There are five instances in the poem where a masculine relative pronoun refers to a feminine antecedent (*se þe* rather than *seo þe*). Such switching is not uncommon in OE manuscripts; therefore for simplicity's sake, these have been rendered in the feminine.

⁷² Nearly all translators/editors emend MS *camp* (MnE "battle" or "strife") to *Cain*, for this account corresponds with the one at lines 110-1.

That gift immense that god had granted him,
And trusted the one-wielder for glory,
For solace and support; because of that,
He overcame that fiend, humbled hell's ghost.
The lowly went then with no deal of joy;
The fiend of mankind sought his death-home out.
His mother, greedy still and gloomy-mood,
On that sorrowful journey wished to go
To wreak revenge for the death of her son.
She came then to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes
Were sleeping in the hall. Then there occurred
A change in fortune for those earls at once,
As soon as Grendel's mother reached within.
The horror was less by just as much as
A maiden's strength, a woman's war-terror,
Is less than a weaponed-man's when the bound blade
That forged by hammer was, the blood-stained sword
With doughty edges, shears through the helm's boar.
Then in the hall, the hard-edge was drawn forth,
The sword above the seats, many broad-shields
Were lifted firm in hand; remembered none
His helm or great mail-coat when that terror
Took hold of him. She in a great rush was;

Once she had been found out, she wished to save
 Her life outside of there. She quickly had
 One of the noblemen, she seized him fast,
 She went then to her fen. In Hrothgar's mind,
 He was the most beloved of heroes in
 The rank of retainer between the seas,
 That strong shield-warrior, he whom she killed
 Within his rest, a glory-fast man was.
 But Beowulf was not there, he was inside
 The other hall, the place assigned before,
 After the treasure-give to that famed Geat.
 A cry arose in Heorot; she had seized
 In gore the well-known hand;⁷³ renewed was grief,
 Came back into the home. That was no good
 Exchange that both sides bought with friendly lives.
 The wise old king, that hoary fighting-man,
 Was in a storm-tossed mood once knew he that
 His elder-thane un-living was, knew that
 His dearest man was dead. Then Beowulf,
 The triumph-blessed man, in haste was fetched
 Unto that resting-room. In the fore-day,
 A certain earl, a noble champion,

⁷³ Grendel's mother has taken her son's hand.

He with his retainers, then went to where
The wise king wondered whether the all-wielder
Would ever wish to work a change for him
After that woeful spell. Then across the floor
The war-worthy man with his hand-troops walked
(The hall-wood dinned), so that he could address
With words the wise lord of the Ingwines,
After that urgent call, to ask him if
His night had pleasant been.

Fitt XX (ll. 1321-1382)

Then Hrothgar spoke,
 The helm of Shyldings: “Ask not of my joys!”
 Great sorrow is renewed within the Danes
 For Aeschere⁷⁴ is dead, the elder brother
 Of Yrmenlaf,⁷⁵ my runic advisor
 And counsel-king who by my shoulder stood
 When we in battle had guarded our heads,
 Whenever footmen clashed and struck boar-helms.
 So should an earl be, good from ancient times,
 And so was Aeschere! In Heorot
 That restless slaughter-ghost was his hand-bane
 I do not know whither the horrid one,
 While boasting of that meat, reviled for her feast,
 Has gone in her return journey. She has
 Her vengeance wrought for that hate-feud in which
 You yesterday Grendel killed while enraged
 With your hard clasp, because for far too long
 He waned and wounded people of my land.
 He fell in war, sentenced and stripped of life,
 And now the other mighty wicked-scather

⁷⁴ Literally “ash-army.”

⁷⁵ Literally “immense-legacy.”

Has come here—she her kinsman would avenge—
 And too far has she carried on that feud.
 So thus it may seem to many a thane,
 He who at heart for his jewel-giver weeps,
 A hard breast-bale; and now the hand lies dead,
 That which availed you with all your desires.
 I have the land-dwellers heard, my people,
 The hall-advisors, say that they have seen
 Two such great mark-walkers, two such strange ghosts,
 Who hold the moors. Of those, the other was,
 Insofar as they could know, most like a queen;
 The other wretched-shape, in a man's form,
 Had trod the wracking-path; he larger was
 Than any other man; in former days,
 The earth's inhabitants had called him "Grendel."
 They know no father, whether for them⁷⁶ ere
 Had been brought forth any of ghosts unknown.
 They guard the hidden land, the wolf-hollows,
 The windy nesses, daring fen-narrows,
 There where the mountain-stream goes down beneath
 The nesses darkened-mists, flood under ground.

⁷⁶ Because of Old English pronouns' ambiguity, it is uncertain whether this should be translated "them" (referring to Grendel and his mother) or "him" (referring to the hypothetical father). Either rendering works in this instance.

Not far from here in mile-marks stands the mere;
Above it hangs a rimy stand of trees,
A wood held fast by water-covered roots.
Each night a violent-wonder may be seen:
A fire upon the flood. No wise and old,
No bairn of men, lives that may know that ground;
Although the heath-stalker, strong hart with horns,
Be chased by hounds, be seeking out the holt,
Be fleeing far, he will give up his life,
Will leave his life on shore, before he will
Enter in it. That is not a safe place!
The tossing waves arise out of that place,
The darkness towards the clouds, when stirs the wind,
Until the sky then dims, the heavens weep.
Now aid depends again on you alone.
You know not yet her yard, that fearful place,
Where you may find the fighter of much sin;
Seek if you dare. I will repay that feud
To you with wealth, with treasure, with wound gold,
As ere I did, if you should come away.”

Fitt XXI (ll. 1383-1472)

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:

“Do not sorrow, wise man! *It better is*

For everyone that he avenge his friend

Than mourn he much. Each of us shall abide

The end of this world's life—let him who may

Do works ere death of honor; that is best

For a noble warrior now un-living.

Arise, realm's ward, let us with all haste fare

To see the track of Grendel's kinswoman.

I vow to you this: she will not be lost

In any cover, not in the earth's arms,

Not in the mountain's holt, not in the sea's depths—

Let her go where she will. But for this day,

Be patient with your woes, as I expect

You to.”

The ancient warrior leapt up,

He gave great thanks to god, the mighty lord,

For what that man had spoke. A bridled horse,

A steed with a wound main, then bridled was

For Hrothgar; well-equipped the wise king rode;

The footmen bearing linden-shields stepped forth.

The last footprints along the forest-path,

The tracks across the ground, were widely seen:
She straight had fared over the murky moor,
Had soulless borne the best of the young-thanes,
Of those who ruled the hall-home with Hrothgar.
The nobles' bairns went up the steep stone-hills,
The narrow paths, the uncanny passage,
The steep nesses, the many houses of
The water-beasts. He went before with some
Few wisemen in order to see the land,
Until he found by chance some mountain-trees,
A bliss-less wood, which leaning were above
The hoary stone; the water underneath
Was bloody and stirred up. For all the Danes,
For friends of Shyldings, for many athane,
That pain had in their minds to be endured,
That grief for each one of the noblemen,
Since they had come upon, on that sea-cliff,
The head of Aeschere. The folk looked towards
The flood welling with blood, with much hot gore.
At times the horn its willing war-song sang;
The troop all sat. They saw then in the water
Many of the wyrm-kin, the strange sea-drakes,
Who swam the sound; likewise atop the ness,

The water-monsters lay, those wyrms and wild-beasts,
That in the morning-time often observe
A sorrowful journey on that sail-road;
They rushed away in raging bitterness,
They had the bright sound heard, the war-horn's charm.
The Geatish leader parted one wave-struggler
From life with one from his own arrow-bow;
That hardy battle-dart had stood by him
Throughout his life; it was a slower swimmer
Than any in the waves once death took it.
Then quickly within the waves, with boar-pikes,
With sword-sharp hooks, the wonderful wave-king
Was violently attacked, was firmly snared,
Was drawn onto the ness; the men beheld
Their horrifying guest. Then Beowulf girded
Himself in his earl-dress, he never mourned
For his own life. That hand-wove battle-shirt
Both broad and cleverly adorned, that which
Knew how to guard the bone-cave so a war-grasp,
An irate wicked-hold, might never scathe
Either his breast or life, would try that sound;
The shining-white helmet guarded the head
Of he who had to stir up the mere-grounds,

To seek the surging-sound. The helm bejeweled
 Encircled was with noble bands, the like
 The weapon-smith had wrought in former days,
 Had shaped with wonders, inset with boar-forms,
 So that thereafter brand or battle-sword
 Might not it bite. Not then the smallest of
 The mighty-aids was that which Hrothgar's thyle
 Had lent him in his need: that hilted-sword
 Was Hrunting named. It was one of the first
 Of old treasures; of iron was its edge,
 With poison laced, wrought hard with battle-sweat;
 It never had deserted any man,
 He who had wound his hand about its hilt,
 He who had dared to go on dread-journeys
 To the folk-stead of foes;

Not the first time
 That was that it should do a mighty-work.
 Indeed, the son of Ecglaf, power-crafty,
 Could think not of what he had said before
 While drunk with wine, when he had lent that weapon
 To a better sword-bold. He himself did
 Not dare to risk his life beneath the waves,
 In lordship to engage; it was not so

For the other, since he⁷⁷ had dressed for war.

⁷⁷ I.e. Beowulf.

Fitt XXII (ll. 1472-1556)

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:
“Now think, *the* famous kinsman of Half-Dane,
Wise lord, now that I ready am to go,
Gold-friend of men, of what we said before,
That if I were to quit life in your need,
That you were to be in a father’s place
To me forever when I will have gone.
Be you the hand-ruler to my hand-givers,
To my young-thanes, if battle should me seize;
And likewise, send that wealth to Hygelac,
Beloved Hrothgar, that you granted me.
The Geats’ lord may then sense within that gold,
Then Hrethel’s son may see when stares he deep
Into that treasure, that I found a good
Ring-giver with choice-men, enjoyed them while
I was able. And let then Hunferth have
That old heirloom, that wondrous wave-marked sword;
That widely-known man may my hard edge have;
I shall with Hrunting for my glory work,
Or death shall take me then.” After those words,
The Weather-Geats leader went quick with zeal;
He would no answer bide; the sea-swell seized

That battle-man. It was a day-long while
 Before he could perceive the bottom-plain.
 Soon she who held the flood's expanse, sword-fierce,
 She grim and greedy, one hundred half-years,
 Had found that someone of men from above
 Had tried the eel-wights' yard. She grabbed at him;
 She seized the war-man in her horrid grasp
 But could not scathe the body hale within;
 His ring surrounded him from the outside,
 So that she might not, through his fighting-home,
 His locked limb-coat, with loathsome fingers, rip.
 The wave-wolf bore, once to the ground she came,
 The lord of rings into her dwelling place,
 So that he might—he was not then so brave—
 Not wield his weapons, but many wondrous things
 Had smelled⁷⁸ him in the sound, many sea-beasts
 With battle-tusks had broken his war-shirt,
 They had pursued the wretch.⁷⁹ The earl then sensed
 He was inside of some afflicted hall
 Where water could never scathe him at all,
 Further, because of that roofed hall, the flood's

⁷⁸ This follows MS *swecte*, which is usually emended to *swencte* (sensed, tracked).

⁷⁹ *Aglæcan* typically has a negative connotation (thus translated most frequently herein as *wretch*); this half line may refer to either Beowulf or other sea-monsters.

Fear-grip might not him touch. He saw fire-light,
 A flashing gleam that brightly shone. The good
 Then sensed cursed ground, the mighty mere-woman;
 He gave his might-rush to his battle-blade;
 His hardy hand did not withhold that swing;
 The ring-sword sang to her atop her head
 Its greedy battle-song. The guest then found
 The fighting-gleam did not wish to bite her,
 To scathe her life; instead, that edge deserted
 That lord in need; it had endured many
 A hand-meeting, had often sheared a helm,
 A fated fighter's battle-gear; that was
 The first time that dear treasure's judgment had failed.
 Later, all was one-thought, that Hygelac's
 Kinsman, ever mindful of famous works,
 Had not been late with that his daring deed.
 The irate warrior then tossed aside
 That wondrously marked weapon bound with jewels,
 So that the sturdy and steel-edged lay down
 Upon the earth; he trusted to his strength,
 To his hand-grip's might.

So a man shall do,

When thinks he in war to gain longsome praise,

About his own life he will never care.

