

An Updated Verse Translation  
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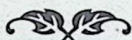
SCYLD SCEFING, *the first name mentioned in the poem, seems to come from the mists of legend.* Later in the poem, a Danish king named Heremod, who died without an heir, is mentioned. Thus the mysterious arrival of Scyld, an unknown child drifting ashore in a boat, began a new dynasty. *Yrse*, the fourth child of Healfdene (whose name, not in the poem, is supplied from Norse tradition), was married to Onela, a Swedish king who plays a part in the final third of the poem.

The ominous words "Gables . . . waiting for hate-fire" refer to another Norse tradition, not developed in *Beowulf*, of a long-lasting feud between Danes and Heathobards. According to this tradition, Hrothgar marries his daughter to Ingeld, the new young king of the Heathobards, but this merely postpones hostilities, and the Heathobards attack, burning Heorot, though they are finally vanquished. Upon Hrothgar's death, his nephew Hrothulf takes the throne and kills Hrethric, Hrothgar's elder son. Hrothgar's younger son Hrothmund and his other nephew Heorowearð are also in line for the throne. These four people are merely referred to in the poem with portentous overtones.

The descent of Grendel and other monsters from Cain after the biblical flood is explained in the early Middle Ages by the corruption of Noah's son Ham, whose offspring continued the breed of monsters begun with Cain.



One important note for pronunciation: The initial consonant cluster “sc-” should be pronounced as “sh” in “show.” Thus “Scyld Scefing” (above) should be pronounced like “Shyld Shefing.”



## I

Yes! We have heard of years long vanished  
how Spear-Danes struck sang victory-songs  
raised from a wasteland walls of glory.  
When Scyld Scefing shamed his enemies  
measured meadhalls made them his own  
since down by the sea-swirl sent from nowhere  
the Danes found him floating with gifts  
bound to their shore. Scyld grew tall then  
roamed the waterways rode through the lands  
10 till every strongman each warleader  
sailed the whalepaths sought him with gold  
there knelt to him. That was a king!  
Time brought to him birth for his people  
a gift to the Danes who had grieved too long  
cold and kingless—the Keeper of men  
shortened their longing with Scyld’s man-child  
sunlight for darkness. To this son the Wielder  
Life-Lord of men loaned a king’s heart  
banishing the ache of a barren meadhall.  
20 Beaw was renowned his name went traveling  
sung wide and far by seafaring minstrels.  
So should a prince show his heartstrength  
by his father’s side share gold-treasures

forge friend-warriors to fight against darkness  
 in his last winters. With love and action  
 shall a man prevail in memory and song.  
 At the hour shaped for him Scyld took his leave  
 a kingly departure to the King's embrace.  
 They bore their savior back to the sea  
 30 his bones unburned as he bade them do  
 child of the mist who chased their mourning  
 loved and led them through the long winters.  
 Ready at seashore stood a ring-prowed ship  
 icy and eager armed for a king.  
 They braced him then, once bright with laughter  
 shaper of hall-songs, on the ship's middle-board  
 hard by the mast. From hills and valleys  
 rings and bracelets were borne to the shore.  
 No words have sung of a wealthier grave-ship  
 40 bright with war-weapons ballasted with gold  
 swords and ring-mail rich for drifting  
 through the foaming tide far from that land.  
 Their lord was laden for long sailpaths  
 with love and sorrow splendid with gifts  
 for those who had ferried him far through the mist  
 once sent them a sailor strange treasure-child.  
 At last they hung high upon the mast  
 a golden banner then gave him to the sea  
 to the mounding waves. Their mindgrief was great  
 50 dark with mourning. Men cannot know  
 cannot truthfully say—singers of tales  
 sailors or gleemen—who gathered him in.  
 Then Beaw held them banished war-ravens  
 sailed through the summers strengthening peace  
 like his father before him known far abroad  
 a king to contend with. Time brought a son



high-minded Healfdene who held in his turn  
through long glory-years the life-line of Scyld.  
Then four strong ones came forth from his queen  
60 woke to the world warmed the gift-hall—  
Heorogar and Hrothgar Halga the good  
Yrse the fair one Onela's hall-queen  
that battle-wise Swede's bed-companion.  
Hrothgar was beckoned born for a kingdom  
shaped as a lord loved by his hall-thanes  
who bore him high as boys became men  
and men grew mighty. His mind told him  
to raise a throne-house rarest in Denmark  
70 mightiest meadhall in measure and strength  
that the oldest among them ever had beheld  
to give freely what God had provided  
share his wealth there shape borderlands  
love and lead them in light against darkness.  
Then, as I heard, help came crowding  
from hills and glens hewers of timber  
trimmers and weavers. It towered at last  
highest of them all—Heorot he named it  
who with words wielded the world of the Danes.  
Hrothgar was king kept his promise  
80 gave from his gift-throne goldgifts and peace.  
Gables were crossed capped with horn-beams,  
waiting for hate-fire high anger-flames.  
It was yet too soon for swordswings to clash  
not yet the day for dark throne-battle  
a blood-minded son and his bride's father.

