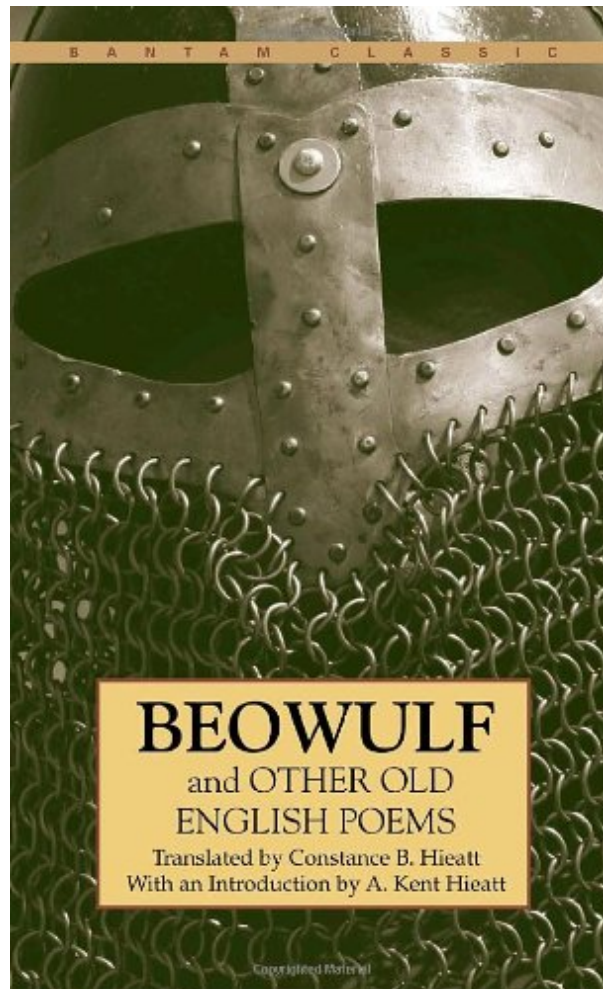
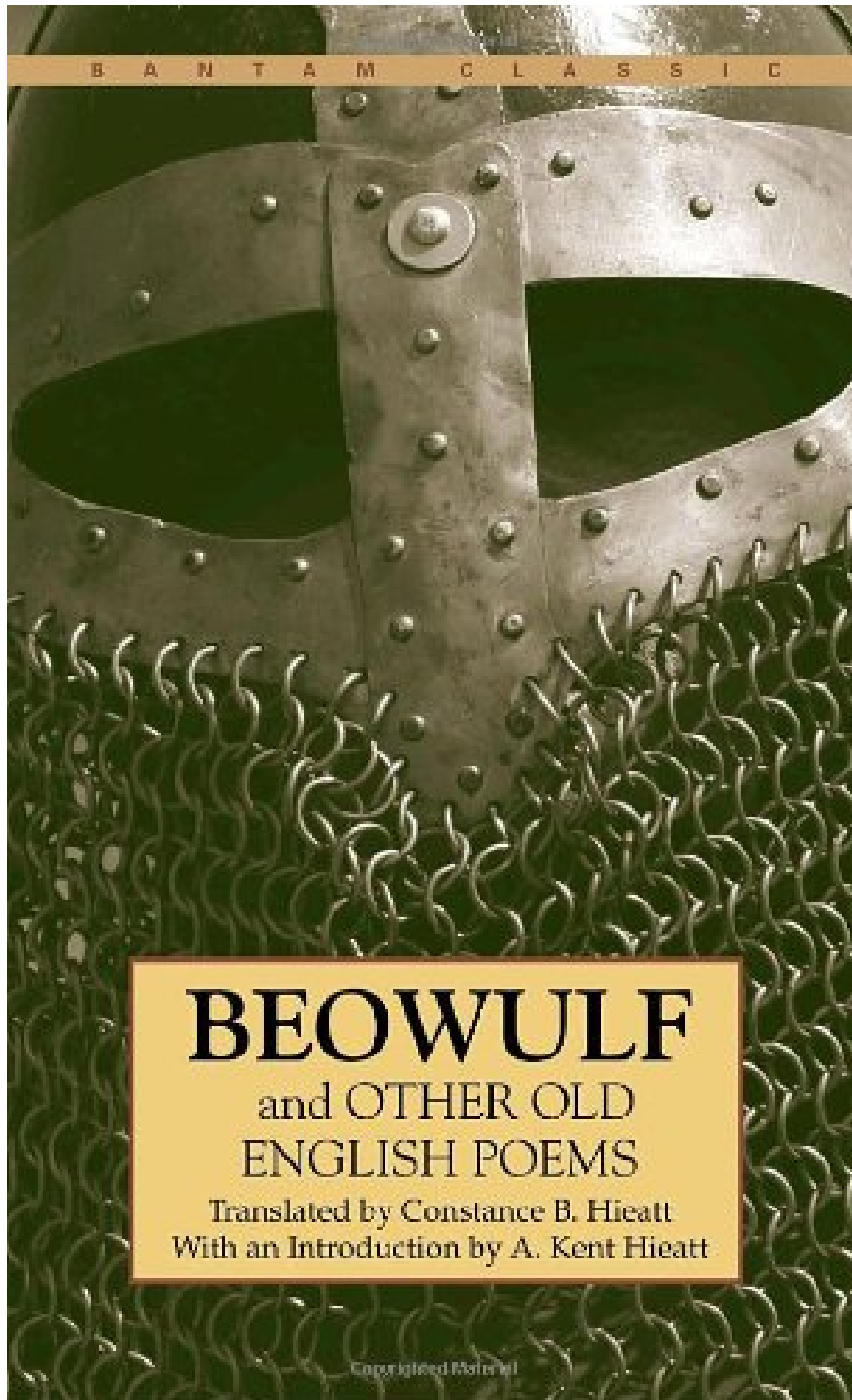


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BEOWULF
and OTHER OLD
ENGLISH POEMS

Translated by Constance B. Heatt
With an Introduction by A. Kent Heatt

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The Founding of the Scylding Dynasty

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PART I: The Cleansing of Heorot

Heorot Is Built and Assaulted by the Monster Grendel

1

When the prince his father was gone, Beowulf, son of Scyld, reigned over the people; he was renowned among nations for a long time. To him in turn was born high Healfdene, who rules the Danes gloriously as long as he lived—a venerable leader, fierce in battle. To Healfdene, the leader of hosts, four children all told were born into the world: Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good, and a daughter, who, they say, was Onela's queen—consort of the Swedish king.