The War-Geats' lord—he did not fear that feud—
Then by the shoulder seized Grendel's mother;
The battle-hardened, bulging in his rage,
Then flung his life-strife down so that she bowed
Upon the floor. She quickly, after that,
Repaid him that hand-loan with her grim grip,
And seized him to herself; that weary-mind
Then overthrew the strongest warrior,
The foot-champion, so that he took a fall.
She sat on that hall-guest and drew her knife,
Her broad bright-edge; she would avenge her bairn,
Her sole offspring. The braided breast-armor
Upon his shoulder lay; that saved his life,
Against that point, also against that edge,
It withstood that ingoing. Then the son,
Of Ecgtheow, the Geatish champion,
Would have been lost had not his battle-coat,
His hard war-net, helped him, had holy god
Not wielded his war-win; the wise ruler,
The heavens' guide had chosen easily,
As soon as he had stood.

Fitt XXIII (ll. 1557-1650)

He saw amongst

The battle-gear a triumph-blessed blade,
An ancient giant-sword with edges strong,
The warriors' glory; that was the best
Of weaponry, except that it was more
Than any other man might bear into
The fighting-sport, both good and grand, the work
Of giants. Grasped he then the chain-linked hilt;
The Shyldings' bold, both savage and sword-grim,
The ring-sword drew; bleak in his hope for life,
He fiercely struck so that it slashed her hard
Across the neck; it broke through her bone-rings.
The whole blade through her fated flesh-home went;
She crumpled to the floor. The sword was bloody;
The man rejoiced in his work; the gleam shone forth;
The light arose inside as clearly as
The candle of the sky from heaven shines.
He looked about the hall; he turned by the wall;
The thane of Hygelac, irate and firm,
Then hefted hard the weapon by its hilt.
That edge was useless to that war-man,
But with great haste he Grendel would repay

For many battle-rushes he had wrought
Upon the West-Danes much more often than
The one time when he slew Hrothgar's hearth-friends
While in their sleep; he ate of Danish folk
Some fifteen sleeping men and carried off
Another of the same, a loathsome haul.
The brutal champion paid out his prize
For that to him, to whom he saw at rest,
The battle-weary Grendel lying lifeless.
Thus had the war in Heorot scathed him ere.
The body sprang wide apart after death,
Since it had suffered a blow, a hard sword-swing,
And since the fighter had carved off its head.
The wise men, they who gazed into the mere
With Hrothgar, saw soon that the surging surf,
The bloodstained brine, had been all swirled about.
The grey-hairs, the old ones, together spoke
About that good one, they did not expect
It of that nobleman that he would come
In triumph's glory seeking their famous king;
They thought that many times, that the wave-wolf
Had destroyed him. When came the day's night hour,
The violent Shyldings gave up the ness;

The men's gold-friend went thence unto his home.

The guests⁸⁰ sat sick of mind and stared into

The mere; they wished, and yet did not expect,

That they would see their friend and lord again.

Then after that fight-sweat, that sword began

To wane, that war-blade turned to battle-ice.

It wondrous was, it melted most like ice

When the father lets go the bond of frost,

Unwinds the deep-sea-ropes. *He has the wield*

Of time and season both; that is true fate.

He did not take, the Weather-Geats leader

While in that house, more of those treasured goods—

Though saw he many there—but for the head

And hilt bejeweled. The sword had melted ere,

Had burned away the pattern-braided blade;

Too hot for it the blood was from inside

That adder-ous strange-ghost who there had died.

He soon was in the sound; he who before

In battle bade the wrothfuls' fighting-fall,

Then swam up through the mere. The welling-waves,

The vast lands, had entirely been cleansed,

As soon as that strange-ghost had let go of

⁸⁰ The Geats.

Its living-days and this creation lent.⁸¹

Then came onto the land the shipmen's helm;

He swam strong-spirited; he rejoiced in

That sea-plunder, that powerful burden,

Which he had brought with him. That splendid band

Of thanes then went towards him, gave thanks to god,

Exulted in their lord, for they had been

Allowed to see him sound. The helm and coat

Then soon were loosed from that brave warrior.

The surface drowsed, the water underneath

The welkin's arch, the bloody slaughter-stained,

The glad spirits fared forth thence to the path,

They walked the earthen-way, the well-known street.

The kingly-bold men bore the head away

From that sea-cliff, a great effort even

For two of them; four of the very brave

With great toil had to ferry Grendel's head

Upon the slaughter-stake to that gold-hall,

Until at last they came unto the hall,

Fourteen bold Geatish warriors striding.

The lord of men with them, proud in the throng,

⁸¹ The "creation lent" in this line could refer to either any one of, or combination of, the following: body, world, fate, life, existence.

The mead-plain trod.

Then came to go inside

The elder of the thanes, the deed-keen man

By glory worthy made, the war-fierce lord,

He greeted Hrothgar. Grendel's head was borne

By the hair into the hall, to where men drank,

A terror for the earls and queen with them,

A wondrous face there seen; the men looked on.

Fitt XXIV (ll. 1651-1739)

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:
“Behold! O Half-Dane’s son, O Shyldings’ lord,
We gladly brought this sea-plunder to you
That here you look upon as proof of triumph.
Un-softly have I lived through with my life
The war beneath the waves; I braved that work
With great hardship. That fight would have soon ceased
If god were not my shield. I could not work
With Hrunting anything within that war,
Though that weapon be strong; but men’s wielder
Then granted to me that I was to see
A fine great old-sword hanging on the wall
(He leads most often those without a lord),
So that I could then draw that weapon forth.
When was made known to me the proper time,
I slew the house’s shepherds in that fight.
That battle-blade then burned its braided-welds
When blood had sprayed, the hottest of war-sweats.
I bore that hilt away thence from those fiends;
I wrought revenge for every fiery deed,
That death-quell of the Danes; so was it right.
I therefore promise it to you, that you

May sleep now sorrow-less in Heorot with
 Your host of warriors and each one of
 Your people's thanes, both tried and green alike,
 And that you need not dread, O Shylding's lord,
 The elder-bale of earls from that one side,
 As you had done before."

That golden hilt

That work of giants from earlier times
 Was given in hand to that ancient man,
 That hoary battle-first; after the fall
 Of those devils, that work of wonder-smiths
 Then passed into the wealth of the Dane's king;
 When that cruel-hearted man, that foe of god,
 That murder-guilty one, had given up
 This world—along with his mother as well—
 It went into the wield of the world-kings,
 The best of those between the oceans twain
 Who deal out treasure in the Shadowlands.

Then Hrothgar spoke, he looked the hilt over,
 The old heirloom; on that the origin
 Of ancient-strife was written, when the flood,
 The surging seas, had slain the giant's kin
 (They fared horribly); those people were

Alien to the everlasting lord;
 The wielder granted them their end-reward
 Through welling waters.

 So too on its guard
 Of splendid gold was marked in the right way
 With runic characters, set down and said,
 For whom that sword, the best iron, had first
 Been wrought with writhing-hilt and wyrm-markings.
 Then Half-Dane's wise son spoke—all silent fell:
 "Lo! One may say, he who furthers both truth
 And right within the folk, remembers all
 Far gone affairs, an ancient home-land ward,
 That better born this earl was! Glory is raised
 Throughout the wide-ways, my friend Beowulf,
 Yours over every land. You hold all power
 With patience, with the wisdom of your mind.
 I shall my friendship carry out to you,
 As we two spoke before. You shall become
 The everlasting solace for your people,
 A help to warriors. Heremod did
 Not so become for Ecgwela's⁸² children,
 The Honor-Shyldings; never did he wax

⁸² Literally "sword-wealth."

In power for their joy, but rather for
Their slaughter-fall, and for the death-quell of
The Danish people; with his mind enraged,
He killed his table-vassals, shoulder-friends,
Until he went alone, the famous lord
Away from human bliss. Though mighty god
Had raised him with the joys of might and strength,
Had furthered him the more, beyond all men,
Yet still the blood-sorrowful breast-hoard grew
Within his heart. He never gave bright rings
To honor Danes, but blissless did he bide
So that he suffered through that struggle's work,
That longsome people-bale. Thus teach yourself
From that, and understand the best of a man.
I, wise with winters, tell this tale to you.
The wonder must be said: how mighty god,
Through his great heart, dispenses to mankind
His wisdom, land, and earl-ship, all he wields.
At times he lets the thoughtful-mood of a man
Of famous people, turn about in bliss;
He gives him in his home the joy of earth
That must be held; the sheltering lee of men,
He makes him wielder of parts of the world,

A far-flung realm he himself does not think
Will end because of his own un-wisdom.
He lives in wealth; not ill or age him thwarts,
Nor does inward sorrow darken his heart,
Nor nowhere does conflict reveal edge-hate,
But all the world revolves on his own will.
He does not know the worse—

Fitt XXV (ll. 1740-1816)

—Until a deal

Of over-thought then grows and thrives inside
 Of him while the guard sleeps, the soul's shepherd.
 That sleep is much too fast, is burden-bound,
 Is very near the bane who shoots fire from
 His arrow-bow. He then is struck within
 His breast, beneath his helm by the bitter dart.
 He knows not how to guard himself from that—
 By crooked-commands from the cursed ghost;
 That which he long has held he thinks too small,
 His angry-mind covets, he never gives
 The plated-rings with pride, and thereafter
 He forgets and forgoes his future-fate
 For a great deal of glory-gifts that god,
 The wonder-wielder, had on him bestowed.
 Then in the end-writing it happens that
 The loaned body-home fails, the fated falls;
 Another one, he who un-mournfully
 Will deal the treasure out, then grasps the earl's
 Old-wealth, he heeds no fear. Protect yourself
 From baleful wickedness, Beloved Beowulf,
 Best man, and choose the better for yourself—

Eternal ways; do not take any heed
 Of over-thought, of pride, famed champion.
 Now is the only time your might will bloom,
 For soon ailment or edge will part you from
 Your strength, or fire's fang, or flood's welling,
 Or sword's grip, or spear's flight, or dire old-age;
 Or brightness of your eyes will fail and fade;
 Soon death will overcome you, noble man.
 Thus have I wielded the Ring-Danes beneath
 The welkin for one hundred of half-years,
 And locked away the wars of many tribes
 Throughout this middle-earth, protected them
 With ashes and edges.⁸³ Because of that,
 I never knew of any foe beneath
 The sky's expanse. What an unwinding came
 Of that to me within my native-home,
 Misery after mirth, since Grendel brought
 About that old struggle, his invasion;
 I always wore much worry for that search.
 For that, thanks be to god, eternal lord,
 For that which I awaited all my life,
 That now I look upon his blood-stained head

⁸³ I.e. "With spears and swords."

With my own eyes after this ancient fight!
Go now to your own seat, enjoy the feast,
War-worthied one; a great many treasures
Shall be dealt out between us come the dawn.”
The Geat was glad at heart; at once he went
To seek his seat, so ordered the wise one.
Then after as before, was fairly made
A feast for all the courageously-famed,
The hall-sitters, on that new occasion.
The night-helm lowered, brought the dark upon
Those lordly men; all of the host arose.
The gray-haired man, the ancient Shylding wished
To seek his bed. The rightly-thinking Geat,
The famed shield-warrior, desired rest;
At once a hall-thane showed him on his way,
That man adventure-weary, foreign-born;
He saw to all that noble’s needs out of
Respect, which war-sailors had in that day.
The large hearted one rested; the hall stood high,
Was great and gold-adorned; the guest there slept
Until the black raven proclaimed, blithe-hearted,
Heaven’s winsomeness. When gliding came the bright,
The scathers rushed about, the noblemen

Were eager to fare back to their people;
The bold-of-spirit comer wanted then
To seek his ship far thence. The hardy one
Commanded Hrunting be borne to the son
Of Ecglaf, ordered him to sieze the sword,
Beloved iron; he thanked him for that loan,
He said he thought it a good battle-friend,
A battle-crafty blade, he did not blame
With words that sword's edges; that was a brave man.
And then the warriors, ready with arms,
Were journey-set; the worthy to the Danes,
The nobleman, then to the high seat went,
To where the other noble seated was;
The battle-brave hero greeted Hrothgar.

Fitt XXVI (ll. 1817-1887)

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:

“Now we sea-sailors, come from far away,

Will say that Hygelac we strive to seek.

The entertaining pleasures here were right;

You have done well by us. If I by aught

On earth may earn the more of your mind-love,

O’ lord of men, than by what I have done

Of battle-works, I will be ready at once.

If from across the flood’s expanse I hear

That border-dwellers threaten you with fear,

As to you hateful foes now and then do,

I then will bring a thousand thanes to you,

Heroes to help. I know that Hygelac,

The Geatish lord, though that he still be young,

The folk’s shepherd, that he will do for me

With words and works, so I may praise you well

And bear a spear-holt to support you then,

The help of might, to where you will need men.

If Hrethric, the bairn of a king, should seek

The Geatish court, he will find many friends;

The far-kith is sought better by he who

Is strong himself.”