Then an alien creature cold wanderer  
could no longer endure from his dark exile  
bright bench-laughter borne to the rafters

each night in that hall. The harp sounded  
 90 the poet's clear song. He sang what he knew  
 of man's creation the Measurer's work:  
 "He shaped the earth opened the heavens  
 rounded the land locked it in water  
 then set skyward the sun and the moon  
 lights to brighten the broad earthyard  
 beckoned the ground to bear gardens  
 of limbs and leaves—life He created  
 of every kind that quickens the earth."  
 They lived brightly on the benches of Heorot  
 100 caught up in laughter till a creature brought them  
 fear in the night an infernal hall-guest.  
 Grendel circled sounds of the harp  
 prowled the marshes moors and ice-streams  
 forests and fens. He found his home  
 with misshapen monsters in misery and greed.  
 The Shaper banished him unshriven away  
 with the kin of Cain killer of his blood.  
 The Measurer fashioned a fitting revenge  
 for the death of Abel drove his slayer  
 110 far from mankind and far from His grace.  
 Cain sired evil cunning man-killers  
 banished from heartlove born in hatred  
 giants and fiends jealous man-eaters  
 long without penance. God paid them for that.  
 Then Grendel prowled, palled in darkness,  
 the sleep-warm hall to see how the Danes  
 after beer and feasting bedded down for rest.  
 He found inside slumbering warriors  
 unready for murder. Bereft of remorse  
 120 from love exiled lost and graceless  
 he growled with envy glared above them



towering with rage. From their rest he snared  
thirty hall-thanes loped howling away  
gloating with corpses galloping the moors  
back to his cavern for a cold banquet.

At dawning of day when darkness lifted  
Grendel's ravage rose with the sun.

The waking Danes wailed to the heavens  
a great mourning-song. Their mighty ruler

130 lord of a death-hall leaned on his grief  
stooped in shadows stunned with thane-sorrow  
bent to the tracks of his baneful houseguest  
no signs of mercy. His mind was too dark  
nightfall in his heart. There was no need to wait  
when the sun swung low for he slaughtered again  
murdered and feasted fled through dawnmist  
damned to darkness doomed with a curse.

It was easy to find those who elsewhere slept  
sought distant rest reached for night-cover

140 found beds with others when the bad news came  
the lifeless messages left by that caller  
murderous hall-thane. Men still walking  
kept from the shadows no shame in their hearts.  
Now a lone rage-ruler reigned through the night  
one against all till empty and still

stood the long meadhall. Too long it stood  
twelve cold winters wound in despair—  
the lord of the Danes dreamed of his lost ones  
watched for a sign. Then it widely was known

150 in dark Denmark that death lived with them  
when weeping heartsongs wailed of Grendel  
Hrothgar's hall-monster hell's banquet-guest—  
lashed by hunger he longed for nightfall  
with no pause or pity, poison in his heart.  
No plans for payment passed through that mind

money or goldgifts remorse for slaughter—  
 no somber mourners sued for revenge  
 death-settlement from that demon's hands.  
 He raged at them all envious hell-fiend  
 160 in dark death-shadow doomed young and old  
 trapped and snared them trailed in nightshade  
 cloud-misted moors—no man can follow  
 where God's enemies glide through the fog.  
 Dawn brought to them blood-signs of rage—  
 outcast from grace Grendel went prowling  
 the empty hall-benches. Heorot received him  
 in cold darkness damned to his rule.  
 Yet he never could greet the peaceful gift-throne  
 love and bounty life-joy and gold  
 170 for the old betrayal outlawed him there.  
 It was long despair for the lord of the Danes  
 a breaking of mind. Many a counselor  
 gathered to whisper groped for messages  
 ways to escape those woeful night-visits.  
 Some made promises prayed to idols  
 swore to honor them asked them for help  
 safety from murder. Such was their custom  
 the hope of heathens hell-thoughts in mind.  
 They ignored the Measurer Maker of heaven  
 180 Shaper of glory shamed by terror  
 unable to praise or pray to the Father  
 wish for his guidance. Woe unto those  
 with ill in their hearts hopeless and doomed  
 forcing their souls to the fire's welcome  
 praying to names that will never help them  
 praise without hope. Happier are they  
 who seek after deathday the Deemer of men  
 free their soul-bonds to the Father's embrace.  
 With sinking heart the son of Healfdene



190 endlessly waited wept for an answer  
no hope for relief. Too long and merciless  
slaughter and greed seemed to his people  
narrow and endless nightbale and tears.

In the home of the Geats Hygelac's thane  
gathered the stories of Grendel's torment  
a good man and strong strongest of all  
in that broad kingdom born for deliverance  
shaped for that hour. He ordered a boat,  
lithe wave-cutter, loudly proclaimed  
200 he would seek the Battle-Danes sail the wave-swells  
hail their king there kindle their hearts.  
Though they loved him life-seasoned elders  
answered his courage urged him onwards  
gazed at the weather wished for the sun.  
With care this champion chose his spearmen  
culled from the Geats their keenest fighters  
good men and faithful. Fifteen in all  
they sought their seacraft strode to the cliffs  
followed their chief to the fallow waves.  
210 Fast by the headland their hard-keeled boat  
waited for westering. Winding in swirls  
the sea met the sand. They stored their weapons  
bright shields gleaming spears and helmets  
strong war-weapons. Shoved through the breakers  
the stout-bound wood slid from the land.  
They flew on the water fast by the wind blown  
sail flecked with foam skimmed the waverolls  
through day and darkness. Dawn grayed the sky  
and the hour grew near when over the wave-tops  
220 the coiled bowsprit brought them a sign.  
A rising of land reached towards the sun  
shining seacliffs steep rock-pillars