Then Hrothgar was granted success in battle and glory in war, so that his friends and kinsmen obeyed him willingly, and his band of warriors grew large. It came into his mind to order a great mead-hall built, one which the children of men should hear of forever; there he would give out all that God gave him (except the public land and the lives of men) to young and old. I have heard that he then ordered work to adorn the building from nations far and wide throughout this earth. The time soon came when the greatest of halls was quite ready, and the ruler whose word was widely respected gave it the name of Heorot. He did not forget his promise to give out rings and treasures at the feast. The hall towered, high and wide-gabled: it awaited the hostile flames of hateful fire. The time had not yet come when deadly hate would arise between a son and father-in-law after a deed of violence.

This was a time of suffering for the powerful demon who dwelt in darkness, when he heard loud rejoicing in the hall every day. There was the sound of the harp and the sweet song of the minstrel, who told about the creation of men, long ago; he said that the Almighty made the earth, the beautiful land bounded by the water; then, triumphant, he placed the sun and the moon as a light to lighten those who dwell on the land, and adorned the earth with branches and leaves; and he also created every living creature which moves after its kind.—Thus the retainers of Hrothgar lived in joy and happiness, until the hellish fiend began his wicked deeds.

This grim spirit was called Grendel. A notorious prowler of the waste lands, he held sway in the moors, the fen and fastness. The miserable creature had long inhabited the haunts of monsters, since the Creator had condemned him and all his race, the progeny of Cain, in vengeance for the slaying of Abel. Cain got no joy by his murderous act, but was banished by the eternal Lord; God drove him from mankind for that crime. Of his race were born all evil broods—ogres, elves, and monsters, and the giants who contended against God for a long time—he paid them back for that!

2

When night fell, Grendel went to seek out the lofty house, to see how the Danes had settled down after drinking beer. There, inside, he found the band of noble warriors, sleeping after the feast: they did not know sorrow and the misery of men. Grim and greedy, the evil creature was alert at once: the cruel and savage monster took from their beds thirty of the thanes. Then he left there, exulting in his booty, seeking out his home with his fill of slaughter.

Then a dawn, with the break of day, Grendel's might in warfare was no secret to men. Where there had been feast and merrymaking, weeping arose, a great cry in the morning.

The glorious chief sat joyless; the prince, mighty of old, endured sorrow for his thanes when they saw the track of the foe, the accursed demon. The trouble now was severe beyond measure, hateful and long lasting: there was no further respite, but again the next night he committed more murder—he did not shrink from hostile act and wicked deed, for he was too fixed in the fetters of sin. Now it was easy to find a man who looked for a resting place further away, a bed in other buildings, when he had seen clear signs of the hall-visitor's hatred: he who escaped the enemy kept himself further away in a safer place.

The monster prevailed in this way and contended against right, one against all, until the best of houses stood empty. That lasted a long time: for twelve winters the Danish lord was afflicted with these troubles and suffered great sorrow. Sad lays made it openly known to men that Grendel warred against Hrothgar for a long time; he waged warfare, committed wicked deeds and hostile acts, for many seasons of continual strife. He did not want peace with any of the Danish host; he did not wish to stop his deadly evil, nor to settle the feud with payment—none of the counselors had reason to expect great compensation from the hand of the murderer. On the contrary, the dark death-shadow persecuted young and old, lingered and ambushed. He held the misty moors in perpetual darkness—no man knows where such demons go.

Thus the enemy of mankind, the fearful outcast, often did many wicked deeds and perpetrated greivous injuries. In the dark nights he prowled Heorot, the richly decorated hall; but he could not approach the throne, the seat where treasure was given—God prevented him—nor feel gratitude for gifts.

That was heartbreaking misery for the Scylding's lord. Many great leaders frequently sat in counsel pondering plans, in deliberation as to what would be best for brave-spirited men to do against the awful horror. At times they made sacrifices to idols in heathen temples, entreating the devil to help them relieve the distress of the people. Such was their custom, the hope of heathens—their thoughts were on hell, for they did not know their Creator, the Judge of deeds: they neither knew the Lord God nor understood how to worship the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of glories. Woe to him who, in cruel affliction, shall thrust his soul into the embrace of the fire—he shall know no comfort or change. Well shall it be for him who may go to the Lord after the day of death and ask for peace in the bosom of the Father!

So Healfdene's son brooded continually over the trouble of the time; nor could the wise prince turn that misery aside. The strife which had come upon the people was too hateful and enduring, a cruel, dire distress—the greatest of evils that come by night.

A brave man of the tribe of the Geats, a thane of Hygelac, heard in his homeland of Grendel's deeds. He was the strongest and mightiest man alive, noble and stalwart. He ordered a good ship prepared for him, saying he wished to seek out the warrior king over the road of the swans, since that glorious leader had need of men. Wise men did not blame him for this venture, although he was dear to them: they encouraged the brave man, and looked at the omens. The hero had chosen the keenest champions he could find among the Geatish people, and it was as one of fifteen that he led the way to the ship, a skilled seaman guiding his band along the shore.

In good time the boat was on the waves, floating under the cliffs. Watchful men climbed the prow. The ocean streams eddied, sea washed against sand, as the men bore bright trappings and splendid armor into the ship. The men shoved out: the warriors launched the well-braced craft on the longed-for journey. Driven by the wind, the boat went over the billowy sea, foamy necked, like a bird, until in due time on the following day the curved prow had advanced so that the seafarers saw land; they sighted the shining sea cliffs, the steep banks of the shore, the broad headlands. The sea had been crossed and the voyage was at an end. Quickly the people of the Geats mounted on the land and moored the ship—their battle garments, shirts of mail, rattled—and thanked God that their voyage had been easy.