In answer Hrothgar spoke:

“Into your mind the knowing lord has sent
Those spoken words; I have not heard of one
So young in life who speaks more prudently.
You are both strong of might and shrewd in mind,
One wise of spoken words. I will you tell
What think I: if it happens that a spear
Or war-grim fight, an iron or ailment,
Should take your lord, the offspring of Hrethel,
The folk’s shepherd, and still you have your life,
The Sea-Geats cannot choose a better king
Than you, than any hoard-ward of heroes,
If you will hold the realm of your kinsmen.
Now more and more your mind-heart pleases me,
Beloved Beowulf. You have brought it about
That common peace shall thrive within the folk,
The people of the Geats and the Spear-Danes,
And strife shall rest, the wicked-violence
Which they had done before. And while I wield
The wide kingdom, the shared treasures, many
Shall greet the other with goodness across
The gannet’s bath; the ring-necked ship shall bring
Both gifts and love-tokens rather than war.

I know these people will be firmly wrought,
 With fiend and with friend both, in every way,
 Un-blameworthy and in the old ways wise.”

 The lee of earls, the kinsman of Half-Dane,
 Then gave him twelve treasures within the hall;
 He from inside, along with that giving,
 Commanded those dear men to seek in health,
 To quickly come again. The Shyldings’ lord,
 The good and noble king, the best thane kissed
 And took him by his neck; the tears then fell
 From him, the gray-haired one. He had two thoughts,
 The old and very wise, about their fate,
 But one was stronger than the other one:
 They would not see each other afterwards,
 The bold ones in council. That man was so
 Beloved to him, he could not forbear
 His welling-breast, but in his heart, there fast
 In his mind-bonds, a hidden longing burned
 Within his blood for that dear man.

Beowulf,

The gold-proud battle-man, boasting his wealth,
 Thence trod the grassy-mold away from him.
 The sea-goer that rode at anchor bided

Its owner-lord. Then in that going-out,
The gift of Hrothgar often was esteemed;
Was faultless that one king in every way,
Until old age—*that which has often scathed*
So many—robbed him of the joys of might.

Fitt XXVII (ll. 1888-1962)

Then came unto the flood the throng of youth,
 Of the much bold; they bore the ring-net coats,
 The locked limb-mail. The return of the earl
 The land-ward saw, as he had done before;
 He did not greet the coming guest with harm
 From the hill top, but rode towards him instead.
 He said then that the bright-homed⁸⁴ scathers who
 Were faring to their ship would be welcome
 Amongst the Weders' men.

Then on the sand,

The spacious ocean-craft, the ring-stemmed one,
 Was laden with war-dress, with steeds and wealth;
 The ship's mast towered over Hrothgar's hoard.
 He gave a gold-bound sword to that board-ward,
 So after would he be thought more gift-worthy
 Because of that heirloom on the mead-bench.
 The ship went out with them onboard to stir
 The water deep; it gave up Danish lands.
 One of the sea-cloths, one sail, was fastened
 Along the mast with ropes; the sound-wood thundered.
 The wind across the waves did not deprive

⁸⁴ This kenning most likely refers to the warriors' armor.

The floater on the waves of its journey;
 On the sea-goer fared, the foamy-necked
 Was floating forth across the ocean waves,
 The bound-stem journeyed over the sea-stream,
 Until they of the Geats could sense the cliffs,
 The nesses known. The keel was thrust upwards,
 Driven by rushing air; it stood on land.
 The harbor-ward alert, he who before
 Had gazed upon the sea for longsome time,
 The dear men eager for, was quickly in
 The sea; the broad-bosomed ship fast he moored
 Onto the sand with anchor-bonds for fear
 The force of waves might wreck the winsome wood.
 He then commanded that the nobles' wealth,
 The arms and plated gold, be borne ashore;
 It was not far thence for those who had to seek
 The giver of gold, Hygelac Hrethling,
 Where dwelled he then at home the sea-wall near
 His comrades with. The hall was beautiful;
 The king, a lord renowned, high in his hall;
 And Hygd,⁸⁵ who was very young and wise
 Although she had few winters bided in

⁸⁵ Literally "forethought."

The locked-hold, Hareth's rightly thriving daughter;
 Was neither so in need, nor too gift-sparing
 Of treasure-hoard to the people of the Geats.
 That excellent folk-queen had weighed Thryth's⁸⁶ mind,
 Her fearful fiery deed. None of her brave,
 Beloved comrades had dared to try her wrath—
 Excepting her great lord—to stare with eyes
 On her by day, for he was sure to know
 The hand-bound slaughter-bonds; since straightaway,
 Once seized him had that hand, a sword was chosen,
 So that the patterned blade might settle it,
 And show its baleful quell. That is not such
 A queenly action by lady done—
 Although she peerless be—the peace-weaver
 Should exact life from a beloved man
 After a false offense. But the kinsman
 Of Hemming⁸⁷ hamstrung that; ale-drinkers told
 Another story, that she less had done
 Of people's bale, of wicked violence,
 Since first she had been given, gold-adorned,
 To that young champion, the dear one to

⁸⁶ Literally “power.” Her name is often rendered as Modthryth. This digression serves to contrast the traits of a “good” queen (Hygd) with those of a “bad” one (Thryth).

⁸⁷ I.e. Offa.

That noble since she had by voyage sought
 The floor of Offa over fallow flood
 By order of her father, after where,
 She on the throne of man, one famed for good,
 While living, made the most of her life's fate.
 She high-love for the lord of fighters held,
 Of all mankind, so have I heard it said,
 The best of kin between the oceans twain.
 For Offa was, with gifts and battle both,
 A spear-keen man, was widely worthy thought,
 He held his native-land with his wisdom;
 From him awoke to help the warriors
 The battle-crafty Eomer, he who was
 Hemming's kinsman, the grandson of Garmund.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Literally "spear-hand."

Fitt XXVIII (ll. 1963-1998)

The hard one with his hand-picked school of men
 Then went across the sand, the sea-plain trod,
 The wide shoreline. There the world-candle shone,
 The sun was hastening up from the south.
 They had their voyage finished and had gone
 With courage where they heard the lee of earls,
 The bane of Ongentheow,⁸⁹ good young war-king,
 Was dealing out the rings from in his stronghold.
 To Hygelac the journey of Beowulf
 Was made known quickly, that into his land
 The lee of warriors, the shield-stander,
 Had come still living, hale from battle-play,
 To go into his court. Then quickly was
 The inner hall cleared for the walking-guest,
 So did the ruler bid. He then sat him,
 Who through that fight had lived, across from him,
 Kinsman opposite kinsman, as soon as
 He greeted his liege-lord with high-loyal speak,
 With mighty words. The daughter of Haereth
 All through that wide-hall moved with the mead-cup,
 She loved those people, bore the weight of drink

⁸⁹ Literally "again-servant."

To heathen hands. Then Hygelac began
To question fairly his friend in that high-hall;
A burning thought broke through his thinking mind—
What were the voyages of the Sea-Geats:
“What happened to you on the water-way,
Beloved Beowulf, once you suddenly
Resolved to seek that fighting far away,
The war in Heorot, over the salt water?
Did you at all better that wide-known woe
For Hrothgar, for that famous king? For that
I seethed with mind-distress, with sorrow-surge,
I had no trust in my beloved man’s
Adventure; for a long time had I bid
That you were not to greet in any way
That slaughter-ghost, and that you were to let
The South-Danes themselves war with Grendel make.
I say my thanks to god I see you sound.”

[Fitt XXIX]⁹⁰ (ll. 1999-2038)

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:

“To many men that famous meeting is,

Lord Hygelac, un-secret, what a fight

The two of us, myself and Grendel, had

Within that place where he did a great number

Of sorrows to the Victory-Shyldings,

Of endless miseries. I wrought revenge

For all of that, so none of Grendel’s kind

Across the earth will have the need to boast

Of that dusk-din, they who the longest live

Of that loathed-kin ensnared within deceit.

I came there first, to that ring-hall, to greet

Hrothgar; at once the famed child of Half-Dane,

After he knew the spirit of my mind,

To me then gave the seat opposite his sons.

The host was overjoyed; I never saw

Within my life’s length under heaven’s half

A greater mead-blissed bunch of hall-sitters.

At times the famous queen, the folk’s peace-friend,

Passed through the hall, she bade her young children;

⁹⁰ The numbering in the manuscript omits the numbers for Fitts XXIX and XXX. Different editors break the intervening lines in a variety of ways in an attempt to correct the apparent oversight. The numbering used herein is that of Mitchell and Robinson.

She often gave a ring-wreath to a man
 Ere going to her seat. At times, before
 The old retainers, Hrothgar's daughter bore
 The ale-cup to the earls at the hall's end;
 I heard floor-sitters call her Freawaru;⁹¹
 She passed the jeweled cup to the heroes there.
 She, young and gold-adorned, is promised to
 The gladsome son of Froda;⁹² the Shylding's friend,
 The shepherd of the realm, has deemed that good
 And tells of that design, that with that lady
 He settle should the war, a great deal of
 That slaughter-feud. But seldom anywhere
 After a noble-fall is the bane-spear,
 For even a little while, then lowered down,
 Although the bride be good. For that therefore,
 The lord of Heathobards⁹³ may be displeased
 Along with each one of those people's thanes,
 When he, a Danish noble-child who is
 Accompanied by tested warriors,
 Onto the hall-floor with the maiden goes.
 On him the ancestor's heirloom glistens,

⁹¹ Literally "lord-watch."

⁹² Literally "wise." The son referred to is Ingeld of the Heathobards.

⁹³ Literally "war-beards."

Ring-marked and hard, the wealth of those war-born,

While they were able to their weapons wield—

[Fitt XXX]⁹⁴ (ll. 2039-2143)

—Until they their beloved comrades led,
 Along with their own lives, to that shield play
 To that ruin. An old spear-fighter speaks
 Over his beer, the one who sees the ring,
 Remembers all the spear-killings of men—
 For them his heart is grim—he sad in mind
 Begins to try the youthful champion's mind
 Through the thought of thoughts, to wake a baleful war,
 And speak these words: 'Might you, my friend, now know
 That sword, that iron dear, your father bore
 To battle, to his hindermost journey
 Beneath the grim-helm, where the Danes him slew?
 Those fearless Shyldings wielded the slaughter-field
 Once Withergyld⁹⁵ lay down, once fighters fell.
 Now, here, some son or other of those banes,
 While boasting of his treasure, strides about
 The hall-floor, brags of murder, bears the prize
 That should be yours by right.' He urges and
 Reminds at every chance with his sore words,

⁹⁴ See n89 above.

⁹⁵ Literally "hostile-reward."

Until the season comes the maiden's thane,
 Because of his father's deeds, will sleep blood-stained
 Bereft of life, after the sword blade's bite;
 The other one escapes thence still alive,
 He surely knows the land. Then on both sides
 The sworn oath of the earls will broken be,
 Once slaughter-strife wells up inside Ingeld,
 And once becomes his wife-love cooler after
 The boiling cares. Therefore, I do not think
 Those battle-born are loyal, that their part
 Of noble-peace with Danes is genuine,
 That they are fixed in friendship. Speak I shall
 Of Grendel more, so that you well may know,
 Giver of wealth, how afterwards had ended
 The hand-rush of heroes when heaven's gem
 Had glided over ground, the irate ghost,
 Both dire and evening-grim, then came to seek
 Us out where sound we guarded had the hall.
 That war was fatal there for Hondscio,⁹⁶
 The life-bale for the doomed; he lay down first,
 That girded champion; then Grendel turned

⁹⁶ Literally "hand-shoe" or "glove." While Beowulf recounts Grendel's attack (see Fitt XI), he names the warrior killed in the initial assault.

Into the mouth-bane of that famed young thane:
 He swallowed that beloved man's body whole.
 Never before that time because of that,
 The bloody-toothed bane would, intent on bale,
 Go idle-handed out of that gold-hall,
 But known for might, he made a try at mine,
 He grabbed with ready-hand. A glove⁹⁷ was hung,
 Both large and strange, was fixed with skillful bonds;
 It cleverly was wrought with a devil's craft
 And fell of drake. That dread deed-doer wished
 To put me, yet un-sinning, there inside,
 One of many; it was not to be so
 As soon as I in ire had stood upright.
 Too long it is to tell how I repaid
 That hand-loan to the people-scather for
 Each one of those evils; my king, there did
 I give worth to your people with my works.
 He ran away, enjoyed his winsome-life
 A little while; and yet his stronger hand
 Had guarded from inside Heorot his swath,
 He, hated, went from there; then sad in mind,

⁹⁷ This "glove" is clearly some sort of pouch. Scholars debate the significance of the glove's inclusion in Beowulf's retelling, it having been omitted from the original depiction of the battle with Grendel.

