

Beowulf

Beowulf

Translated by J.G. Nichols



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Beowulf

Beowulf

Hwæt! Wē Gār-dena in gēardagum,
þēodcyninga þrym gefrūnon,
hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon!

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaþena þrēatum,
monegum mægþum meodosetla oftēah,
egsode eorl[as], syððan ærest wearð
fēasceaft funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād,
wēox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þāh,
oð þæt him æghwylc ymsittendra
ofer hronrāde hýran scolde,

10

gomban gyldan; þæt wæs gōd cyning!
Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned
geong in geardum, þone God sende
folce tō frōfre; fyrenðearfe ongeat,
þē hīe ær drugon aldor(lē)ase
lange hwīle; him þæs Līffrēa,
wuldres Wealdend woroldāre forgeaf,
Bēowulf wæs brēme – blæd wīde sprang –
Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.

Swā sceal (geong g)uma gōde gewyrcean,
fromum feohgiftum on fæder (bea)rme,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wilgesīþas þonne wīg cume,
lēode gelæsten; lofdædum sceal
in mægþa gehwære man geþêon.

20

Him ðā Scyld gewāt tō gescæphwīle
felahrōr fēran on Frēan wære;
hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe

Beowulf

Who does not know of the Danes' renown,
of the people's lords in times long past,
how their princes performed deeds of daring!

Scyld Scefing would heave away from hostile bands,
from hordes of men, their mead benches.
He dumbfounded his foemen, a foundling at first,
a wretched waif. He had his reward,
waxed under the clouds; his worth was honoured,
until not a one of his neighbours about,
over the whale road, but was bound to obey him, 10
please him with gifts. He was a great king!
He had a son, born to succeed him,
a young leader lent by God
to relieve the land. He saw what distress
once plagued the people, left with no leader
such a length of time. The Lord of life,
Giver of glory, granted him honour.
Beowulf* was famous, far and wide,
Scyld's son on the shores of the Danes.
A young man ought to act in this way, 20
distributing treasure in his father's time
so that close companions will stand by his side,
reward him in turn when war comes,
protect the people. By praiseworthy deeds
men always prosper among the nations.
Then Scyld departed at his appointed hour,
still hardy and hale, into the hands of the Lord.
His dear companions carried him down

swæse gesīþas, swā hē selfa bæd,
 þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga – 30
 lēof landfruma lange āhte.
 Þær æt hýðe stōd hringedstefna
 īsig ond ūtfūs æþelinges fær;
 ālēdon þā lēofne þēoden,
 bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,
 mārne be mæste. Þær wæs mādma fela
 of feorwegum frætwa gelæded;
 ne hýrde ic cýmlīcor cēol gegyrwan
 hildewæþnum ond heaðowædum,
 billum ond byrnum; him on bearne læg 40
 mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon
 on flōdes æht feor gewītan.
 Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,
 þēodgestrēonum þon þā dydon,
 þe hine æt frumsceaftē forð onsendon
 ænne ofer yðe umborwesende.
 Þā gýt hīe him āsetton segen g(yl)denne
 hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,
 gēafon on gārsecg; him wæs geōmor sefa,
 murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon 50
 secgan tō sōðe selerædende
 hæleð under heofenum, hwā þæm hlæste onfēng.

I

Ðā wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,
 lēof lēodcyning longe þrāge
 folcum gefræge – fæder ellor hwearf,
 aldor of earde –, oþ þæt him eft onwōc
 hēah Healfdene; hēold þenden lifde
 gamol ond gūðrēouw glæde Scyldingas.
 Ðæm fēower bearn forðgerīmed

to the surging sea, as himself commanded
 while his words had force, that friend of the Scyldings. 30
 Their leader reigned so long in the land.
 A ringèd prow was riding in harbour,
 ice-covered and eager, a king's craft.
 Down they laid their dearest lord,
 giver of rings, in the grasp of that ship,
 his might by the mast. In mounds they loaded
 famous treasure from far-off parts.
 Never was known a ship ennobled
 with such weapons of war, war-wear,
 blades and byrnies. His breast was laden 40
 with precious goods to go with him
 far out of sight at the flood's mercy.
 The gifts they supplied were no slighter than those
 (they gave their all) given by men
 who sent him out at the start of things
 alone on the ocean when only a child.
 They set up besides a golden standard
 high overhead. The sea received him,
 ocean owned him. Their spirits were sad,
 their mood mourning. No man can assert, 50
 say for certain, statesmen in hall,
 heroes under heaven, who came by that cargo.