stood before them. The sail grew limp  
 shallows lapped at them shore-sand received them.  
 The Weather-Geats waded walked their ship up  
 lashed it to land. Linked steel-corselets  
 clinked and glistened. They gave thanks then  
 to the God of them all for guiding them safely.  
 Watching above them the warden of the shores  
 230 glimpsed from the cliff-top a glinting of armor  
 as they bore from their boat bright shields and spears  
 rich with war-weapons. He wrenched his thoughts  
 groped within his mind who these men might be.  
 He roused his horse then rode to the seashore—  
 Hrothgar's cliff-guardian heaved up his spear  
 shook it to the sky shouted his challenge:  
 "Who might you be in your burnished mailcoats  
 strutting with weapons? Who steered this warboat  
 deep-running keel across the wave-swells  
 240 here against this shore? I assure you now  
 I've held this guard-post hard against sailors  
 watched over Denmark down through the years  
 that no hateful shipband might harbor unfought.  
 Never have boatmen beached more openly  
 shield-bearing thanes unsure of your welcome  
 hoisting no signal to hail peace-tokens  
 friendship to the Danes. I doubt that I've challenged  
 a loftier shieldman than your leader there  
 hale in his war-gear—no hall-lounger that  
 250 worthied with weapons—may his wit not belie  
 so handsome a swordman. I will hear quickly  
 first where you came from before you move on  
 you possible pirates pushing further  
 into Danish land. Now let me advise you  
 horseless sailors hear my counsel  
 my heartfelt words: Haste will be best



in letting me know the land you came from.”

The ablest among them answered him clearly  
lifted up his spear unlocked his wordhoard:

260 “We are mindful of manners men of the Geats  
Lord Hygelac’s hearth-companions.

My father wandered far through this world  
earned his way there Ecgtheow by name  
survived many winters wartime and peace  
till age wearied him. He won many battles  
named by Northmen in nations abroad.

Now we have come here with kind intentions  
to seek out your lord son of Healfdene  
victor of men. Advise us well!

270 We bear to your lord leader of the Danes  
a helpful message—but we hold no secrets  
now that we’re here. You know if it’s true  
stories told to us sorrowful tales

evil in Denmark some demon or giant  
a devilish creature who in darkness of night  
roams the moorpaths murder in his heart  
hell’s messenger. To Hrothgar I offer  
words to consider serious counsel

280 how this wise ruler may win over deathdays  
if an end to sorrows ever will come forth  
a taming of torment time for revenge  
healing of heartbreak in this helpless land.

Unless this happens as long as he rules  
darkness and bloodgrief will doom his people  
banished forever from that best of halls.”

The coastguard replied proud horse-soldier  
no fear in his words: “One way or another  
a sharp warden can weigh carefully  
words and intentions if he’s worthy in thought.

290 I’ve heard in your speech heartstrong fealty

to the lord of the Danes. I'll lead you now  
 with your spears and helmets to the hall above—  
 I'll tell my companions to tend to your ship  
 guard carefully against all comers  
 this newly tarred vessel nestled in sand  
 to hold it in trust till the time comes round  
 when homeward it bears the best among you  
 brings back alive beloved warriors  
 on this ring-prowed ship riding foamwaves  
 300 back to the Weather-Geats wondering for news.”  
 They marched forward then mounted the headland  
 left their keel-ship lashed to beach-anchor  
 roped to the sand. Around their mask-helmets  
 golden boar-heads beamed to the sun  
 flashed a war-gleam on fire-hardened steel  
 signaled their weapons. They strode together  
 crested the sea-wall till they saw glinting  
 that timber-strong hall trimmed bright with gold  
 tall horn-gables towering in the sun  
 310 high to the heavens Hrothgar's gift-hall.  
 Its light shone forth over land and sea.  
 The coastguard paused pulled his horse round  
 stopped by the roadside studied them well  
 hefted his spear hailed them again  
 paused for a moment with these parting words:  
 “Fare you well now—may the Father almighty  
 hold you from harm help from this moment  
 teach you the way. I turn to the sea  
 back to the beaches bastions of Denmark.”  
 320 The stone-cobbled road ran on before them  
 as they marched together. Their mailcoats glistened  
 laced by smith-hands—linked steel-jackets  
 clinked an armor-song as they came to the hall  
 strode in their war-gear straight to the door.



They settled broadshields bright by the wall  
rounded and hardened by ringing forge-hammers.  
They bent to the benches breast-coats in rows  
life-guarding corselets. They leaned ash-spears  
ranked by the door reaching above them  
330 gray-tipped treelimb. Geats rested there  
wealthy in weapons. A warrior came forth  
eager for news-words asked who they were:  
“From where have you brought those broad-rimmed shields  
gray-gleaming mailcoats good mask-helmets  
such a heap of armor? I am Hrothgar’s  
counselor and friend. How far have you traveled  
crossed the wave-rolls to come to this door?  
My wits tell me you are welcome callers  
in full friendship no fugitives with you.”  
340 The chief of the Geats gave him an answer  
tall and helmeted taught him with words  
the meaning of his men: “We are mighty Hygelac’s  
board-companions—Beowulf is my name.  
I have come to greet your great people-king  
to tell your Dane-lord tidings of hope  
explain to your king if he plans to receive us  
why we sailed westward to this splendid meadhall.”  
Wulfgar replied watchful Northman  
son of the Wendels wearing their strength  
350 no hurry in his mind: “I will hail my chief,  
mindful of murder, mix words with him  
greet the gift-throne give him your name  
since you’ve come to greet him with grand helpwords.  
I will step to the high-seat stand before him  
bear his answer back to you here.”  
He entered the hall where Hrothgar sorrowed,  
gray in his mindthoughts grief cloaking him,  
strode to the gift-throne stepped before him