He fell unto mere-ground. The Shyldings' friend
Repaid me for that slaughter-rush with much
Gold-plated wealth, with many treasured things,
Once morning came and we had sat to feast.
There then was tale and glee. The ancient Shylding
Having learned much, then told of far-off times;
At times the battle-brave would touch the harp,
The winsomeness of that delightful wood,
At times a song was sung, both sooth and sad,
At times the openhearted king would tell
A story strange in keeping with rightness.
At times the ancient battle-warrior,
In old age bound, began to bewail youth,
The fighting-strength; his breast within welled up
When, wise with winters, he remembered much.
So there within we took delight all day,
Until the second night had come to men.
Then afterwards was Grendel's mother fast
Prepared for grief-revenge; the sorrowful
Then ventured forth, for death had seized her son,
The Weders' battle-hate. That woman harsh
Then wrought her vengeance for her bairn, a man
She boldly killed; in there was Aeschere's life

Then going-out, the life of that wiseman.
Neither they nor the people of the Danes
Could burn the death-weary with fire-brand
When morning came, nor lay that man beloved
Into the flame; she bore his body thence
In fiendish arms, beneath the mountain-stream.
For Hrothgar that was the harshest of pains
Of those which long befell the people's first.
The wild-mind king then begged me by your life,
That in that throng of waves, I do earl-ship,
That venture I my life, that I perform
A famous deed; he promised meed to me.
I found the grim and horrible ground-herd
Of surging water that is widely known;
There for a while, a fight was shared by us,
The water gushed with gore, and off I carved
The head of Grendel's mother in that hall
With a mighty-edged sword; I bore away
Her life un-softly thence. I was not yet
Then fated, afterwards the lee of earls,
The son of Half-Dane, to me gave much wealth.

Fitt XXXI (ll. 2144-2220)

So did the people's king by custom live.
 I have not given any of that prize,
 That mighty meed, away since Half-Dane's son
 Had given me that wealth in self-judgment;⁹⁸
 I bring it now to you, O noble-king,
 To bestow my esteem, for all kindness
 Belongs to you; I few head-kinsman have
 Except you, Hygelac."

He ordered those

Be borne inside, the boar-like head-banner,
 The high war-helm, the hoary mail-armor,
 The ready war-sword; once he told their tale:
 "When Hrothgar gave this battle-dress to me,
 With certain words he ordered that I tell
 You first about this boon; he said then that
 King Heorogar,⁹⁹ the Shyldings' lord, had it
 For a long while; and yet he would not give
 The breast-coat to his son, brave Heoroward,¹⁰⁰
 Although he had been trustworthy to him.
 Use them all well."

⁹⁸ See n45.

⁹⁹ Eldest son of Half-Dane, whom Hrothgar succeeded to the throne.

¹⁰⁰ Literally "sword-ward."

I have heard it said that
 Four matched swift steeds with apple-fallow coats
 Followed behind those bejeweled arms; he made
 A gift to him of those horses and hoards.
So shall a kinsman do, he shall not braid
Others a wicked-net with secret-craft,
Shall not prepare the death of a hand-friend.
 To Hygelac, his nephew was most true
 In hard conflicts, and each the other to,
 Mindful of joys. I heard he gave Hygd
 The neck-ring, jewel-like wonder-ornament,
 That Wealhtheow, the daughter of a king,
 Had given him, and also horses three,
 Slender and saddle-bright; her breast was honored
 Since that ring-take. The bairn of Ecgtheow
 Thus showed his boldness, man well-known for war,
 For noble deeds: he acted with honor.
 While drunk, he never slew his hearth-comrades,
 His heart was never brutal towards any:
 He, battle-fierce, held back that gift immense
 That god had granted him, the greatest strength
 Of all mankind. He had been long maligned
 Before, so that the Geatish bairns would tell

No good of him, nor would the lord of hosts
 Then make him much-worthy on the mead-bench;
 They thought that he was slack, a lord un-strong.
 Every one of the troubles was reversed
 For the honor-wealthy man. The lee of earls,
 The battle-famous king, then ordered that
 The heirloom of Hrethel, adorned with gold,
 Be brought inside; at that time, there was not
 A better bejeweled treasure in sword-shape
 Amongst the Geats; he laid that on the lap
 Of Beowulf and gave him seven thousand,¹⁰¹
 A building, and lord's stool. For both of them
 Together was the kin-land, yard, home-right,
 Within the nation-shape; a wider realm
 Went to the other man, he who was better.

¹⁰¹ The MS omits what Hygelac gives that numbers seven thousand; however, most translators and editors accept that Beowulf's lord gives him seven thousand hides of land wherein a hide equals a plot that could support a single family. A hide varied from region to region.

[Part II: Beowulf Cyning]¹⁰²

It after happened that—in later days
 Of battle-crash, when Hygelac lay dead
 And battle-swords beneath the covered shield
 Became the bane of Heardred,¹⁰³ when the hard
 War-fierce, the Battle-Shyldings, had him sought
 Within the triumph-land, assaulted had
 With violence the nephew of Hereric—¹⁰⁴
 The broad kingdom then passed to Beowulf,
 Into his hand; he held it properly
 For fifty winters—that was a wise king,
 Old native-land guardian—until a drake¹⁰⁵
 Began to rule in the dark nights; he who
 In his high house, his steep stone-barrow, watched
 Over the hoard; the path lay underneath,
 Unknown to men. Through there, someone of men
 Had gone inside, he who out of his need
 Had seized by hand a jeweled cup from within
 The heathen hoard. The drake did not conceal,
 Though he had been asleep, had been betrayed

¹⁰² “King.”

¹⁰³ Literally “hard-counsel.”

¹⁰⁴ Literally “Army-rule.”

¹⁰⁵ Parts of the following twenty-two lines of the MS are severely damaged; various editors either reconstructed or conjectured much of what follows.

By the thief's craft; the people, nearby-folk

Of men found out he was swollen with rage.

Fitt XXXII (ll. 2221-2311)

Not under his own wield, for his own will,
 Did he who sorely scathed it trick the wurm
 Out of his hoard, but out of threatened-need
 That certain thief had fled the hateful swings
 Of heroes' children, lacking his own home,
 And went inside of there. The sin-sore man
 Soon found a fearsome terror stood in there
 With the guest; yet the shape
 shaped
¹⁰⁶ when fear had poured over him
 He seized a cup bejeweled. There were many
 Such ancient treasures in that earthen hall,
 For one of men, with thankful-thinking there,
 In former days, had hidden that dear wealth,
 All of the heirlooms of a noble race.
 In earlier times, death had seized them all,
 And yet one of the people's noble host,
 He who had moved about the longest there,
 The ward who mourned his friends, had hoped to hold
 That off, so that he would have been allowed
 To use the old-treasure a little while.

¹⁰⁶ Little remains of the preceding two-and-a-half manuscript lines.

A ready barrow waited on a field
 Near waves of water, new beside the ness,
 Was fixed with complex-craft. The ring shepherd
 Had borne within the portion hoard-worthy
 Of earl-treasure, of plated gold, and then
 He spoke a few words: "Hold you now, O earth,
 Now that heroes may not, this wealth of earls!"
 Behold! Before from within you the good
 Have gotten it. War-death, that fierce life-bale,
 Destroyed each of my people's fiery deeds,¹⁰⁷
 Of those who gave up this¹⁰⁸ and saw hall-bliss.
 I now have none who bear the sword or cup,
 Dear drinking-vat: the host has gone elsewhere.
 The hardy helm with golden plate shall fall;
 The polisher will sleep, the one who should
 Burnish the war-grim mask; the army-coat,
 Which bided within battle iron's bite
 Over the breaking boards, likewise shall rot
 Like its hero; the ring-mail cannot with
 The fighters fare on even half so far
 As with the battle-first. And there is not

¹⁰⁷ Most editors emend MS *fyrena* to *fyra* ("man"). However, battle having destroyed the wicked acts of the speaker's people is acceptable, for if war kills an individual, it also kills all that individual's actions.

¹⁰⁸ Most editors insert *lif* ("life") into the MS. However, the "this" is the treasure.

The winsome harp, the mirth of the glee-wood,
 Nor does a good hawk fly throughout the hall,
 Nor does a swift steed beat the stronghold's yard.
 A baleful quell has sent away many
 Of my life-kin."

Thus did the mournful-mind
 Bemoan his woes, the one about them all,
 Un-blithe he moved about both day and night,
 Until the surge of death ran through his heart.

The old dusk-scather found the winsome hoard
 Stood open, he who burning barrows sought;
 The naked brutal-drake then flies at night
 Encased in fire; land-dwellers fear him much.
 He shall seek out the hoard within the earth;
 There he, the old and wise with winters, guards
 The heathen gold—he is no better for it.
 So did the people-scather hold on earth
 A certain mighty-crafted treasure-house
 For three hundred winters, until one man
 Had angered him in mind; to his liege lord
 He bore the plated cup, he bade his lord
 For a peace pact. When had been razed the hoard,
 The trove of rings borne off, he granted the boon

Unto the wretched man. The lord beheld
 The ancient work of men for the first time.
 But then the wyrm awoke; strife was renewed.
 He sniffed about the stone; his stark-heart found
 The footprint of his fiend; he had stepped forth
 With cunning craft too close to the drake's head.
Thus easily the un-fated, the one
Who holds the wielder's grace, may pass through woe
And wracksome wanderings.

The hoard-ward sought
 About the ground, he wished to find that man,
 He who had sorely dealt with him in sleep;
 The hot and fierce-minded one often went
 Around the outside of the hollow cave,
 There was not any man within that waste;
 Yet he rejoiced in war, in battle-work,
 At times about the barrow would he move,
 He sought the cup bejeweled. He soon found out
 That someone of men had upset his gold,
 His high-treasure. Then bided the hoard-ward
 Sorrowfully until the evening came;
 For then the barrow's shepherd swelled with rage,
 The loathed would pay back that dear drinking-cup

With fire; when day was hastened, to the wrym's
Delight, he would no longer bide inside
The wall, but fared with flame, rushed out with fire.
The first was terrible for men on land,
So for their treasure-give straightaway
It was then ended with sorrowfulness.

Fitt XXXIII (ll. 2312-2390)

That guest began to spew forth flames, to burn
The dwellings bright; the burning gleam arose
In rage against those men. He would not leave,
That loathed sky-flyer, any living there.
The war of the great wyrm was widely seen,
The violence of that afflicting foe,
Both far and wide, and how the Geatish men
That battle-scather hated and hindered;
Then afterwards he shot back towards his hoard,
His hidden lordly-hall, before daybreak.
He had enveloped land-wares with his flame,
With bale and brand, he trusted to his barrow,
His war and wall: his faith had lied to him.
That terror was made known to Beowulf, fast
In sooth, that his own home, the best of buildings,
The gift-stool of the Geats, had melted away
Within that burning-surge. For that good man,
That was his heart's regret, a great mind-sore;
The wise one thought that bitterly he had
Enraged the wielder, everlasting lord,
Had broken an old right. His breast welled up
With dark thoughts within—such was not his way.

The flame-drake had ground down those men's fastness,
That island from without, that earthen-ward,
With fire; the battle-king, the Weders' lord,
Then meant to wreak revenge on him for that.
The lee of warriors, the lord of lords,
Then ordered that a splendid battle-shield,
All of iron, was to be wrought for him;
He knew well that the forest's wood would be
No help to him, linden against that flame.
The ancient-good lord had to bide the end
Of fleeting-days, the world of life, the wyrm
Though it a long time had its hoard-wealth held.
The lord of rings hated that he should seek
That far-flyer with troops, with his great host;
He did not of that fight for himself dread,
He thought nothing of the war of the wyrm,
Its vigor and valor, for lived he had
Through daring narrows of war-violence,
Of battle-crashes, many times before,
Since when that victory-blessed man had cleansed
The hall of Hrothgar, had in battle crushed
The kinswoman of Grendel, loathsome race.
Nor was the least of his hand-meetings where

A man had slain his Hygelac, that time
 The Geatish king, the friend of all his folk,
 The offspring of Hrethel, had died sword-drunk,
 Beaten with blades, within the rush of war
 Inside Friesland. Thence Beowulf came by craft;
 He made use of the ocean's sound; he held
 The battle-gear of thirty earls within
 His arms enclosed when went he towards the sea.
 The Hetware¹⁰⁹ had no good cause at all
 To boast about that walking-war in which
 They bore before themselves their linden-shields
 Against him. Afterwards, just a few came
 Away from that fierce fighter seeking his home.
 The son of Ecgtheow, alone and forlorn,
 Across the sea's expanse then swam back to
 His people; there Hygd presented him
 A hoard and realm, the rings and noble seat;
 She did not trust her child to know the way
 To hold the homeland throne from foreign foes
 Since Hygelac was dead. And yet could not
 The wretched ones within that noble find
 At all that wished he to be Heardred's lord,

¹⁰⁹ Literally "hat-people." Allies of the Frisians.