From the wall the Danish guard, who had the duty of keeping watch on the sea cliffs, saw bright shields and ready armor brought over the gangway: he was very curious to know what men these were. Hrothgar's thane rode his horse to the shore, brandishing a mighty spear in his hand, and spoke in formal words: "What manner of men are you, warriors in armor, who have thus come in your lofty ship here across the sea? I have been coast guard here for a long time, holding watch by the sea so that no enemy force might harry the land of the Danes. Never have armed men come here more openly—yet you did not have leave from our warriors, or the agreement of kinsmen. Never have I seen a mightier nobleman in the world, a greater man in armor, than one among you: surely that is no mere hall retainer exalted with weapons—may his splendid countenance, his peerless appearance, never belie him!—Now I must know your lineage before you may go further, possibly spying on the land of the Danes; strangers, seafarers, now hear my plain thought: best make it known quickly where you come from."

The chief answered him; the leader of the band said, "We are people of the Geatish nation, Hygelac's hearth companions. My father was a noble leader well known among nations; he was called Ecgtheow. He lived through many winters, and was an old man when he departed from this world. Wise men remember him well all over the earth. We come with friendly intentions to seek your lord, the son of Healfdene; be of good counsel to us! We have a weighty errand to the glorious lord of the Danes—nor, I think, will there be anything secret about it. You know whether what we have heard is true: that an enemy—I know not who, a mysterious persecutor—shows his strange hostility among the Danes in the dark nights and works injury and slaughter in a terrible way. I may be able to give Hrothgar sincere good counsel as to how he, who is so good and wise, may overcome the fiend—if a change is ever to be, if a cure for these miserable afflictions is to

come in its turn, and sorrows end. Otherwise, he will suffer trials and distress for ever after, as long as the best of houses remains in its lofty place."

The guard, a fearless officer, spoke as he sat there on his horse: "An acute warrior who has a clear mind should be a judge of both words and deeds. I understand that this band is friendly to the lord of the Danes. Go on with your weapons and armor; I will guide you. Also, I shall bid my men to guard your boat honorably against every enemy, watch over the newly tarred vessel on the sand, until the curved-prowed ship again bears its beloved lord over the sea to the land of the Geats. One who does brave deeds will be allowed to survive the storm of battle unhurt."

They went on their way. The ship remained; the spacious vessel was moored with a rope, fast at anchor. Over the warriors' cheek-guards shone boar figures, decorated with gold, shining and hardened by fire: the warlike boar kept guard over the fierce ones. The company hastened until they could perceive the timbered hall, splendid and decorated with gold; that was the most famous building under heaven, the dwelling of the mighty lord; its light shone over many lands. The guard showed them that bright home of brave men so that they could go straight to it, then turned his horse and said, "It is time for me to go. May the almighty Father, by his grace, keep you safe in your undertaking! I shall go to the sea to keep watch against hostile bands."

5

The street was paved with stone, and the path guided the band of men. Chain-mail gleamed and bright iron rings sang in their armor as they came to the hall in their warlike gear. Weary of the sea, they set their broad, strong shields against the wall of the building and sat down on the bench, with a ringing of chain mail. Their spears, war gear of seamen, stood gathered together, the ashwood gleaming gray at the tip; the band was well equipped with weapons.

There a noble champion asked the warriors of their descent: "From where have you brought decorated shields, gray coats of mail and visored helmets, a host of spears? I am Hrothgar's herald and officer. Never have I seen a bolder band of strangers. I think you have come to Hrothgar in daring mood: not as exiles seeking refuge, but as brave men in search of glory."

The famous hero answered him: strong in his helmet, the valiant Geat replied, "We are Hygelac's table-companions: Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell my errand to the son of Healfdene, the glorious prince who is your lord, if he who is so great will allow us to greet him."

Wulfgar replied (he was a prince of the Wendels, well known for his wisdom and valor): "I will ask the lord and ruler of the Danes, the giver of rings, as you request. I shall tell the glorious lord of your venture and quickly bring you back the answer the great one thinks fit to give me."

Quickly he turned to the place where Hrothgar, old and gray, sat with his band of nobles; the valiant warrior went up and stood by the shoulder of the Danish lord—he knew the custom of the court. Wulfgar spoke to his lord: "Geatish people are here, come from over the expanse of the water; the warriors call their chief Beowulf. My lord, they ask to exchange words with you. Do not refuse them your answer, gracious Hrothgar! They are well-armed men who seem worthy of the respect of nobles; and the chief who led these warriors here is certainly a powerful man."

6

Hrothgar, the Scyldings' protector, spoke: "I knew him when he was a boy. His father was called Ecgtheow: to him Hrethel, king of the Geats, gave his only daughter in marriage. Now his brave son has come here to see a loyal friend. Seafarers who have carried gifts for the pleasure of the Geats said that this famous warrior has the strength of thirty men in his grip. I expect that holy God in his grace has sent him to the Danes to help us against Grendel's terror. I shall offer the hero treasures for his daring. Hurry: bid the band of kinsmen to come in to see me and tell them that the Danish people welcome them."

Wulfgar went to the door and brought his message from within: "My victorious lord, the ruler of Denmark, bids me say to you that he knows of your noble descent, and that you courageous men from over the sea are welcome to him. Now go in your battle gear, wearing your helmets, to see Hrothgar; let the shields and wooden spears remain here to await the result of the conference."

The hero arose with many a warrior around him: a troop of mighty thanes. Some stayed there to guard the war gear, as their leader ordered them, while the others hastened under Heorot's roof, the herald guiding them. The helmeted leader went on until he stood on the hearth.

His mail, the battle net linked by the skill of the smith, shone as Beowulf spoke: "Hail, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer, and I have undertaken many a glorious deed in my youth. In my native land I heard of Grendel's doings. Seafarers say that this hall, the best of buildings, stands idle and useless to all when the evening light fades under heaven's vault.