skilled in the customs of kings of the North.  
 360 Wulfgar spoke then words mixed with light:  
 "Here we have strangers hailing from far  
 sailing the gulfstreams from Geatish country.  
 The greatest among them as I gauge the man  
 is known as Beowulf. They bring hope-tidings  
 wish to share words wait peacefully  
 to greet you, my lord. Do not leave them there  
 but give them welcome gladman Hrothgar!  
 Their weapons are stout steel boar-helmets  
 gleaming with gold. Their Geatish king  
 370 is a prosperous man a mighty ruler."  
 Hrothgar answered helm of the Danes:  
 "I knew their chieftain a child long ago.  
 His father was Ecgtheow who found his wife  
 in the hall of the Geats where Hrethel gave him  
 his only daughter. This day his son  
 has come to find me a friend of his youth.  
 Sailors have told me, sea-messengers  
 ferrying gifts from Götland to Denmark  
 with thankful tokens, that this tall grappler  
 380 can grind as strongly in the grip of his hand  
 as thirty war-thanes. I think that the Measurer  
 Maker of us all has urged him here,  
 sent to the Danes, I dare to imagine,  
 relief from Grendel. For this great mercy  
 I promise him now priceless heirlooms.  
 Make haste, my friend, fetch them in here  
 all of them together to greet all of us,  
 tell them clearly that they come as lamplight  
 to darkness in Heorot." To the door he turned  
 390 Wulfgar the Wendel wove them a speech:  
 "My lord has told me my beloved hearth-king  
 chief of the East-Danes that he honors your kin.



You have come in time, the tide has brought you  
like welling waves welcome to his heart.

Come forth with me in your corselets of steel  
your hard mask-helmets where Hrothgar awaits you.  
Leave your shield-boards your spears by the benches  
until you have traded talk with my lord.”

400 Some remained there stayed by their weapons  
held them from harm. Their hero rose then,  
around him his thanes ready for orders.

They walked together Wulfgar before them  
under Heorot's roof helmets gleaming  
stood at the hearth hard by the gift-throne.

Beowulf spoke then, burnished mailcoat  
work of wonder-smiths winking in firelight:  
“Hail to you, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's thane  
nephew and friend. I have known much peril  
grim death-dangers. Grendel's ravages

410 came to my ears in my own homeland.

Sailors have said that this strong meadhall  
with high gold-gables this Hall of the Hart  
stands empty and idle when evening-light fades  
when the dark sky lowers and light thins to gray.

My people have urged me, elders and youth  
best of Weather-Geats brothers of my heart,  
to cross the gulfway come straight to you  
offer you my strength stand by your side.

420 They saw for themselves as I surfaced from ambush  
broke through the waves to the winds of sunrise  
how I crushed water-sprites cracked their blood-teeth  
shoved them deathwards down by the sea-floor  
fought them by night in narrow-dark waters  
on the sandy ground. Grendel is next—

I will settle alone this sorrowful feud  
this baleful business. I beg of you now,

lord of the Ring-Danes royal man-leader,  
 a small favor-gift from sovereign to friend—  
 do not refuse me now that I'm here  
 430 come from afar to cancel your problem—  
 I and my men no more than this war-band  
 will cleanse your Heorot close out this evil.  
 I also have heard that this hellish monster  
 with careless strength carries no weapons.  
 I will therefore swear in honor of Hygelac—  
 to keep my protector proud in his heart—  
 I'll bear no swordblade no shield to that fight  
 no boar-head helmet—with my handgrip only  
 I will fight this fiend find his life-core  
 440 man against monster. Tomorrow you will find  
 at rising of light the Ruler's judgment.  
 If this demon wins no doubt he will banquet  
 on bodies of Geats gorge with all of us  
 swill and swallow snatch our lives away  
 munch on our bones. Do not mourn for me  
 or shame your heart in shadows of defeat  
 if he cracks my bones bends me deathwards  
 hauls me away hoping to taste me  
 slash me to morsels with murder in his heart  
 450 staining the moors. Do not sorrow for long  
 for my lifeless body lost and devoured.  
 But send to Hygelac if struggle takes me  
 this best of battle-shrouds breast-protector  
 greatest of corselets good Hrethel's gift  
 Weland's hand-smithing. Wyrð is determined!"  
 Hrothgar answered helm of the Danes:  
 "Beowulf my friend you have brought from home  
 a gesture of honor joining with us now.  
 Your father once caused the cruelest of feuds—  
 460 his hands emptied Heatholaf's lifeblood