Or that he wanted to choose that kin-dom;
 And yet he held him up within the folk
 With friendly lore, with boons and benefits,
 Until he older had become: he wielded
 The Weder-Geats. The wracked kinsmen, the sons
 Of Ohthere,¹¹⁰ then sought him overseas;
 They had rebelled against the Shylfings' helm,¹¹¹
 That best of all sea-kings of those who give
 Out treasure in Sweden, a famous lord.
 That proved to be his mark;¹¹² in return for
 That food, he cast lots with a mortal-wound,
 The swing of sword against Hygelac's son,
 And afterwards the bairn of Ongentheow
 Had sought his home, since Heardred then lay dead,
 He then let Beowulf hold the lordly seat,
 Left him to wield the Geats: that was a good king!

¹¹⁰ Literally "pursuit-army."

¹¹¹ Upon seizing the throne after his brother Ohthere's death, Onela has driven out his nephews Eanmund and Eadgils, both of whom seek refuge with the Geats. Refer to *A History of the Swedish Wars In Beowulf* for a full description of these events.

¹¹² Referring to Heardred. By taking in Ohthere's exiled sons, Heardred brings about war with the Swedes and his own death.

Fitt XXXIV (ll. 2391-2459)

In later days, he had remembered to
 Repay that noble-fall, befriended had
 The wretched Eadgils,¹¹³ supported the son
 Of Ohthere within his country's folk,
 With warriors and weapons, from across
 The sea's expanse; he¹¹⁴ later wreaked revenge
 With journeys cold and careworn: stole away
 The king's life.¹¹⁵ Thus the son of Ecgtheow
 Had lived through each struggle, each slaughter cruel,
 Each daring work, until the one day that
 He had to war against the wyrm. Thus one
 Of twelve,¹¹⁶ swollen with rage, the Geatish lord,
 Then went to see the drake. He had learned whence
 The feud arose, the heroes' baleful strife;
 The famous treasure-vat had come unto
 His bosom through the spy's own hand. He was,
 Within that company, the thirteenth man;
 The servant, sad-in-mind, had brought about
 That battle's beginnings, the wretched one
 Then had to lead them thence into that land.

¹¹³ Literally "wealth-hostage."

¹¹⁴ Eadgils.

¹¹⁵ Onela.

¹¹⁶ Beowulf seeks the dragon with eleven of his countrymen (the twelve) and the thief.

He went against his will to the place where
He knew a certain earthen-hall, a cave
Beneath the ground, close to the surging sea,
The war of waves; inside, the cave was full
Of crafted works and wires. That ward un-kind,
That ready battle-bold, the old one under
The earth, his golden treasure held. That was
No easy bargain for any man to get.
The battle-hardened king sat on the ness,
The Geats' gold-friend then bid his hearth-comrades
Be hale. Within him was a saddened heart,
Restless and slaughter-set; unknowingly
Near was his fate; it came to greet the old one,
To seek the hoard within his soul, to sever
Asunder life from body; It was not
For long the noble's life was wound in flesh.

Then Beowulf spoke, the bairn of Ecgtheow:

"In youth I lived through many a war-rush,
A time of strife; I bear that all in mind.
When I was seven-winters old the lord
Of jewels, the lord-friend of the folk, had taken
Me from my father; Hrethel king then had
And held me, gave me treasure and a feast,

He bore friendship in mind. I was no more
 Loathsome to him, that fighter in his fortress,
 Than any of his children: Herebeald,¹¹⁷
 And Heathcyn,¹¹⁸ or my beloved Hygelac.
 Unfittingly a murder-bed was made
 For the eldest son by a kinsman's deeds,
 Since Heathcyn had struck down his friend and lord,
 Had shot him with an arrow from his horn-bow;
 He missed his mark and shot his own kinsman,
 One brother had shot dead the other with
 A bloody spear. That was a worthless war,
 A sinful fiery deed, a mind-worry
 Within the breast; in spite of all of that,
 The un-avenged man had to yield his life.
*It thus is mournful for the ancient man
 To have to bide that his young son upon
 The gallows ride—then he recite a tale,
 A sorry song, when hangs his son, a joy
 For the raven, and help him he cannot,
 The old and very wise can nothing do.
 It always is remembered each morning,*

¹¹⁷ Literally “army-bold.”

¹¹⁸ Literally “war-kin.”

*That journey elsewhere of his successor;
He does not care to bide another one,
A guardian of heritage, within
The keep when has the first one found his deeds
Through death's distress. The care-sore one, within
His son's chamber, a wasted wine-hall sees,
A windy rest bereft of any bliss.
The riders sleep, the heroes in darkness;
There is no music of the harp, no joy
Within the yards, such as there once had been."*

Fitt XXXV (ll. 2460-2601)

*“He goes to bed, he sings a sorrow-lay,
This one about that one; he thinks the fields
And homesteads all too great.*

The Weder's helm

Thus wore the welling soreness of his heart
For Herebeald, he could not make the feud
With his life-bane in any way better,
And yet he could not hate that battle-man
For loathsome deeds though to him he was not dear.
Then he to whom that soreness had befallen,
Gave up men's bliss along with that sorrow;
He chose the light of god; to his offspring
He left—as wealthy men do—land and towns,
When life he left.

Then there was sin and strife

Between the Swedes and Geats, a common crime,
A hard host-war, across the water wide
Once Hrethel died, up until the offspring
Of Ongentheow were daring warriors,
They wished to hold no peace across the sea,

But about Hreosnabeorh¹¹⁹ they often held
 A horrid wicked-harvest. For those feuds
 And fiery deeds, my friends and kinsmen wrought
 Their vengeance—so it has been made well known—
 Although the other bought that with his life,
 A hard bargain: for Heathcyn, Geatish lord,
 That battle was his fall. I have heard that
 In the morning one kinsman then avenged
 The other with blade-edges for his bane,
 When Ongentheow attacked Eofor. Then split
 The battle-helm, the ancient Shylfing fell
 Sword-pale; his hand remembered many feuds,
 And thus it did not withhold that life-swing.
 I bought those treasures that he gave to me
 In war—with a light sword, as granted was
 To me; he gave me land, a winsome home.
 It was no want of his that he need seek
 Among the Gifthas, or among the Spear-Danes,
 Or within Sweden a worse warrior
 To buy with wealth. On foot I always would
 Before him go, alone on point, and so
 I always shall make war for as long as

¹¹⁹ Literally “ruin-hill.”

This sword endures, this which has often lasted
 For me before and after, from when I,
 Before the noble host, became the hand-bane
 Of Daeghrefn,¹²⁰ the Hugas' champion;
 He not at all could bring that treasured armor,
 That breast-glory, back to the Frisian king,
 But in that fight the banner's shepherd fell,
 The noble in his strength; my edge was not
 His bane: his surging heart, his bone-house, broke
 Within my battle-grasp. Now edge of blade,
 My hand and hardy sword, shall war over
 The hoard."

Then Beowulf spoke his last,
 He spoke his final time with boasting-words:
 "I braved many a battle in my youth,
 Yet I, the wise guardian of the folk,
 Will seek the feud, will do that famous deed,
 If that wicked scather seeks me outside
 His earthen-hall."

He spoke to all his men,
 The brave helm-bearers, his own dear comrades,
 A final time:

¹²⁰ Literally "day-raven."

“I would not bear my sword,
This weapon, to the wurm, if knew I how
I otherwise might grapple with that wretch
After my boast, as once I did with Grendel.
But here expect I heat of battle-fire,
Of violence and hate; therefore on me
I will have shield and coat. I will not flee
The length of a foot from the barrow’s ward,
But for us two, it shall be at that wall
As destiny decides, fate of each man.
I in my mind am firm: I will forego,
Against that battle-flyer, boastful words.
Bide on the barrow, warded by your coats,
As armored men, and learn which of the two
Of us may bear his wound the better after
The slaughter-rush. This is not your venture,
Neither is this the measure of a man
To deal out mighty things against that wretch,
To do earl-ship, except for me alone.
I with my courage shall gain gold or war,
That dangerous life bale, will seize your lord.”

The daring fighter rose beside his shield;
Then hard beneath his helm, he bore his mail

Beneath the stone-cliffs, trusted to the strength
Of one man—*such is not the coward's course.*
He who had lived through a great many wars
And battle-crashes when the footmen clashed,
The good one with the best of all men's traits,
Then saw bow-shaped stones standing near the wall
And a stream breaking forth from the barrow.
That surging-stream was hot with battle-fires;
He was unable to go near the hoard
For any length of time and stay un-burnt,
Could not endure the deep for flame of drake.
The Weder-Geats' leader, swollen with rage,
Then let a word fare out from in his breast;
The stark-hearted one stormed; his voice in went,
The war-bright roared beneath the hoary stone.
The hate was stirred; the hoard-ward heard man's speech,
And there was no more time to seek friendship;
Then first to come forth was that demon's breath,
Hot battle-sweat, out from within the stone.
The earth then dinned. The man in the barrow,
The Geatish lord, then swung his shield to face
That terror-guest; The ring-coiled one's heart then
Was set to seek that fight. The good war-king

Drew forth his sword, that aged heirloom with edges
Un-dulled; for each one there the terror of
Their baleful thoughts was from the other one.
He stood strong-spirited, the friends' bold lord,
Against his tower-shield when coiled that wyrm
Together fast; he bided in his armor.
He came then burning, slithering while coiled;
He rushed towards his reward. The shield kept well
The life and body of the famous king
A shorter time than what his mind had sought,
There at that moment was the first time that
He had to wield with fate not granting him
Glory in war. The Geat's lord quickly drew
His hand upwards, he struck the horror-stained
One with his splendid heirloom so the edge
Was weakened; brightness bit into the bone
Less strongly than the people-king had wished,
Pressed hard with cares. Then was the barrow's ward
In a fierce mood after that battle-swing;
He hurled out slaughter-fire; the battle-gleam
Sprang widely forth. The gold-friend of the Geats
Did not boast of triumphant victory;
His war-blade failed, his sword within distress,

As so that ancient iron should not have done.
It was no easy undertaking for
The famous son of Ecgtheow to be
Compelled to give up ground against his will
And dwell then someplace else—*so shall each man*
Let go of these loaned-days. It was not long
Until those wretches met each other again.
The hoard-ward took heart—breast surging with breath—
One time anew; he had endured the narrows,
Been seized by fire, he who before had wielded
The folk. His hand-chosen comrades, those bairns
Of nobles, never stood about him in
A troop for war-virtue, instead they fled
Into the holt, and there they saved their lives.
The spirit surged with sorrow inside one;
No wight may ever put aside kinship
In those who think well.

Fitt XXXVI (ll. 2602-2693)

His name was Wiglaf,¹²¹

Beloved shield-warrior, the son of Weohstan,¹²²

A Shylfing lord, kinsman of Aelfhere;¹²³

He saw his liege-lord suffering from heat

Beneath his war-grim mask. He bore in mind

The honor that he gave to him before,

The wealthy homestead of the Waegmundings,¹²⁴

Every folk-right, as had his father owned.

He then could not hold back: his hand his shield

Of yellow linden grasped, his ancient sword,

He drew forth which was known amongst the men

as Eanmund's,¹²⁵ son of Ohthere, heirloom.

For that Weohstan became the battle-bane

To that long friendless exile with sword-edge,

And to his kinsman bore a burnished helm,

A ring-mail coat, a giant-ish old-sword;

To him had Onela given his kinsman's

War-wear, the ready battle-gear. He¹²⁶ did

Not speak about the feud, though he¹²⁷ had killed

¹²¹ Literally "war-heirloom."

¹²² Literally "idol-stone."

¹²³ Literally "elf-army."

¹²⁴ Literally "sea-hands."

¹²⁵ Literally "wealth-hand."

¹²⁶ Onela.

His brother's bairn. He held that battle-gear,
 That blade and coat, for many a half-year,
 Until his son could do earl-ship as had
 His forefather; he gave him then among
 The Geats war-wearings countless of all sorts
 When life he left, the wise on his way forth.
 That was the first adventure for the young
 Champion, that he should the war-rush face
 With his free-lord. His spirit faltered not,
 Nor did his mighty heirloom weaken in war;
 The wyrm would find that out, once they had met
 Together. Wiglaf spoke, with saddened heart,
 He many right words said unto his friends:

"I bear in mind that time we took of mead,
 When vowed we had in the beer-hall our lord,
 Who gave these rings to us, we would repay
 Him for the battle-gear—if such a need
 Were to arise—For helms and hardy swords.
 Therefore by his own will he chose us from
 Amongst his army for this undertaking;
 He held us worthy of resplendent deeds—
 And gave me all this wealth—because he deemed

¹²⁷ Weohstan.