"The noblest and wisest counselors of my people advised me to come to you, lord Hrothgar, because they knew of my great strength. They themselves saw me when, stained with the blood of enemies, I came from battles, when I bound five giants and destroyed their race, and killed water monsters on the waves at night; I endured great hardship to avenge their persecution of the Geats—they had asked for trouble! I ground down those fierce creatures, and now I will fight against the monster Grendel; alone I shall settle the dispute with the demon.

"Chief of the Danes, protector of the nation, I want to ask one boon of you now—do not refuse me, defender of warriors and friend of the people, now that I have come so far—that I alone, with my bold troop of nobles, may purge Heorot.

"Also, I have learned that the monster, in his recklessness, does not care to use weapons; then, so that Hygelac, my lord, may rejoice over me in his heart, I will scorn to bear a sword or broad shield to the battle but will grapple against the fiend with my hands and fight for my life, enemy against enemy; he whom death takes there must trust to the judgment of the Lord. I expect that if he can have his way, he will devour the Geatish people in the war-hall without hesitation—as he has often done to mighty warriors.

"If death takes me, there will be no need for you to cover my head, for Grendel will have my bloodstained body; he will bear off the bloody corpse to devour it. The solitary monster will eat ruthlessly, staining his moor retreat—and you will not have to worry longer over the disposal of my body. If I fall in battle, send Hygelac this best of war garments, finest of mail, which protects my breast; it is an heirloom of Hrethel, the work of Weland the smith. Destiny always comes about as it must!"

7

Hrothgar, defender of the Scyldings, spoke: "You have come to help us and fight in our defence, my friend Beowulf. Your father's blows brought about a great feud when he killed Heatholaf, among the Wyflings, so

that his people, fearing war would result, could not shelter him. From there he sought out the Danish people over the rolling waves, visiting the Scyldings at the time when I first reigned over Denmark and held the gracious realm, treasure city of warriors, in my youth. Heorogar was dead then—my elder brother was no longer living; he was a better man than I! After that I settled the feud with money. I sent ancient treasure over the water to the Wylfings; in return, Ecgtheow swore oaths to me.

"It is with great sorrow in my heart that I tell any man what Grendel has done to me in his malice—what injuries and calamities he has brought about in Heorot. My troop of retainers has grown smaller; destiny has swept my warriors off with Grendel's terror. God can easily put an end to the deeds of the mad ravager! Often warriors drunk with beer have vowed over the ale cup to wait in the beer hall with their swords for Grendel's onslaught. Then in the morning, when day broke, this mead-hall was bloodstained; all the bench planks were soaked with blood, the hall stained with battle gore. I had the fewer loyal men, beloved veteran retainers, since death had carried them off.

"—Now sit down to the feast, and, in due time, listen to lays of warriors' victories, as your heart may prompt you."

A bench in the beer hall was yielded to the men of the Geats, and the brave champions went to sit there. A servant did his duty; bearing a decorated ale cup in his hands, he poured out the bright drink. From time to time a clear-voiced minstrel sang in Heorot, and the large company of warriors, Danes and Geats, rejoiced together.

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Unique and beautiful, Beowulf brings to life a society of violence and honor, fierce warriors and bloody battles, deadly monsters and famous swords. Written by an unknown poet in about the eighth century, this masterpiece of Anglo-Saxon literature transforms legends, myth, history, and ancient songs into the richly colored tale of the hero Beowulf, the loathsome man-eater Grendel, his vengeful water-hag mother, and a treasure-hoarding dragon. The earliest surviving epic poem in any modern European language. Beowulf is a stirring portrait of a heroic world—somber, vast, and magnificent.

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This was a time of suffering for the powerful demon who dwelt in darkness, when he heard loud rejoicing in

the hall every day. There was the sound of the harp and the sweet song of the minstrel, who told about the creation of men, long ago; he said that the Almighty made the earth, the beautiful land bounded by the water; then, triumphant, he placed the sun and the moon as a light to lighten those who dwell on the land, and adorned the earth with branches and leaves; and he also created every living creature which moves after its kind.—Thus the retainers of Hrothgar lived in joy and happiness, until the hellish fiend began his wicked deeds.

This grim spirit was called Grendel. A notorious prowler of the waste lands, he held sway in the moors, the fen and fastness. The miserable creature had long inhabited the haunts of monsters, since the Creator had condemned him and all his race, the progeny of Cain, in vengeance for the slaying of Abel. Cain got no joy by his murderous act, but was banished by the eternal Lord; God drove him from mankind for that crime. Of his race were born all evil broods—ogres, elves, and monsters, and the giants who contended against God for a long time—he paid them back for that!

2

When night fell, Grendel went to seek out the lofty house, to see how the Danes had settled down after drinking beer. There, inside, he found the band of noble warriors, sleeping after the feast: they did not know sorrow and the misery of men. Grim and greedy, the evil creature was alert at once: the cruel and savage monster took from their beds thirty of the thanes. Then he left there, exulting in his booty, seeking out his home with his fill of slaughter.

Then a dawn, with the break of day, Grendel's might in warfare was no secret to men. Where there had been feast and merrymaking, weeping arose, a great cry in the morning.

The glorious chief sat joyless; the prince, mighty of old, endured sorrow for his thanes when they saw the track of the foe, the accursed demon. The trouble now was severe beyond measure, hateful and long lasting: there was no further respite, but again the next night he committed more murder—he did not shrink from hostile act and wicked deed, for he was too fixed in the fetters of sin. Now it was easy to find a man who looked for a resting place further away, a bed in other buildings, when he had seen clear signs of the hall-visitor's hatred: he who escaped the enemy kept himself further away in a safer place.

The monster prevailed in this way and contended against right, one against all, until the best of houses stood empty. That lasted a long time: for twelve winters the Danish lord was afflicted with these troubles and suffered great sorrow. Sad lays made it openly known to men that Grendel warred against Hrothgar for a long time; he waged warfare, committed wicked deeds and hostile acts, for many seasons of continual strife. He did not want peace with any of the Danish host; he did not wish to stop his deadly evil, nor to settle the feud with payment—none of the counselors had reason to expect great compensation from the hand of the murderer. On the contrary, the dark death-shadow persecuted young and old, lingered and ambushed. He held the misty moors in perpetual darkness—no man knows where such demons go.