a man of the Wylfingas. The Weather-Geats then  
dared not hold him for the harm he caused.  
From there he sought the South-Danes' country—  
over angry waves the winds delivered him.  
I first ruled then the realm of my people  
held in my youth a young kingdom  
homeland of the Danes—Heorogar was dead  
my older brother born of Healfdene  
borne to the grave—he was better than me!  
470 I managed that feud fixed it with payment  
sent to the Wylfingas sailors with gifts  
saved your good father with fine peace-tokens.  
It wounds me to say weary with mourning  
aching with grief how Grendel comes calling  
each twilight in Heorot tortures us all  
with nightblack murders. My men are fewer  
some carried away—wyrd has swept them  
into Grendel's grasp. God could easily  
stem this heart-sickness sweep it away.  
480 Often my hall-thanes hearts strong with beer  
bold in their ale-cups boasted in firelight  
that they would linger lie here in waiting  
for Grendel's ravaging ready with swordswings.  
Then was this meadhall at morning's raven-call  
dark with their doom as the day shoved forth,  
benches and bolsters black with battle-gore  
hall-rafters trembling. Heorot grew cold then  
stronghearted warriors were snatched into night.  
But sit now to banquet bear us good news  
490 tell us good tidings in time as you wish.”  
Benches were bared the beer-hall made roomy  
Geats were gathered together with all.  
There the stern-hearted settled by the fire  
welcome and ready. The warden of ale-cups

brought to their hands the bright hall-drink  
 taught them greetings. At times the minstrel  
 touched his harpstrings. They were happy together  
 a great band of them Geats with the Danes.

UNFERTH (meaning “discord” or “nonsense”) is a complex character who is twice called a *thyle* (“orator” or “jester”) and sits at Hrothgar’s feet, a position of counselors or jesters or poets. Here he is the traditional “court challenger,” enabling Beowulf to establish his credentials as a monster killer and giving him license to insult both Unferth and the Danes with impunity. Beowulf calls him a fratricide who will suffer either “in hell” or “in the hall,” depending on how the manuscript is interpreted, and it is later said that he was “not honorable towards his kin in swordplay.” This may mean that he found himself serving one lord and his brothers another, or he may have refused to support his brothers in battle. In any case, Unferth is well tolerated by the Danes and lends his respected sword to a grateful Beowulf.

Before and after the killing of Grendel, Hrothgar leaves Heorot to sleep in his “bower,” an outbuilding within the palisade compound characteristic of many Anglo-Saxon “burgs.”

Then up spoke Unferth Ecglaf’s swordson  
 500 held to his station at Hrothgar’s feet  
 unbound battle-runes. Beowulf’s errand  
 boasting of sea-strength burned in his heart—  
 never would he grant greater adventures  
 on land or sea to sailors or hall-thanes  
 than he had survived, hale sword-champion:  
 “Are you that Beowulf who with Breca swam  
 on the broad sea-swell struggling together  
 proud wave-wrestlers wagering your lives  
 with reckless boasting risking for praise  
 510 deep water-death? Not one counselor  
 friend or enemy could force you to cancel  
 that sorrowful swim—shipless wanderers



rowing with your hands reaching for salt-swells  
measuring the sea-road with stroking arms  
embracing the ocean broad water-fields  
wintry with waves. You worked at your folly  
for seven nightfalls—he outswam you there  
stronger than you. The sea at dawning  
heaved him ashore on Heatho-Raemas' ground.

- 520 He found his way then fared to his home  
beloved country land of the Brondingas  
proud timber-hall where his people waited.  
That son of Beanstan beat you at swimming  
bettered your boasting brave sea-warrior.  
Now I expect, proud though you swagger,  
brave at battle-rush bragging as you go,  
a grimmer contest with Grendel here  
if you dare sleep now in this darkened hall.”  
Beowulf spoke then son of Ecgtheow:
- 530 “Unferth my friend you find much to say  
eased with beer-cups all about Breca  
his seafaring ways. I say to you now  
I was greater in swim-strength gliding through waves  
longer with arm-strokes than my lagging friend.  
We boasted together—boys egering  
young in judgment yearning for renown  
game for water-wolves—that we would gamble  
lives against the sea loud ocean winds.  
With naked swords we slashed through the waves  
540 ready with warblades for wandering whales  
dark sea-monsters. No swifter than me  
could Breca swim there—I stayed beside him  
unwilling to leave him alone against all.  
Through five nightfalls we floated and swam  
on the ice-hard waves till an angry sea-flood  
broke out above us—blackening sky

and freezing northwinds forced us apart  
towering salt-swells struck between us.  
Strange sea-creatures surfaced around me—  
550 the mailcoat I wore woven with gold  
hard and hand-locked held me from death  
laced by wonder-smiths linked against carnage.  
To the deep sea-floor something pulled me  
hard gripfingers hauled me to sand  
with grappling-tight claws—it was granted to me  
to reach this devil rush him to sleep  
with sharp sword-point—swift blade-slashing  
strong in my hand haled him deathwards.  
Then more came at me many a water-sprite  
560 seagoing demons—I served them all  
with quick sword-thrusts sent them to hell.  
They missed their supper sea-bottom banquet  
squatting on the sand serving their hunger  
with my tasty corpse cold ocean-feast.  
By gray dawnlight lapped with salt-foam  
rolled by tidewaves they rested on land  
sleepened by swordswings—the sailpath was cleared  
sun-bright waterways washed of their blood.  
Light from the East lifted the storm-clouds  
570 God's bright beacon burnished the sea—  
looming headlands leaned high above,  
wind-scoured cliffwalls. Wyrð often spares  
an undoomed man when his mind-strength prevails.  
With sword's edges I sent into death  
nine sea-monsters. I have not yet heard  
of a harder struggle under heaven's archway  
a riskier night in narrow ocean-streams.  
From dark water-death waves bore me up  
weary of swimming—the sea lifted me  
580 led me to shore in the land of Finns.