Us good spear-warriors, brave helm-bearers,
Although our lord, the folk's shepherd, had thought
To do this courage-work alone because
He has performed the most illustrious,
Most daring, deeds amongst all men. The day
Has come that our liege-lord has need of might,
Good warriors; let us now go to him
And help our battle-first while there is heat,
Is grim flame-fear. For in me god has seen
That to me it is much more pleasing that
The flame embrace my body-home along
With my gold-giver. Nor does it seem right
That bear we shields back to our native-yard,
Unless we first may fell the foe, may shield
The life of the Weder's king. I know full well
That for his old-works it be no reward
If he alone among the Geatish host
Should suffer that sorrow, should sink in strife;
Therefore the sword and helm, the ring-mail coat
And battle-shroud, shall be for both of us.”
He made his way then through the slaughter-reek;
He bore his battle-helm to help his lord,
He then a few words said:

“Beloved Beowulf,

Avail all well, as in your youth of yore
 You said that in your life you would not let
 Your glory wane. With deeds, with all your might,
 O brave firm-minded nobleman, you now
 Must shield your life: I fully will help you.”
 After those words the wurm, the wicked-guest,
 Then came irate a second time within
 A flood of shining fire to seek his foe,
 The loathsome man; he burned with waves of flames,
 His shield-board burned down to its boss, his coat
 Was not able to help the young spearman,
 And yet the young man went courageously
 Beneath his kinsman’s shield after his own
 Was ground to dust by fire. The war-king yet
 Remembered famous deeds, he struck then with
 His mighty-strength, his battle-blade, so that
 It, fiercely driven, stuck within the head;
 Then Naegling¹²⁸ burst apart; then Beowulf’s sword,
 Ancient and silver, failed in that conflict.
 It was not granted to him that the edges

¹²⁸ Possibly “nailing.” Naegling’s destruction continues the trend of weaponry—particularly named weaponry—*failing* in combat.

Of irons could him help at war; too strong
The hand was for him whose swings overworked,
So have I heard, all double-edged swords when
He bore the wound-hard weapon into war;
That not at all was for his betterment.
That people-scather, fearsome fire-drake,
Mindful of feuds, then rushed on that brave man
A third time when he was then yielded room;
Then hot and battle-grim he fanged his neck
With bitter-bones;¹²⁹ he was with soul-blood soaked,
That sweat welled up in waves.

¹²⁹ I.e. The drake's teeth.

Fitt XXXVII (ll. 2694-2751)

And I have heard that in the people's king's
Distress, the nobleman beside him showed
His courage, craft, and keenness, as it was
Inborn in him. He did not heed the head
Because the hand of that high-minded man
Had burned when helped he had his kinsman there;
For that the man in battle-armor struck
The brutal guest a little lower down,
So that the sword, bejeweled and plated, dove
Inside of it, so that the fire began
After to melt away. The king himself
Still wielded wits, he drew his slaughter-knife,
Both battle-sharp and bitter, that he wore
Upon his coat; the Weders' helm cut through
The middle of the wyrm. They felled the fiend—
Their courage had the end of its life wreaked—
And both those noble-kin had brought him down.
As such a man must be, a thane at need.
Yet for that lord, that was the final time
Of victory was done by his own deeds,
His own world-works, the wound that the earth-drake
Had wrought on him began to burn and swell;

He straightaway within his bosom found
 An adder-venom¹³⁰ welled up within him
 With baleful violence. The nobleman,
 The one with wise thoughts went to sit down in
 A seat beside the wall; he saw the work
 Of giants, how the bow-shaped standing stones
 And firm pillars held up that everlasting
 Earth-house from within. With his hand the thane,
 Immeasurably good, with water laved
 The sword-gored famous king, his friend and lord,
 Who sated was with war, unfastened his helm.

Then Beowulf spoke—he spoke despite his hurts,
 His death-dire wound; he knew that passed he had
 Through his daytime, this wide earth's winsomeness,
 When all his numbered days had fled, and that
 His death was then immeasurably near—
 “Now would I give my son this battle-gear,
 If there were granted to me any ward
 Of birthright who of my own body was.
 I have these people fifty winters held;
 There was no border-dwelling folk-king who
 Had dared to greet me with his battle-friends,

¹³⁰ Beowulf has been poisoned.

Had dared to with that terror threaten me.
I have my shaped-time bided in his yard,
I held mine well, I sought no cunning-wars,
Nor did I swear many an oath un-right.
Now, sick with life-wounds, I may have the joy
Of all of that because the wielder of
Mankind will have no need to charge me with
The baleful murder of my kinsman when
My life passes away from my body.
Now go in haste to see the hoard beneath
This hoary stone, beloved Wiglaf, for
The wyrm lies dead, it sorely wounded sleeps,
Bereaved of its treasure. Be now in haste,
So know I ancient-wealth, fine golden goods,
So see I well divine cut-gems, so that
After such treasure-bliss, I may let go
More softly both my life and nation-ship,
That which I have long held.”

Fitt XXXVIII (ll. 2752-2820)

Then straightaway—

So have I heard—after those words of speech,
 The son of Wihstan heard his wounded lord,
 The war-sick one; he bore the ring-net coat,
 The braided battle-shirt, beneath the roof
 Of that barrow. When by the seat had gone
 The proud young thane, he saw triumphant glory:
 Many a treasured jewel; gold glittering
 Upon the ground; things wondrous on the wall;
 And of the wrym, that old dusk flyer's den;
 Some cups, the vats of former men, that stood
 Without a polisher, a ruined-wealth.
 There many helms were old and rust-eaten,
 Many arm-rings were twisted skillfully.
With ease a treasure, gold upon the ground,
May overhie each member of mankind:
Let him who will hide it.

He likewise saw

A golden standard, greatest of hand-wonders,
 Was locked with limb-craft, hanging high above
 The hoard; from that banner a gleam arose
 So that he could perceive the earthen ground,

Could look over those works. There was no sign
Of wrym because the edge had taken him.
I have so heard that one man in the hill
Then robbed that hoard, that ancient giant-work,
He loaded on his bosom cups and dishes
For self-judgment; and he the standard took,
The brightest of beacons. The old lord's blade—
Of iron was its edge—already scathed
Him who had of those treasures been, for a
Long while, the ruling hand, he who had bore
His fearsome fire hot before the hoard,
Had welled up violently at middle-night,
Until he died for murder. In haste was
The messenger, eager to journey back,
Impelled by treasure; then a burning thought
Upon him broke, whether he, spirit-bold,
Would meet the strength-sick Weders' king alive
Within that place where ere he had him left.
He with those treasures found the famous king,
His lord, bloodied and at the end of life;
He then began on him to sprinkle water
Until a word's point broke through his breast-hoard.

Then Beowulf spoke,¹³¹ the old unto the youth—
 He saw the gold: “I thank with words the lord,
 The honor-king, the everlasting ruler,
 For all these treasures on which I here gaze,
 For such of those I, for my people, had
 Been able to attain ere my death-day.
 Now that I have this hoard of treasures bought
 With my old, wise life’s end, they will perform
 The peoples’ need; I can no longer stay.
 The battle-famed shall bid a mound be wrought,
 The brightness after pyre, on the sea’s cape;
 And stand it shall there high atop Whale-Ness
 In order to memorialize my people,
 So afterwards sea-sailors, those who drive
 A vessel far across the floods’ dark mists,
 May call it ‘Beowulf’s Barrow.’”

Then he gave
 A golden ring to him from ‘round his neck,
 The daring-minded lord then gave his thane,
 His young spear-warrior, a gold-wrought helm,
 A ring, and chain-mail coat; he ordered that
 He use them well: “You are the final heir

¹³¹ Sense and meter indicates that a half-line or more has been omitted.

Of all our kin, the Waegmundings. Fate swept
Away all my kinsmen, my earls in strength,
To their outcome; I after them must go.”
That was the final word of that old one,
His breast-thoughts ere he chose the funeral fire,
The hot flame-surge; yet out his soul then went
To seek the judgment of the sooth-fast ones.

Fitt XXXIX (ll. 2821-2891)

It for the young man went then painfully,
That he on earth had seen his most beloved
Bear himself pitiably at his life's end.
The horrific earth-drake lay likewise dead,
Bereaved of life, oppressed by baleful work.
The crooked-bowed wurm could no longer wield
Ring-hoards, because the edges of iron,
The hard war-shard, the heirloom of hammers,
Had carried him away, so that, stilled by
His wounds, the wide-flyer crashed to the ground
Near his hoard-house. He never went again
To fly about the sky at middle-night
While gloating of his treasure trove,
He never showed again his peerless form,
But to the earth he had then fallen for
The handiwork of that war-first. Indeed,
Within that land few men possessing might
Have thrived in that, so have I heard it said,
Though bold he be in every deed within
That rush against the scathing adder's breath,
Or in that plundering of the ring-hall
By his own hands, if there he were to find

The ward awake who dwelt in that barrow.
A good deal of that noble treasure trove
Was paid for by the death of Beowulf;
Each to the end of his loaned life had fared.
It was not long before the battle-late,
The ten weak trust-betrayers together,
Gave up the holt. They dared not fight before
With javelins in their liege-lord's great need,
But shamed they bore their shields and battle-dress
To where the ancient warrior lay dead.
They upon Wiglaf gazed; he-weary-sat,
That foot-champion, close by his lord's shoulder,
Had tried with water him to wake, but it
Availed him not at all. Though wished he it
Full well, he could not hold on earth the life
Within that foremost spear, nor anything
For that folk-wielder change; for god's decree
Would every man's deeds guide, as it yet does.
Then was a grim answer easy to get
From that young man for he who ere let go
His courage. Wiglaf spoke, the son of Weohstan,
The man heart-sore, he looked to those unloved:
"Behold, he who will speak the sooth may say

Your lord, he who to you those treasures gave,
That warlike gear in which you there now stand,
When on the ale-bench he often gave
The hall-sitters, the lord unto his thanes,
Both helm and mail, which was the most splendid
He might find anywhere both far and near,
That wrothfully he had it thrown away
That battle-wear, when to him war befell.
That folk-king had no need to boast about
His war-comrades. Yet to him granted god,
The wielder of triumphs, that he, alone
With edge of sword, wreak vengeance for himself
When want of courage was with him. In war,
I little life-support could to him give;
I nevertheless thus began to help
My kinsman past the limit of my strength.
That spirit-enemy was weaker once
I with my sword had struck; the fire then surged
Less fiercely from its head. About the lord,
Too few defenders thronged when hardship came.
Now treasure-take and sword-gift, all the joys
Of native-land, that bliss shall fail your kind;
Each man of your kindred must go deprived

Of land-rights when the nobles from afar
Learn of your flight, your deed inglorious.
For each earl, death is better than shamed-life.”

Fitt XL (ll. 2892-2945)

He bade that war-work be announced within
The camp, which was over the sea-cliff's edge
Where had that earl-troop, those shield-bearers, sat
Sad-spirited all morning long that day,
In expectation of the final-day
Or the return of their beloved man.
He who had ridden up to that headland
Was little silent with his new stories,
But in the hearing of all spoke full sooth:
"The wish-granter of all the Weders' people,
the Geatish lord, is now fast in his death-bed,
Remains in slaughter-rest by deeds of wrym.
Near him his life-foe lies with sword-wounds sick;
By no means could he wound that wretch by sword.
The son of Weohstan, Wiglaf, sits over
Beowulf—one earl over the other one
Un-living—holds with tired-mind the watch
Beside the head of both beloved and loathed.
Now will the expectation of a time
Of strife be with the people, as soon as
This is un-hidden for the Franks and Frisians,
Becomes known far and wide. The enmity

Was shaped hard with the Hugas, since the time
When Hygelac with a floating-force had come
Into the Frisians's land, where the Hetware
Had laid him low in war, had valor done
With greater might, so that the armored man
Then to him had to bow; he fell within
The footmen's ranks; the elder never gave
Of treasure to his noble troop. Since then
The Merovingians' gentleness has been
Un-given to us. Nor do I at all
Expect the peace or trust of the Swedish,
But it was widely known that Ongentheow
Had stolen life from Heathcyn Hrethling while
In Ravenswood, when for their pride the Geats
First sought the War-Shylfings. The wise father
Of Ohthere, awful and old, gave back
That hand-slaughter: he cut the sea-king down,
Rescued his bride, the old former maiden,
Bereft of gold, the mother of Onela
And Ohthere. He followed his life-foe
Until they painfully escaped lord-less
To Ravensholt. And with an immense host
He then besieged the last wound-weary swords,

And often vowed woes to that wretched band
All that long night; he said that in the morning
He with sword's edge would cut somebody open
For sport within those gallows-trees. Relief
For their sore-minds befell them with daybreak,
When those of Hygelac perceived the song
Of horn and trumpet, when the good one came
Faring on the trail of that people's host.