Thus the enemy of mankind, the fearful outcast, often did many wicked deeds and perpetrated greivous injuries. In the dark nights he prowled Heorot, the richly decorated hall; but he could not approach the throne, the seat where treasure was given—God prevented him—nor feel gratitude for gifts.

That was heartbreaking misery for the Scylding's lord. Many great leaders frequently sat in counsel pondering plans, in deliberation as to what would be best for brave-spirited men to do against the awful horror. At times they made sacrifices to idols in heathen temples, entreating the devil to help them relieve the

distress of the people. Such was their custom, the hope of heathens—their thoughts were on hell, for they did not know their Creator, the Judge of deeds: they neither knew the Lord God nor understood how to worship the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of glories. Woe to him who, in cruel affliction, shall thrust his soul into the embrace of the fire—he shall know no comfort or change. Well shall it be for him who may go to the Lord after the day of death and ask for peace in the bosom of the Father!

Beowulf's Arrival

3

So Healfdene's son brooded continually over the trouble of the time; nor could the wise prince turn that misery aside. The strife which had come upon the people was too hateful and enduring, a cruel, dire distress—the greatest of evils that come by night.

A brave man of the tribe of the Geats, a thane of Hygelac, heard in his homeland of Grendel's deeds. He was the strongest and mightiest man alive, noble and stalwart. He ordered a good ship prepared for him, saying he wished to seek out the warrior king over the road of the swans, since that glorious leader had need of men. Wise men did not blame him for this venture, although he was dear to them: they encouraged the brave man, and looked at the omens. The hero had chosen the keenest champions he could find among the Geatish people, and it was as one of fifteen that he led the way to the ship, a skilled seaman guiding his band along the shore.

In good time the boat was on the waves, floating under the cliffs. Watchful men climbed the prow. The ocean streams eddied, sea washed against sand, as the men bore bright trappings and splendid armor into the ship. The men shoved out: the warriors launched the well-braced craft on the longed-for journey. Driven by the wind, the boat went over the billowy sea, foamy necked, like a bird, until in due time on the following day the curved prow had advanced so that the seafarers saw land; they sighted the shining sea cliffs, the steep banks of the shore, the broad headlands. The sea had been crossed and the voyage was at an end. Quickly the people of the Geats mounted on the land and moored the ship—their battle garments, shirts of mail, rattled—and thanked God that their voyage had been easy.

From the wall the Danish guard, who had the duty of keeping watch on the sea cliffs, saw bright shields and ready armor brought over the gangway: he was very curious to know what men these were. Hrothgar's thane rode his horse to the shore, brandishing a mighty spear in his hand, and spoke in formal words: "What manner of men are you, warriors in armor, who have thus come in your lofty ship here across the sea? I have been coast guard here for a long time, holding watch by the sea so that no enemy force might harry the land of the Danes. Never have armed men come here more openly—yet you did not have leave from our warriors, or the agreement of kinsmen. Never have I seen a mightier nobleman in the world, a greater man in armor, than one among you: surely that is no mere hall retainer exalted with weapons—may his splendid countenance, his peerless appearance, never belie him!—Now I must know your lineage before you may go further, possibly spying on the land of the Danes; strangers, seafarers, now hear my plain thought: best make it known quickly where you come from."

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The chief answered him; the leader of the band said, "We are people of the Geatish nation, Hygelac's hearth companions. My father was a noble leader well known among nations; he was called Ecgtheow. He lived

through many winters, and was an old man when he departed from this world. Wise men remember him well all over the earth. We come with friendly intentions to seek your lord, the son of Healfdene; be of good counsel to us! We have a weighty errand to the glorious lord of the Danes—nor, I think, will there be anything secret about it. You know whether what we have heard is true: that an enemy—I know not who, a mysterious persecutor—shows his strange hostility among the Danes in the dark nights and works injury and slaughter in a terrible way. I may be able to give Hrothgar sincere good counsel as to how he, who is so good and wise, may overcome the fiend—if a change is ever to be, if a cure for these miserable afflictions is to come in its turn, and sorrows end. Otherwise, he will suffer trials and distress for ever after, as long as the best of houses remains in its lofty place."

The guard, a fearless officer, spoke as he sat there on his horse: "An acute warrior who has a clear mind should be a judge of both words and deeds. I understand that this band is friendly to the lord of the Danes. Go on with your weapons and armor; I will guide you. Also, I shall bid my men to guard your boat honorably against every enemy, watch over the newly tarred vessel on the sand, until the curved-prowed ship again bears its beloved lord over the sea to the land of the Geats. One who does brave deeds will be allowed to survive the storm of battle unhurt."

They went on their way. The ship remained; the spacious vessel was moored with a rope, fast at anchor. Over the warriors' cheek-guards shone boar figures, decorated with gold, shining and hardened by fire: the warlike boar kept guard over the fierce ones. The company hastened until they could perceive the timbered hall, splendid and decorated with gold; that was the most famous building under heaven, the dwelling of the mighty lord; its light shone over many lands. The guard showed them that bright home of brave men so that they could go straight to it, then turned his horse and said, "It is time for me to go. May the almighty Father, by his grace, keep you safe in your undertaking! I shall go to the sea to keep watch against hostile bands."

5

The street was paved with stone, and the path guided the band of men. Chain-mail gleamed and bright iron rings sang in their armor as they came to the hall in their warlike gear. Weary of the sea, they set their broad, strong shields against the wall of the building and sat down on the bench, with a ringing of chain mail. Their spears, war gear of seamen, stood gathered together, the ashwood gleaming gray at the tip; the band was well equipped with weapons.

There a noble champion asked the warriors of their descent: "From where have you brought decorated shields, gray coats of mail and visored helmets, a host of spears? I am Hrothgar's herald and officer. Never have I seen a bolder band of strangers. I think you have come to Hrothgar in daring mood: not as exiles seeking refuge, but as brave men in search of glory."