I have never heard tell tales of yourself  
strong with swordplay swimming through nightwaves  
with gnashing sea-demons. Never has Breca  
fought through darkness in deep waterways—  
and you were never known for such deeds  
nothing to brag of renowned as you are  
for killing your brothers bringing them down,  
your own blood-kin. You'll answer for that  
wandering in hell though your wit be strong.  
590 I'll say one thing son of Ecglaf—  
never would Grendel grieve all of you  
mangle your hearts with murder in Heorot  
torture your lord in this tame meadhall  
if your courage held strong as you claim it does.  
Grendel has learned through long winters—  
no need to bother with brave Shield-Danes  
no interruptions of his nightly visits.  
He takes what he needs no one stopping him  
finds no contest with cowering Danes  
600 snares and slashes safe in Heorot  
owning you all. But I'll show him  
sooner than he knows a new kind of battle  
with men of the Geats. On the morning after  
when southern sunlight shines on this hall  
we will lift our meadcups to merciful peace  
bright bench-laughter banishing your grief.”  
Grief-heavy Hrothgar murder-stunned king  
heard in those words hard promises  
news of deliverance from long heartbreak  
610 found in Beowulf fair morning-thoughts.  
Laughter and song leapt to the rafters  
warm welcome-words. Then Wealhtheow came forth  
folk-queen of the Danes daughter of Helmingas

Hrothgar's bedmate. She hailed all of them  
 spoke her peace-words stepped to the gift-throne  
 fetched to her king the first ale-cup  
 warmed his mind-chill wished darkness away  
 from the tall high-seat—he took from her hands  
 the gleaming cupful gave her his thanks.

620 Through the high meadhall went Hrothgar's queen  
 offering hall-joy to old and to young  
 with rich treasure-cups till time brought her  
 where Beowulf sat. She bore him a cup  
 with gold-gleaming hands held it before him  
 graciously greeted the Geats' warleader  
 gave thanks to God for granting her will  
 sending her mercy a man to believe in  
 hope from abroad. He held the meadcup  
 high in his hands hailed the queen there  
 630 brought to Wealhtheow battle-strong words.  
 Beowulf spoke son of Ecgtheow:

“I swore to myself when I sailed from home  
 mounted my ship with my men around me  
 that I alone would ease your heartgrief  
 settle this feud here or fall deathwards  
 in Grendel's grasp. I'll give you his lifeblood  
 deliver his fiend-soul or finish my days  
 here in Heorot high treasure-hall.”

640 His words were welcome to Wealhtheow's heart  
 that bountiful boast—then back with her lord  
 the proud folk-queen found her station.  
 Cheers from the benches chased night-shadows  
 strong warrior-songs soared through the hall  
 rose to the rafters till ready for sleep  
 Healfdene's son heavy with thane-grief  
 yearned for evening-rest. Years had taught him



that Grendel roamed raging with envy  
Heorot on his mind from the moment that sunrise  
flushed towards the sky till final nightshades  
650 dark with shadow-shapes shoved across the meadows  
wound around Heorot. Hall-feasters rose.  
Their weary war-king wished for Beowulf  
luck in the night left him the gift-throne  
that great meadhall gave him farewell:  
“Never have I offered to any other man,  
from the first moment I found shield-strength,  
this hall of the Danes house of our nation.  
Have now and hold these havoc-stained walls  
remember your strength stand against darkness  
660 with luck and courage. You will lack for nothing  
if you risk this nightfall and rise with the sun.”  
He left the hall then Healfdene’s son  
lord of the Shield-Danes beloved treasure-king  
went to his bedrest Wealtheow beside him  
to comfort his sleep. The King of glory  
granted for that night a guard against helldeth  
a strong hall-warden holding in darkness  
a keen house-watch for the king of Heorot.  
The Geats’ champion gathered his men  
670 matched against evil the Measurer’s strength.  
He stripped off his armor steel-meshed mailcoat  
gilded mask-helmet gold-handled sword  
set them aside to serve him elsewhere  
rich war-weapons wonder-smiths’ handwork.  
He kindled their courage with keen boastwords  
as they bent to bedrest in that best of halls:  
“No meaner am I in mortal combat  
grim hand-wrestling than Grendel himself.  
I will not send him to sleep with my blade  
680 carve out his life though I could easily.

He has learned nothing of linden-shield play  
 fighting with armor fearless though he be  
 in dark thane-murder—on this dangerous night  
 we'll have no swordplay if he seeks me here  
 no clear weapon-fight—then the wise Deemer  
 will show his mercy the Shaper of all  
 will measure us both, bring judgment here.”  
 He bent to his bolster Beowulf the Geat  
 put his head to rest—around him his warriors  
 690 steelhearted sailors settled down to sleep.  
 Not one believed they would leave Heorot  
 sail once again seek out their homeland  
 the known meadows of their native country.  
 Too many stories of that tall wine-hall  
 emptied of Danes by dark night-slaughter  
 had found their ears. But the Father of men  
 wove them battle-speed—Weather-Geats prevailed  
 reprieved from hate-death haled to victory  
 by the strength of one saved from farewell  
 700 by a tight handgrip. It truly is known  
 that God manages men of this earth.