Fitt XLI (ll. 2946-3057)

The slaughter-rush of men, the bloody-swath
Of Swedes and Geats, was seen both far and wide,
How between them those folk had wakened feud.
From them the good man with his kinsman left,
The old and wise, the saddened much sought out
His fast stronghold, earl Ongentheow then went
Farther away; he knew the battle-skill
Of Hygelac, that daring man's war-craft,
He had no trust in any opposition
That he could have made war on those seamen,
That he could have defended the hoard, the bairns,
And brides against those battle-sailing ones;
Then afterwards the old one fled into
His earthen-wall. A chase was bidden to
The Swedish people; Hygelac's standard
Went forth and overran the sheltered land,
The Hrethlings after thronged into the camp.
There gray-haired Ongentheow was brought to bay
By edge of sword so that the people's king
Had to submit to Eofor's rule alone.

Then Wulf Wonreding¹³² angrily him struck,
 So with his swing the sweat of war sprang forth
 In streams beneath his hair. And still he was
 Not frightened thus, that ancient Shylfing lord,
 But quickly he repaid that slaughter-crash
 With worse exchange, after the people's king
 Had turned around. But Wonred's speedy son
 Could not return a blow to that old man,
 For Ongentheow had previously sheared
 The helm atop his head so that he had
 To bow bloodstained; he fell upon the earth;
 But doomed to die he was not yet, for he
 Recovered then, although the wound him hurt.
 The hardythane of Hygelac had let
 His broad long blade, the giant-ish old sword,
 Across the shield-wall break the great helm once
 His brother lay down dead; the king then bowed,
 The shepherd of the folk, he was life-struck.
 Then were there many who bound his¹³³ kinsman,
 Who quickly raised him up as soon as a way
 Was cleared so they could wield the slaughter-field.

¹³² Literally "wolf, son of wanting-counsel."

¹³³ I.e. Eofor's.

One warrior then robbed the other one,
He seized from Ongentheow his iron-coat,
His hardy hilted sword, also his helm,
He bore the armor of the hoary man
To Hygelac. He grasped that treasured gear,
And fairly promised him rewards amongst
The people there and so he carried out;
The Geatish lord, the offspring of Hrethel,
Once came he home, repaid Eofor and Wulf
With wealth unheard of for that battle-rush:
He gave to each a hundred thousand worth
Of lands and hand-locked rings; no man across
This middle-earth to fault him had reason
For those rewards since they had done great deeds.
To Eofor gave he then his only daughter,
The honor of his home, to be a pledge
Of peace. The feud and foe-ship that will be,
The slaughter-strife of men, that I expect
As soon as Swedish people seek us out
Once they have learned our lord is now lifeless,
He who before had held the hoard and realm
From hated ones—after the heroes' fall—

Had done the daring Shyldings' folk-desire,¹³⁴
 And furthermore still carries out earl-ship.
 To me is haste the best, so see we may
 Our people's king, and may bring him who gave
 Us rings along the burning pyre's path.
 No small amount shall melt with that proud man,
 But there are hoards of treasure, gold unknown
 Grimly purchased, and rings now bought at last
 With life his own. Then eat him shall the flame,
 The fire enfold—no earl shall treasure wear
 To bear his memory, no shining maid
 Shall have a worthy-ring about her neck,
 But in her grief-mood, she, bereaved of gold,
 Shall tread not once but often a strange land
 Now that the warriors' leader has laid
 Aside his laughter, sport, and gleesome bliss.
 Thus many morning-cold spears shall be wound
 About by fingers, hoisted up by hand,
 No harp's music shall wake the warriors,
 But the black raven flying over the doomed,
 He shall talk much, shall to the eagle say
 How fared he at the feed while with the wolf

¹³⁴ Refers to Beowulf's slaying of Grendel and his mother.

He plundered had the slain.”

The daring man

Was telling loathsome tales; he did not lie

Much in those fates or words. The host arose;

Un-blithe they went beneath the Eagle-Ness

With welling tears to see that wondrous man.

They all then found him soulless on the sand

Within bed-rest, he who had given rings

In former times. Then had the end-day gone

For that good man, so that the battle-king,

The Weders’ lord, then died a wondrous death.

There saw they first an even stranger wight,

The loathsome wyrm was lying opposite

Him there upon the land; the fire-drake

Was grim and horror-stained, was burned away

By flames, was fifty-footmarks long in his lair,

Once held he had the winsome sky at night,

And after had come down to seek his den.

He was made fast by death, had seen the end

Of his earth-cave. Beside him stood both cups

And pitchers, dishes laid low, precious swords

Consumed by rust. Thus had they dwelled there in

The bosom of the earth a thousand winters.

Then that immensely crafted heritage,
That gold belonging to the men of old,
Was wound about with spells so that no man
Might that ring-building touch, lest god himself,
Sooth-king of victories—he is the holder
Of all men—were to grant to whomever
He wised the opening of that bright hoard,
To which of men as seems to him most fit.

Fitt XLII (ll. 3058-3136)

Then was it seen that way had brought no good
 For the wyrm who un-rightly hid revenge
 Beneath the wall. The guardian had slain
 Before that one of few equals; that feud
 Was wrothfully avenged. A wonder is
 Where then a courage-famous earl may reach
 The ending of his life-fate when a man
 No longer is allowed to dwell with kin
 In the mead-hall. So it with Beowulf was,
 When sought he had the barrow-guardian
 And cunning strife; he himself did not know
 How his world-parting had to come about;
 Those famous lords, when they had put that¹³⁵ there,
 Had, until doomsday, deeply sentenced this:
 That he who spoiled that place would be a man
 Guilty of sins, confined to idol-shrines,
 Held fast in hell's bonds, tortured by evils,
 Unless the owner's esteem was first shown
 More clearly to the one who thirsted for gold.
 Then Wiglaf, son of Weostan, spoke once more:
 "Many an earl must often suffer wrack

¹³⁵ I.e. The hoard.

And ruin for the will of one, so it
Has come to pass for us. We could not sway
Our beloved lord, the shepherd of our realm,
With any counsel not to greet the gold-ward,
To let him lie there where he long had been,
To dwell within his place until world's end—
He held it in his own high destiny.
The hoard is to us shown, is grimly won;
That fate that forced him thither was too strong.
I was inside of there, and saw of all
That building's treasures when I was allowed—
The way beneath the earthen-wall had not
At all been sweetly granted. Seized I in
My haste much with my hands, a mighty load
Of hoard-treasures, and hither bore them out
Unto my king. The wise-witted one was
Then still alive; he spoke of all great things,
An ancient man in sorrow, ordered that
You should be greeted, bid that you should build—
In keeping with the deeds of friends and lords—
A barrow high, both great and famed, within
His pyre-place, for every man he was
The most worthy of warriors across

The far-flung earth while use he could make of
His stronghold-wealth. So let us now make haste
A second time to see and seek the heap
Of cleverly-cut gems, those wondrous things,
Beneath the wall; I will you show the way
So that you see up close the rings and gold.
Now let the bier be readied, quickly done,
When come we out and ferry then our lord,
Beloved man, to where he shall long dwell
Within the keeping of the wielder there.”
The son of Weohstan, hero battle-brave,
Then ordered many men, the building-lords,
To ferry wood for fire from afar
To that good one, the leader of the folk:
“Now shall the flame consume, the dark fire wax,
The lord of warriors, he who had oft
Endured the iron-shower when the storm
Of arrows, urged by strength, had shot over
The shield-wall—shafts held to their use, set out
With feathered-gear, they served their arrowheads.”
Then Weohstan’s wise son called forth from the host
The king’s thanes, seven best all together,
Now one of eight, he went beneath the roof

Of wickedness. In hand one war-man bore,
The one who went on point, a gleaming fire.
It was selected not by drawing lots
Who was to loot that hoard once in the hall.
The men had seen it sitting, all of it
Unguarded, lying there wasting away.
Thus little did anyone mourn that they
Need ferry out that dear treasure in haste.
They also moved the drake, they shoved the wurm
Off the cliff-wall—they let the waves him seize,
The fathoms of the flood enfold the hoard's
Shepherd. Wound gold was in a wagon laid,
A countless number of all treasured things;
The nobleman, the hoary man of war,
Was borne unto Whale-Ness.

Fitt XLIII (ll. 3137-3182)

The people of the Geats for him prepared
 On earth a mighty fire that hung with helms,
 With battle-shields, with bright ring-mail armor—
 So had he asked; the grieving heroes laid
 Their famous lord, beloved king, in its midst.
 The warriors began to wake upon
 The barrow the greatest funeral fire;
 The swarthy wood-smoke rose above the flame,
 The roaring blaze was with their weeping wound
 (The wind-whip slacked) until his bone-house broke.
 Then hot in heart, with minds un-mirthful there,
 They spoke of their mind-care—their liege-lord's death.¹³⁶
 Likewise a Geatish woman, her hair bound-hard,
 Then sang a mournful tale, a care-worn song,
 For Beowulf, often said she sorely dreaded
 Her mourning-days, the many slaughter-falls,
 The host's horror, disgrace and slavery.
 Then heaven swallowed the smoke. The people of
 The Geats then wrought a lee upon the hill.
 It was both high and broad, was widely seen

¹³⁶ Parts of the following ten lines of the MS are severely damaged; various editors either reconstructed or conjectured much of what follows.

By wave-sailors, was built in ten days time,
 A beacon of that battle-daring man,
 They wrought a wall about that fire-heirloom,
 As worthily as many clever men
 Could create it. They placed a ring and jewels
 Inside the barrow, such treasures that men
 With evil-thoughts ere seized inside the hoard.

*Let the earth hold the wealth of earls, the gold
 Within the ground, wherein it now yet lives,
 As useless to men as it was before.*

About the mound the battle-daring rode,
 The bairns of noblemen, some twelve in all,
 They would bewail their cares, lament their king,
 Recite a word-song, speak about that man;
 His earl-ship they esteemed and his brave works,
 They deemed him excellent.

So it is right

*That a man praise his friend and lord with words,
 He love him with his heart, whenever he
 Shall be led forth out of his body-home.*

The people of the Geats, the hearth-comrades,
 Thus mourned the fall of their lord. They said he was
 The mildest of men and most peaceful world-king,

The kindest with people, and most fame-keen.

CATALOG OF PROPER NAMES

Aelfhere:	Kinsman of Wiglaf .
Aeschere:	A Dane ; chief advisor to Hrothgar ; slain by Grendel's mother.
Battle-Shyldings:	See Danes .
Beanstan:	Father of Breca .
Beowulf:	Protagonist of the poem; son of Ecgtheow ; nephew and thane of Hygelac .
Beowulf (of ll. 1-52):	Son of Shyld Shafing ; grandfather of Hrothgar ; not to be confused with Beowulf about whose exploits the poet sings in this work.
Breca:	Competed against Beowulf in a swimming contest.
Bright-Danes:	See Danes .
Brondings:	The tribe of Breca .
Brosinga:	Legendary Norse crafters of Freya's magical necklace.
Daeghrefn:	A warrior of the Hugas ; killed by Beowulf .
Danes:	The Danish people have several different names including: Bright-Danes , Spear-Danes , Half-Danes , Ring-Danes , East-Danes , West-Danes , North-Danes , South-Danes , Ingwines , Battle-Shyldings , Honor-Shyldings , People-Shyldings , Victory-Shyldings , and War-Shyldings . All refer to the descendants of Shyld Shafing .
Eadgils:	A Swedish prince; son of Ohthere ; younger brother of Eanmund .

Eanmund:	A Swedish prince; son of Ohthere ; elder brother of Eadgils ; killed by Weohstan .
East-Danes:	See Danes .
Ecglaf:	Father of Hunferth .
Ecgtheow:	Father of Beowulf .
Ecgwela:	Earlier Danish king.
Eofor:	A Geat ; slayer of Ongentheow ; brother of Wulf .
Eomer:	Son of Offa .
Eormenric:	Late fourth-century king of the Eastern Goths.
Finn:	King of the Frisians ; married to Hildeburh ; killed by Hengest .
Fitela:	Nephew of Sigemund .
Folcwalda:	Father of Finn .
Franks:	A Germanic tribe; also called the Hugas and the Merovingians ; see also Hetware .
Freawaru:	Daughter of Hrothgar ; future wife of Ingeld .
Freswael:	A Frisian battlefield.
Friesland:	Home of the Frisians .
Frisians:	A Germanic tribe; the kin of Finn .
Froda:	King of the Heathobards ; father of Ingeld .
Garmund:	Father of Offa .
Geats:	Beowulf 's people; Germanic tribe of Southern Sweden; other names are Sea-Geats , War-Geats , Weather-Geats , Hrethmen , Hrethlings , and Weders .