The famous hero answered him: strong in his helmet, the valiant Geat replied, "We are Hygelac's table-companions: Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell my errand to the son of Healfdene, the glorious prince who is your lord, if he who is so great will allow us to greet him."

Wulfgar replied (he was a prince of the Wendels, well known for his wisdom and valor): "I will ask the lord and ruler of the Danes, the giver of rings, as you request. I shall tell the glorious lord of your venture and quickly bring you back the answer the great one thinks fit to give me."

Quickly he turned to the place where Hrothgar, old and gray, sat with his band of nobles; the valiant warrior went up and stood by the shoulder of the Danish lord—he knew the custom of the court. Wulfgar spoke to

his lord: "Geatish people are here, come from over the expanse of the water; the warriors call their chief Beowulf. My lord, they ask to exchange words with you. Do not refuse them your answer, gracious Hrothgar! They are well-armed men who seem worthy of the respect of nobles; and the chief who led these warriors here is certainly a powerful man."

6

Hrothgar, the Scyldings' protector, spoke: "I knew him when he was a boy. His father was called Ecgtheow: to him Hrethel, king of the Geats, gave his only daughter in marriage. Now his brave son has come here to see a loyal friend. Seafarers who have carried gifts for the pleasure of the Geats said that this famous warrior has the strength of thirty men in his grip. I expect that holy God in his grace has sent him to the Danes to help us against Grendel's terror. I shall offer the hero treasures for his daring. Hurry: bid the band of kinsmen to come in to see me and tell them that the Danish people welcome them."

Wulfgar went to the door and brought his message from within: "My victorious lord, the ruler of Denmark, bids me say to you that he knows of your noble descent, and that you courageous men from over the sea are welcome to him. Now go in your battle gear, wearing your helmets, to see Hrothgar; let the shields and wooden spears remain here to await the result of the conference."

The hero arose with many a warrior around him: a troop of mighty thanes. Some stayed there to guard the war gear, as their leader ordered them, while the others hastened under Heorot's roof, the herald guiding them. The helmeted leader went on until he stood on the hearth.

His mail, the battle net linked by the skill of the smith, shone as Beowulf spoke: "Hail, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer, and I have undertaken many a glorious deed in my youth. In my native land I heard of Grendel's doings. Seafarers say that this hall, the best of buildings, stands idle and useless to all when the evening light fades under heaven's vault.

"The noblest and wisest counselors of my people advised me to come to you, lord Hrothgar, because they knew of my great strength. They themselves saw me when, stained with the blood of enemies, I came from battles, when I bound five giants and destroyed their race, and killed water monsters on the waves at night; I endured great hardship to avenge their persecution of the Geats—they had asked for trouble! I ground down those fierce creatures, and now I will fight against the monster Grendel; alone I shall settle the dispute with the demon.

"Chief of the Danes, protector of the nation, I want to ask one boon of you now—do not refuse me, defender of warriors and friend of the people, now that I have come so far—that I alone, with my bold troop of nobles, may purge Heorot.

"Also, I have learned that the monster, in his recklessness, does not care to use weapons; then, so that Hygelac, my lord, may rejoice over me in his heart, I will scorn to bear a sword or broad shield to the battle but will grapple against the fiend with my hands and fight for my life, enemy against enemy; he whom death takes there must trust to the judgment of the Lord. I expect that if he can have his way, he will devour the Geatish people in the war-hall without hesitation—as he has often done to mighty warriors.

"If death takes me, there will be no need for you to cover my head, for Grendel will have my bloodstained body; he will bear off the bloody corpse to devour it. The solitary monster will eat ruthlessly, staining his moor retreat—and you will not have to worry longer over the disposal of my body. If I fall in battle, send

Hygelac this best of war garments, finest of mail, which protects my breast; it is an heirloom of Hrethel, the work of Weland the smith. Destiny always comes about as it must!"

7

Hrothgar, defender of the Scyldings, spoke: "You have come to help us and fight in our defence, my friend Beowulf. Your father's blows brought about a great feud when he killed Heatholaf, among the Wyflings, so that his people, fearing war would result, could not shelter him. From there he sought out the Danish people over the rolling waves, visiting the Scyldings at the time when I first reigned over Denmark and held the gracious realm, treasure city of warriors, in my youth. Heorogar was dead then—my elder brother was no longer living; he was a better man than I! After that I settled the feud with money. I sent ancient treasure over the water to the Wyflings; in return, Ecgtheow swore oaths to me.

"It is with great sorrow in my heart that I tell any man what Grendel has done to me in his malice—what injuries and calamities he has brought about in Heorot. My troop of retainers has grown smaller; destiny has swept my warriors off with Grendel's terror. God can easily put an end to the deeds of the mad ravager! Often warriors drunk with beer have vowed over the ale cup to wait in the beer hall with their swords for Grendel's onslaught. Then in the morning, when day broke, this mead-hall was bloodstained; all the bench planks were soaked with blood, the hall stained with battle gore. I had the fewer loyal men, beloved veteran retainers, since death had carried them off.

"—Now sit down to the feast, and, in due time, listen to lays of warriors' victories, as your heart may prompt you."

A bench in the beer hall was yielded to the men of the Geats, and the brave champions went to sit there. A servant did his duty; bearing a decorated ale cup in his hands, he poured out the bright drink. From time to time a clear-voiced minstrel sang in Heorot, and the large company of warriors, Danes and Geats, rejoiced together.

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One of the Easier Translations to Understand

By Jonathan

I tried out several translations of Beowulf and this one seems the easiest to understand. Even so it would have helped if the translation had more notes accompanying it.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A good translation

By Newton SABBÁ GUIMARÃES, Ph.D.,LL. D.

It seems to be a very good translation from Old English. The notes at the end of the book, show a good erudition and just sense of Literary Theory regarding ancient works. Ezra Pound used to talk about Beowulf and its complexities and Pound was a genius. Beowulf is indeed a difficult and marvelous poem, and for it its translation into English or any other modern language requires a serious linguistical and philological knowledge. This one that is being reviewed is a very good translation. I have several translations of this poem, but I prefer this one. I liked (I compared with the original OE text) the way in which the poem was put into modern English verses. A hard task, let me say. Translator is, no doubts, a scholar in this wonderful, fascination language. He deserves to be praised, because translation is not a joke!