He slipped through the darkness under deep nightfall  
 sliding through shadows. Shield-warriors rested  
 slumbering guardians of that gabled hall—  
 all except one. That wandering spirit  
 could never drag them to cold death-shadow  
 if the world's Measurer wished to stop him.  
 (A waking warrior watched among them  
 anger mounting aching for revenge.)  
 710 He moved through the mist past moors and ice-streams  
 Grendel gliding God's wrath on him  
 simmering to snare some sleeping hall-thanes  
 trap some visitors in that tall gift-house.



He moved under cloudbanks crossed the meadowlands  
till the wine-hall towered tall gold-gables  
rising in night-sky. Not for the first time  
he came to Heorot Hrothgar's gift-hall—  
never had he come craving a blood-feast  
with worse slaughter-luck waiting there inside.  
720 He came to the hall hungry for man-flesh  
exiled from joy. The ironbound door  
smith-hammered hinges sprang at his touch—  
raging then for gore he gripped in his hand-vice  
the ruined bolt-work wrenched it away  
leapt into the hall loomed with blood-rage  
aching with life-lust—from his eyes shone forth  
a fearful glowering fire-coals smoldering.  
Near him he spied sleeping together  
close war-brothers waiting peacefully  
730 prime for plucking. He exploded with fury  
growled with greed-hunger glared all around him  
burning to separate bodies from life-breath  
drain blood-vessels before breaking of day.  
His luck left him on that last slaughter-night—  
no more after sunrise would he murder and run.  
Wakeful and watching wonder in his mind  
Hygelac's nephew held to his bedrest  
anxious to measure that monster's strength.  
Nor did that thief think about waiting  
740 but searched with fire-eyes snared a doomed one  
in terminal rest tore frantically  
crunched bonelockings crammed blood-morsels  
gulped him with glee. Gloating with his luck  
he finished the first one his feet and his hands  
swallowed all of him. He stepped closer  
groped with claw-hands grabbed the next one—  
the watchful Geat grabbed back at him

gripped with his fingers that great demon-hand  
 tightened his grasp tugged steadily.  
 750 Soon that fen-stalker found himself caught  
 grasped and twisted by a greater handgrip  
 than any he had known in the earth's regions  
 iron finger-clamps—into his mind  
 fear came nudging—nowhere could he move.  
 His thoughts yearned away he wished for his mere-den  
 devil's company—doubt pulled at him  
 a new sensation slid into his mind.  
 Then Hygelac's thane held to his boasting  
 mindful of his speech stood quickly then  
 760 tightened his fist—fingers crackled  
 Grendel pulled back Beowulf followed.  
 That dark wanderer wished for more room  
 to be on his way back to the moor-hills  
 flee to the fens. He felt his knuckles  
 crushed in that grip. A grim visitor  
 that fate-marked fiend found in Heorot.  
 The hall thundered—to hovering Danes  
 safe hut-dwellers sounds of that battle  
 clattered and roared. They raged together  
 770 warrior and guest—the walls rumbled.  
 With great wonder the wine-hall survived  
 twin horn-gables trembling with combat  
 towering high above—it held steadily  
 inside and out with iron log-bonds  
 forged by smith-hammers. The floor shuddered  
 strong mead-benches sailed to the walls  
 burnished banquet-seats bounced and clattered.  
 Hrothgar's wisemen hallowed counselors  
 had never believed that a living creature  
 780 might break Heorot bring down the walls—  
 only fire's embrace flames' greediness



could swallow that hall. Storm-sounds of death  
rocked the horn-gables hammered the roof—  
shivering Danefolk shook with hell-fear  
heard through the walls a wailing sorrow.  
God's demon-foe ground his blood-teeth  
howled to be gone home to the ice-streams  
far from that hall. Hygelac's thane  
strongest mortal mightiest of hand  
790 locked that hell-fiend hard within his grasp.  
He found no reason to free that monster  
spare him to flee far across the moors  
nor did he consider that sinful life  
useful to anyone. Anxious for their leader  
men of the Geats grabbed treasure-swords  
lifted them high to help their champion  
fight for his life with file-hardened edges.  
They were not prepared for this new hand-battling  
those hard-swinging swordmen hewing with steel-bites  
800 slashing about them with shield-breaking cuts  
seeking that fiend-soul—they fought without knowing  
that the choicest of blades champions' war-weapons  
were helpless to harm that hell's messenger.  
He had cast his spell on keenest thane-weapons  
finest treasure-swords though his time was short—  
that final night-visit finished his hall-raids  
destiny struck his damned hell-soul  
banished it forever past boundaries of grace.  
Then that giant ravager rejected by God  
810 marked with murder measured by his sins  
finally conceived in his fiend's mindthoughts  
that his loathsome body would bear no more.  
Hygelac's thane held fast to him  
tightened his grip—Grendel yearned away  
his arm stretched thin thronging with pain—