Gifthas:	East-Germanic tribe.
Grendel:	Monstrous creature that attacks Heorot ; killed by Beowulf .
Guthlaf:	A Danish warrior; a retainer of Hengest .
Haereth:	Father of Hygd .
Halga:	A Danish prince; son of Half-Dane ; brother of Hrothgar .
Half-Dane:	Son of Beowulf Shylding ; father of Hrothgar .
Half-Danes:	See Danes .
Hama:	Hero from Gothic legends; stole the Brosinga necklace.
Heardred:	A Geat ; son of Hygelac .
Heathcyn:	A Geat ; son of Hrethel ; kills his brother Herebeald ; is himself killed by Ongentheow in Ravenswood .
Heathobards:	A Germanic tribe ruled by Froda .
Heatholaf:	Wylfing warrior slain by Ecgtheow .
Heathoreams:	People of south-eastern Norway.
Helmings:	The people of Wealtheow .
Hemming:	The kinsman of Offa and Eomer .
Hengest:	Leader of the Half-Danes at the Fight at Finnsburh after the death of Hnaef ; kills Finn .
Heorogar:	A Danish prince; son of Half-Dane ; eldest brother of Hrothgar .
Heorot:	Hall built by Hrothgar that Grendel attacks.
Heoroward:	A Dane ; son of Heorogar .
Herebeald:	A Geat ; eldest son of Hrethel ; killed by his brother Heathcyn .
Heremod:	King who ruled the Danes prior to Shyld Shafing .

Hereric:	A Geat ; brother of Hygd ; uncle of Heardred .
Hetware:	A Frankish tribe.
Hildeburh:	Danish princess; married to Finn ; sister to Hnaef .
Hnaef:	Leader of the Half-Danes during the wars with the Frisians ; brother of Hildeburh ; killed by Finn .
Hoc:	Father of Hnaef and Hildeburh .
Hondscio:	A Geat ; retainer of Beowulf ; slain by Grendel .
Honor-Shyldings:	See Danes .
Hreosnabeorh:	A hill in Geatland; site of a battle between the Swedes and Geats .
Hrethel:	A king of the Geats ; father to Hygelac ; grandfather to Beowulf .
Hrethlings:	Literally “sons of Hrethel ”; see Geats .
Hrethmen:	Another name for the Geats .
Hrethric:	A Danish prince; son of Hrothgar and Wealthew .
Hrothgar:	A Danish prince; son of Half-Dane ; Danish King and lord of Heorot during the time of Beowulf ’s visit.
Hrothmund:	A Danish prince; son of Hrothgar and Wealthew .
Hrothulf:	A Danish prince; son of Halga ; nephew to Hrothgar .
Hrunting:	Name of the sword Hunferth lent to Beowulf to be used in the fight against Grendel’s mother.
Hugas:	See Franks .
Hunlafing:	Either the name of a Danish warrior or the name of the sword of Hengest .

Hunferth:	Son of Ecglaf ; public spokesman for Hrothgar ; called Unferth in most editions and translations.
Hygd:	Queen of the Geats ; wife to Hygelac ; daughter of Haereth .
Hygelac:	King of the Geats ; Beowulf's lord and uncle.
Ingeld:	Son of Froda ; a prince of the Heathobards ; subsequent to the events depicted in the poem, he burns down Heorot .
Ingwines:	See Danes .
Jutes:	A Germanic tribe.
Merovingians:	See Franks .
Modthryth:	See Thryth .
Naegling:	The sword of Beowulf .
North-Danes:	See Danes .
Offa:	King of the continental Angles during the 4 th century; husband of Thryth .
Ohthere:	A Swedish king; elder son of Ongentheow ; father of Eanmund and Eadgils .
Onela:	A Swedish prince; son of Ongentheow ; married to Yrse .
Ongentheow:	A Swedish king; slayer of Heathcyn ; killed by Eofor .
Oslaf:	A Danish warrior; retainer of Hengest .
People-Shyldings:	See Danes .
Ravensholt:	See Ravenswood .
Ravenswood:	Forest in Sweden; site where Ongentheow slew Heathcyn ; also called Ravensholt .

Ring-Danes:	See Danes .
Sea-Geats:	Another name for the Geats .
Shyld Shafing:	Great-grandfather to Hrothgar ; ultimate progenitor of the Danes , who are also referred to as the Shyldings .
Shyldings:	Descendants of Shyld Shafing ; the Danes .
Shylfings:	Descendants of Ongentheow ; the Swedes .
Sigemund:	Legendary Germanic hero of the Old Norse <i>Volsung Saga</i> ; son of Wael .
South-Danes:	See Danes .
Spear-Danes:	See Danes .
Swedes:	See Scylfing .
Swerting:	Uncle of Hygelac .
Thryth:	Queen of the Angles during the 4 th century; wife of Offa ; her name is often rendered Modthryth in other translations.
Unferth:	See Hunferth .
Victory-Shyldings:	See Danes .
Waegmundings:	The family of Weohstan , Wiglaf , and Beowulf .
Wael:	Father of Sigemund .
War-Shyldings:	See Danes .
War-Geats	Another name for the Geats .
War-Shylfings:	See Shylfings .
Wealhtheow:	Danish queen; wife to Hrothgar .
Weather-Geats:	Another name for the Geats .

Weders:	Another name for the Geats .
Weland:	Famous smith in Norse mythology.
Wendels:	A Germanic tribe; the kin of Wulfgar .
Weohstan:	Father of Wiglaf ; slayer of Eanmund .
West-Danes:	See Danes .
Wiglaf:	Son of Weohstan ; kinsman and retainer of Beowulf .
Withergyld:	One of the fighters of the Heathobards .
Wonred:	A Geat ; father of Wulf and Eofor .
Wulf:	A Geat ; warrior brother of Eofor ; assisted in the killing of Ongentheow .
Wulfgar:	Hrothgar 's attendant and herald, who greets Beowulf upon the Geatish warrior's arrival to Heorot .
Wylfings:	A Germanic tribe.
Yrmenlaf:	A Dane ; younger brother of Aeschere .
Yrse:	A Danish princess; daughter of Half-Dane ; married to Onela .

GENEALOGIES IN *BEOWULF*

The Danes (Shyldings)

The Geats

The Swedes (Shylfings)

A HISTORY OF THE SWEDISH WARS IN *BEOWULF*

II. 2432-2471: With an errant arrow shot, Heathcyn accidentally slays his brother

Herebeald. Thereafter, Heathcyn becomes king of the Geats.

II. 2472-2478: After Hrethel's death, Ongentheow's sons, Ohthere and Onela, attack the Geats.

II. 2479-2484: Heathcyn, as king of the Geats, and his brother Hygelac attack the Swedes in revenge, taking Ongentheow's queen prisoner.

II. 2922-2941: Heathcyn is killed at Ravenswood by Ongentheow who then rescues his queen. The remaining Geats flee into the woods; there Ongentheow threatens them all through the night.

II. 2484-2489 & 2942-2999: At dawn, Hygelac arrives with reinforcements. Warriors in Hygelac's army, Wulf and Eofor, slay Ongentheow. Hygelac becomes the Geats' king; Ohthere becomes the Swedes' king.

II. 2354-2378: Hygelac is slain in Frisia; his son Heardred ascends the Geatish throne.

II. 2379-2384: After the death of Ohthere, his brother Onela seizes the Swedish throne while driving Ohthere's sons, Eanmund and Eadgils, into exile.

II. 2385-2390: Upon taking in the exiled Swedes, Heardred is attacked and slain by Onela who subsequently permits Beowulf to rule the Geats.

II. 2611-2619: Around the same time of Onela's attack, the father of Wiglaf, Weohstan, kills Eanmund in Onela's name. From this battle, Weohstan wins Wiglaf's sword.

II. 2391-2396: With help sent by Beowulf, Eadgils later kills Onela, becoming the Swedish king.

II. 2999-3005: During Beowulf's fifty-winter rule, Eanmund's death goes unavenged.

Upon the Geatish king's death, it is likely that Eadgils will seek vengeance against

Wiglaf, who is the surviving son of Eadgils slayer, Weohstan.

A BRIEF TEXTUAL HISTORY OF COTTON VITELLIUS A. XV

- Between the 7th and 10th centuries CE, a now forgotten Anglo-Saxon bard orally composes the poem known as *Beowulf*. Due to conflicting linguistic evidence, a more exact date has yet to be determined.
- The poem is copied and bound into its codex in the mid-11th century. (Oddly, one scribe began the work, stopped, and was replaced by another scribe who finished the work before editing the first's hand.) A prior date is unlikely due to the pro-Danish stance in the poem, which would have conflicted with the negative image Anglo-Saxon's held of earlier (10th and early 11th centuries) Danish-Viking raiders.
- After having been copied, the manuscript disappears from recorded history, but it likely is housed in one of the many English monasteries.
- In 1563, "Laurence Nouell" writes his name and the year on a leaf of the bound codex. This "Nouell" is likely Lawrence Nowell, Dean of Lichfield, who is one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon scholars.
- Sometime in the early 17th century the codex containing *Beowulf* is bound with another grouping of Anglo-Saxon works, creating a composite codex. The second part (that which contains *Beowulf*) will come to be known as the "Nowell Codex."
- In the late 16th or early 17th century, Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631), a British collector of medieval manuscripts, obtains the codex. He stores the work in his library (Cotton), on a bookcase that is crowned by the bust of the Roman Emperor Vitellius (Vitellius), placing the manuscript on the first shelf (A), fifteen

manuscript places from the left (XV). The codex is ever after recorded as “Cotton Vitellius A. XV.”

- In 1700, Sir John Cotton, Robert’s grandson, donates the entire manuscript library to the British people.
- In 1706, Parliament passes an act calling for a permanent home for the library to be constructed, but it will be some time before the structure is complete.
- In 1722, in response to the decrepit state of Cotton House, the manuscript collection is moved to Essex House.
- In 1729, again in response to the decrepit state of its housing, the library is again moved, this time to Ashburnham House in Little Dean’s Yard, Westminster.
- On Saturday, October 23, 1731, at two o’clock in the morning, a fire breaks out in the library when a mantel-tree is left laying across a hot stove chimney. In order to save the library, the manuscripts are tossed out of a window, but not before Cotton Vitellius A. XV had sustained burn damage along its outer edge and within a few of its leaves. The damaged portions will continue to deteriorate over the next century.
- In 1753, the British Museum opens; Cotton’s library becomes one of the core donations to its manuscript holdings.
- In 1787, Grimur Johnsson Thorkelin, an Iclander, hires a professional scribe (who knows nothing of Anglo-Saxon) to transcribe *Beowulf*. Thorkelin himself also makes a copy of the work. The two transcriptions become known as *Thorkelin A* (the scribe’s work) and *Thorkelin B* (Thorkelin’s own hand). Both transcriptions are eventually shown to have strengths and weaknesses.

- In 1805, based upon Thorkelin's transcriptions, Sharon Turner publishes a translated excerpt of *Beowulf*, the first English translation of any part of the poem.
- In 1815, Thorkelin publishes the first transcription of *Beowulf*. The text is largely inaccurate.
- In August 1845, Cotton Vitellius A. XV is rebound; in order to halt the flaking of the pages, the new binder pastes the leaves into heavy paper borders and rebinds the entire work—the original binding is discarded. While words are no longer being lost at the edges, the cardstock borders have covered some text.

Researchers find that holding the individual pages up to a strong light will reveal some of the more heavily inked words, but many are too faint to show through. Eventually, infra-red lighting is used to illuminate the covered text.
- In 1882, Julius Zupitza prints a facsimile edition of the *Beowulf* manuscript. Drawing upon Thorkelin's work, he adds notations that attempt to reconstruct missing words and passages.
- In 1922, F.R. Klaeber releases his first edition of *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnisburg*. The work is immediately hailed as the definitive scholarly transcription of the work, quickly becoming the gold-standard edition for students, scholars, and translators. Klaeber's work includes the most accurate and thorough transcription to date, copious footnotes, related articles, extensive bibliographies, and a thorough introduction to Anglo-Saxons and their poetry. The work would be expanded upon until 1950, when the third edition is reprinted with two supplements.
- In 1963, Malone Kemp produces another facsimile of the entire manuscript.

- In 1999, Kevin Kiernan publishes *The Electronic Beowulf*; the work includes the actual manuscript pages on CD as well as glossary, bibliographies, *Thorkelin A* and *B*, and critical information.
- In 2002, Seamus Heaney publishes his verse translation of the work; it becomes an international bestseller.

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