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By Andrew Winglee

Great book, excellent scholarship and research, but seller sent an old edition

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BEOWULF AND OTHER OLD ENGLISH POEMS BY CONSTANCE HIEATT PDF

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About the Author

The identity of Beowulf's author and the exact date and place of its composition are unknown. A single copy of the poem, dated about the year 1000, survived Henry VIII's destruction of England's monasteries and was collected by Sir Robert Cotton. This copy was damaged, but not disastrously, in a library fire in 1731 and was finally placed in the British Museum in 1753. The Danish scholar Thorkelin had copies made of it in 1787 and published the whole of it for the first time in 1815. Originally untitled, it is named after its hero, Beowulf, and is divided into two parts: In the first part the young Beowulf battles the monster Gredel and Grendels vengeful mother; in the second, an aged Beowulf kills a fire-breathing dragon but is himself mortally wounded.

No historic Beowulf is known to have existed, but some events described in the poem did take place in the sixth century. Early scholars tried to prove that more than one poet wrote the work, but it is now generally accepted that, like the Iliad's Homer, there was one composer of Beowulf, who took the stories, legends, and myths of his culture's oral traditions and bound them together with his own artistic vision. Written in England at least fifty years after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, and perhaps much later, the poem is recognized today as the longest and greatest poem extant in Old English—yet it describes an ancient heroic society of Danes and Geats in Scandinavia; there is not one word about England, or about the people who come to be known as the English, in the poem.

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PROLOGUE:

The Founding of the Scylding Dynasty

Indeed, we have heard of the glory of the great Danish kings in days of old and the noble deeds of the princes. Scyld Scefing often drove troops of enemies from their mead-hall seats; he terrified the lords of many tribes, although he had once been a destitute foundling. He found consolation for that: he prospered under the heavens, and grew in glory, until every one of his neighbors over the sea had to obey him and pay tribute. That was a good king.

Then a son was born to him, a child in the house, sent by God to help the people—he saw the distress they had suffered before when they were without a ruler for a long time. Therefore the Lord of life, Ruler of heaven, granted worldly honor to the son of Scyld. Beowulf was famous; his renown spread far and wide in the land of the Danes. A young man should do as he did, and with splendid gifts from his father's store win

loyal companions who will stand by him in old age and serve the people when war comes. He who does praiseworthy deeds will prosper everywhere.

Scyld departed from him at the fated time: the mighty man went into the keeping of the Lord. His own dear retainers bore away the beloved king, who had governed them so long, to the current of the sea, as he himself had ordered while he could still use words. There in the harbor stood a ring-prowed ship, covered with ice and ready to set out; it was a craft fit for a prince. They laid their dear lord, the giver of rings, in the bosom of the ship; they put the glorious one by the mast. Many treasures and precious things from far away were brought there—never was a ship more beautifully equipped with armor and weapons of war, swords and coats of mail. On the dead lord's bosom lay a multitude of treasures that were to go far with him in the power of the flood; nor did they give him less valuable treasure than did those who first sent him forth, alone over the waves, when he was a child. They set a golden banner high over his head; then they gave him to the sea and let the water carry him away. Their spirits were saddened, their hearts mournful. Men on earth, even the wisest of counselors, do not know how to tell who truly received that cargo.

PART I: The Cleansing of Heorot

Heorot Is Built and Assaulted by the Monster Grendel

1

When the prince his father was gone, Beowulf, son of Scyld, reigned over the people; he was renowned among nations for a long time. To him in turn was born high Healfdene, who rules the Danes gloriously as long as he lived—a venerable leader, fierce in battle. To Healfdene, the leader of hosts, four children all told were born into the world: Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good, and a daughter, who, they say, was Onela's queen—consort of the Swedish king.

Then Hrothgar was granted success in battle and glory in war, so that his friends and kinsmen obeyed him willingly, and his band of warriors grew large. It came into his mind to order a great mead-hall built, one which the children of men should hear of forever; there he would give out all that God gave him (except the public land and the lives of men) to young and old. I have heard that he then ordered work to adorn the building from nations far and wide throughout this earth. The time soon came when the greatest of halls was quite ready, and the ruler whose word was widely respected gave it the name of Heorot. He did not forget his promise to give out rings and treasures at the feast. The hall towered, high and wide-gabled: it awaited the hostile flames of hateful fire. The time had not yet come when deadly hate would arise between a son and father-in-law after a deed of violence.

This was a time of suffering for the powerful demon who dwelt in darkness, when he heard loud rejoicing in the hall every day. There was the sound of the harp and the sweet song of the minstrel, who told about the creation of men, long ago; he said that the Almighty made the earth, the beautiful land bounded by the water; then, triumphant, he placed the sun and the moon as a light to lighten those who dwell on the land, and adorned the earth with branches and leaves; and he also created every living creature which moves after its kind.—Thus the retainers of Hrothgar lived in joy and happiness, until the hellish fiend began his wicked deeds.

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by his murderous act, but was banished by the eternal Lord; God drove him from mankind for that crime. Of his race were born all evil broods—ogres, elves, and monsters, and the giants who contended against God for a long time—he paid them back for that!

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They went on their way. The ship remained; the spacious vessel was moored with a rope, fast at anchor. Over the warriors' cheek-guards shone boar figures, decorated with gold, shining and hardened by fire: the warlike boar kept guard over the fierce ones. The company hastened until they could perceive the timbered hall, splendid and decorated with gold; that was the most famous building under heaven, the dwelling of the mighty lord; its light shone over many lands. The guard showed them that bright home of brave men so that they could go straight to it, then turned his horse and said, "It is time for me to go. May the almighty Father, by his grace, keep you safe in your undertaking! I shall go to the sea to keep watch against hostile bands."