a great death-wound gaped in his shoulder  
 sinew-bonds weakened snapped viciously  
 bonelockings burst. To Beowulf there  
 victory was granted. Grendel fled then  
 820 sickened with death slouched under fen-slopes  
 to his joyless home no hope for his life—  
 he knew at last the number of his days.  
 To the Danes' misery a dawning of mercy  
 rose from that battle, bright deliverance.  
 Heorot was cleansed healed of thane-slaughter  
 aching morning-grief, emptied of murder  
 by that tall visitor—victory was bright  
 joy to his heart. He held to his promise,  
 evening boastwords, banished from that hall  
 830 dark sorrow-songs consoled the Danes  
 for long torture-years terror in the night  
 an empty meadhall from evening till dawn.  
 He hailed the sunrise hoisted a signal  
 a clear token-sign that terror was dead  
 nailed Grendel's arm that great handgrip  
 near the high gable-point of Heorot's roof.  
 By morning's light many a warrior  
 gathered watchfully by the gift-hall's door.  
 Chieftains and followers from far and from near  
 840 gazed at that wonder grisly monster-arm  
 hand and knife-claws high death-trophy.  
 Grendel's life-loss gladdened the Danes  
 who followed his footprints where he fled to his death  
 left his sorrow-tracks staining the moors  
 went back to the mere bleak monster-home  
 teeming with nicors tomb of the damned.  
 The water-top trembled welling with blood  
 roiled restlessly with red venom-waves  
 hot demon-gore heaved from the depths—



850 Grendel was deathwards doomed man-killer  
 laid down his life in that loathsome mere—  
 hell received him and his heathen soul.  
 They turned away wonder in their hearts—  
 old counselors carried by horses  
 many a young one mounted beside them  
 turned back from the mere. Beowulf's renown  
 filled their mindthoughts—many a Spear-Dane  
 mindful of that night remembering hell-years  
 swore that no man under mighty heaven  
 860 from south or north on sea or on land  
 was greater in battle than Beowulf the Geat.  
 Nor did they blame their bountiful lord  
 gladman Hrothgar good man and king.

HROTHGAR'S MINSTREL now improvises a song of Beowulf, then moves on to the dragon slayer Sigemund (an early legendary Danish hero) and his nephew Fitela, who shared his adventures after the dragon slaying, thus praising the victory over Grendel and anticipating Beowulf's final battle. This is the earliest literary account of the famous Völsung family (Waelsing in *Beowulf*), later versions of which portray Sigemund's son Sigurd (later Siegfried) as the dragon slayer.

At times the riders ready for contest  
 let their war-steeds leap to the race  
 where broad meadowlands bright grass-tables  
 widened the trail. At times the minstrel  
 heavy with memory mindful of the past,  
 ancient war-sagas old monster-tales,  
 870 wove his verse-songs—one word found another  
 skillfully bound. He sang at first  
 of Beowulf's valor victory in Heorot  
 death of a monster and his dark water-home  
 a champion's tale. He told what he knew

stories he had heard of Sigemund the Dane  
 marvelous moments of mighty sword-feats  
 Waelsing's adventures wide traveling  
 secret wanderings seldom disclosed  
 except to Fitela faithful companion  
 880 when he fell to telling tales of his youth  
 to his only shield-friend always by his side—  
 uncle and nephew in narrow adventures  
 seeking forest-fiends strange wood-giants  
 ending them with swords. After his deathday  
 Sigemund's renown was sung in battle-songs  
 tales of dragon-breath days of sword-slaughter  
 glorious rewards. Under gray barrow-stone  
 he gambled his life gathered his courage  
 fought against his fate, nor was Fitela with him.  
 890 It chanced that his sword-point struck through the flesh  
 pierced that serpent stuck in the barrow-wall—  
 that marvelous dragon died of murder.  
 Sigemund survived unsinged by that breath  
 earned a treasure-mound for his own delight  
 a loan from destiny. He loaded a boat  
 bore to its bosom the bright slaughter-prize  
 that serpent's goldnest—the steaming dragon  
 monstrously hot melted to the ground.  
 The wandering Waelsing was widely renowned  
 900 most hailed of heroes after Heremod fell  
 stumbled to his death restored to Sigemund  
 the greater glory-name. Good King Heremod  
 stooped to evil-days stunned his kingdom  
 joined fiend-creatures fared to hell with them  
 after his deathfall. Danes mourned for that  
 bowed to anguish baleful life-sorrow.  
 They ached with yearning for those early throne-years  
 bountiful memories—many a wiseman



had looked to that lord for long peace-days  
910 feasts and friendship as his father's king-love  
had brought to the Danes—deep treachery  
darkened their gift-hall as that dangerous man  
bent down to evil. Beowulf prevailed  
Hygelac's war-thane held to his promise  
brought to all of them bright victory.

They raced their mounts measured the pathway  
on the track to Heorot. The hastening of day  
shoved up the sky—soon came fugitives  
from safe night-lodgings to see that arm-trophy  
920 high upon the hall. Their hopeful king  
keeper of the hoard came from the bride-bower  
marched with his house-guard to Heorot's doorway  
and his queen with him, waiting for hope-news,  
measured the hall-yard maidens at her side.  
Hrothgar spoke then stood by the doorstep  
stared above him at the steep roof-gable  
garnished with gold and Grendel's hand:  
“May thanks to the Wielder for this wondrous sight  
be long in our hearts. Loathsome misery  
930 Grendel has brought me. God brings to us  
wonder after wonder Wielder of glory.  
Until this day I dared not imagine  
relief from sorrow shame and treachery  
sinful murdering when stained with gore  
this best of meadhalls mournfully stood  
empty and idle—agony and grief  
gripped our heart-thoughts with no hope for mercy  
a hand to defend us from that foul hell-monster  
sorcery and death. Through the Deemer's will  
940 a visiting Geat has vanquished forever  
this murdering demon that no Dane's courage

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