5

The street was paved with stone, and the path guided the band of men. Chain-mail gleamed and bright iron rings sang in their armor as they came to the hall in their warlike gear. Weary of the sea, they set their broad, strong shields against the wall of the building and sat down on the bench, with a ringing of chain mail. Their spears, war gear of seamen, stood gathered together, the ashwood gleaming gray at the tip; the band was well equipped with weapons.

There a noble champion asked the warriors of their descent: "From where have you brought decorated shields, gray coats of mail and visored helmets, a host of spears? I am Hrothgar's herald and officer. Never have I seen a bolder band of strangers. I think you have come to Hrothgar in daring mood: not as exiles seeking refuge, but as brave men in search of glory."

The famous hero answered him: strong in his helmet, the valiant Geat replied, "We are Hygelac's table-companions: Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell my errand to the son of Healfdene, the glorious prince who is your lord, if he who is so great will allow us to greet him."

Wulfgar replied (he was a prince of the Wendels, well known for his wisdom and valor): "I will ask the lord and ruler of the Danes, the giver of rings, as you request. I shall tell the glorious lord of your venture and quickly bring you back the answer the great one thinks fit to give me."

Quickly he turned to the place where Hrothgar, old and gray, sat with his band of nobles; the valiant warrior went up and stood by the shoulder of the Danish lord—he knew the custom of the court. Wulfgar spoke to his lord: "Geatish people are here, come from over the expanse of the water; the warriors call their chief Beowulf. My lord, they ask to exchange words with you. Do not refuse them your answer, gracious Hrothgar! They are well-armed men who seem worthy of the respect of nobles; and the chief who led these warriors here is certainly a powerful man."

6

Hrothgar, the Scyldings' protector, spoke: "I knew him when he was a boy. His father was called Ecgtheow: to him Hrethel, king of the Geats, gave his only daughter in marriage. Now his brave son has come here to see a loyal friend. Seafarers who have carried gifts for the pleasure of the Geats said that this famous warrior

has the strength of thirty men in his grip. I expect that holy God in his grace has sent him to the Danes to help us against Grendel's terror. I shall offer the hero treasures for his daring. Hurry: bid the band of kinsmen to come in to see me and tell them that the Danish people welcome them."

Wulfgar went to the door and brought his message from within: "My victorious lord, the ruler of Denmark, bids me say to you that he knows of your noble descent, and that you courageous men from over the sea are welcome to him. Now go in your battle gear, wearing your helmets, to see Hrothgar; let the shields and wooden spears remain here to await the result of the conference."

The hero arose with many a warrior around him: a troop of mighty thanes. Some stayed there to guard the war gear, as their leader ordered them, while the others hastened under Heorot's roof, the herald guiding them. The helmeted leader went on until he stood on the hearth.

His mail, the battle net linked by the skill of the smith, shone as Beowulf spoke: "Hail, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer, and I have undertaken many a glorious deed in my youth. In my native land I heard of Grendel's doings. Seafarers say that this hall, the best of buildings, stands idle and useless to all when the evening light fades under heaven's vault.

"The noblest and wisest counselors of my people advised me to come to you, lord Hrothgar, because they knew of my great strength. They themselves saw me when, stained with the blood of enemies, I came from battles, when I bound five giants and destroyed their race, and killed water monsters on the waves at night; I endured great hardship to avenge their persecution of the Geats—they had asked for trouble! I ground down those fierce creatures, and now I will fight against the monster Grendel; alone I shall settle the dispute with the demon.

"Chief of the Danes, protector of the nation, I want to ask one boon of you now—do not refuse me, defender of warriors and friend of the people, now that I have come so far—that I alone, with my bold troop of nobles, may purge Heorot.

"Also, I have learned that the monster, in his recklessness, does not care to use weapons; then, so that Hygelac, my lord, may rejoice over me in his heart, I will scorn to bear a sword or broad shield to the battle but will grapple against the fiend with my hands and fight for my life, enemy against enemy; he whom death takes there must trust to the judgment of the Lord. I expect that if he can have his way, he will devour the Geatish people in the war-hall without hesitation—as he has often done to mighty warriors.

"If death takes me, there will be no need for you to cover my head, for Grendel will have my bloodstained body; he will bear off the bloody corpse to devour it. The solitary monster will eat ruthlessly, staining his moor retreat—and you will not have to worry longer over the disposal of my body. If I fall in battle, send Hygelac this best of war garments, finest of mail, which protects my breast; it is an heirloom of Hrethel, the work of Weland the smith. Destiny always comes about as it must!"

7

Hrothgar, defender of the Scyldings, spoke: "You have come to help us and fight in our defence, my friend Beowulf. Your father's blows brought about a great feud when he killed Heatholaf, among the Wyflings, so that his people, fearing war would result, could not shelter him. From there he sought out the Danish people over the rolling waves, visiting the Scyldings at the time when I first reigned over Denmark and held the gracious realm, treasure city of warriors, in my youth. Heorogar was dead then—my elder brother was no

longer living; he was a better man than I! After that I settled the feud with money. I sent ancient treasure over the water to the Wylfings; in return, Ecgtheow swore oaths to me.

"It is with great sorrow in my heart that I tell any man what Grendel has done to me in his malice—what injuries and calamities he has brought about in Heorot. My troop of retainers has grown smaller; destiny has swept my warriors off with Grendel's terror. God can easily put an end to the deeds of the mad ravager! Often warriors drunk with beer have vowed over the ale cup to wait in the beer hall with their swords for Grendel's onslaught. Then in the morning, when day broke, this mead-hall was bloodstained; all the bench planks were soaked with blood, the hall stained with battle gore. I had the fewer loyal men, beloved veteran retainers, since death had carried them off.

"—Now sit down to the feast, and, in due time, listen to lays of warriors' victories, as your heart may prompt you."

A bench in the beer hall was yielded to the men of the Geats, and the brave champions went to sit there. A servant did his duty; bearing a decorated ale cup in his hands, he poured out the bright drink. From time to time a clear-voiced minstrel sang in Heorot, and the large company of warriors, Danes and Geats, rejoiced together.

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