I

Then in the stronghold Beowulf Scylding,
 lord of the land, was for very long
 famed all over (his father was elsewhere,
 out of this world), until in turn
 Healfdene was born, that lifelong leader,
 grizzled and grim, of the glorious Scyldings.
 Four children, if all were told,

in worold wōcun, weoroda rāeswa[n], 60
 Heorogār ond Hrōðgār ond Hālga til,
 hȳrde ic þæt [...] wæs Onelan cwēn,
 Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebedda.

Þā wæs Hrōðgāre herespēd gyfen,
 wīges weorðmynd, þæt him his winemāgas
 georne hȳrdon, oðð þæt sēo geogoð gewēox,
 magodriht micel. Him on mōd bearn,
 þæt healreced hātan wolde

medoærn micel men gewyrcean
 þon[n]e yldo bearn æfre gefrūnon, 70
 ond þær on innan eall gedælan
 geongum ond ealdum swylc him God sealde
 būton folcscare ond feorum gumena.

Ða ic wīde gefrægn weorc gebannan
 manigre mægþe geond þisne middangeard,
 folcstede frætwan. Him on fyrste gelomp,
 ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wearð ealgearo,
 healærna mæst; scōp him Heort naman
 sē þe his wordes geweald wīde hæfde.

Hē bēot ne ālēh, bēagas dælde, 80
 sinc æt symle. Sele hlifade
 hēah ond horngēap; heaðowylma bād,
 lāðan līges; ne wæs hit lenge þā gēn,
 þæt se ecghete āþumswēoran
 æfter wælnīðe wæcnan scolde.

Ðā se ellengæst earfoðlice
 þrāge geþolode, sē þe in þystrum bād,
 þæt hē dōgōra gehwām drēam gehȳrde
 hlūdne in healle; þær wæs hearpan swēg,
 swutol sang scopes. Sægde sē þe cūþe 90
 frumscaft fīra feorran reccan,
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),
 wlitebeorhtne wang, swā wæter bebūgeð,

awoke in this world to this prince of hosts, 60
 Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good.
 I have heard that ...* was Onela's queen,
 beloved bedfellow of the brave Swede.

Then Hrothgar was granted glory in war,
 striking success, so that his retainers
 obeyed him gladly, and his warrior band
 increased by many. He was then minded
 to raise for himself a huge house,

to command the making of a mightier mead hall 70
 than the sons of men had seen or heard of,
 and there within, to young and old,
 give out gladly all God had given
 but common land and the lives of men.

The work was blazoned far and wide,
 and many peoples on middle earth*
 adorned this dwelling. And then it was done,
 by rapid workmen, and all was ready
 in that huge hall. He named it Heorot
 who with his words wielded wide sway.

His boast was not empty: he distributed rings, 80
 finery at their feasts. That fortress towered
 high and wide-gabled, bidding the battle surge
 of terrible flames. But time was not yet
 when the blade hate of hostile in-laws
 should come to life with loathsome slaughter.

Then the bold demon who dwelt in darkness
 suffered a time of terrible strain,
 when day after day he heard from the hall
 loud laughter, the lure of the harp,
 a bard's clear song. He who was skilled 90
 in far-off things recalled the Creation,
 told how the Almighty made the earth,
 a rich expanse with water round it,

gesette sigehrēþig sunnan ond mōnan
 lēoman tō lēohte landbūendum,
 ond gefræt Wade foldan scēatas
 leomum ond lēafum, lif ēac gesceōp
 cynna gehwylcum þāra ðe twice hwyrfaþ. –
 Swā ðā drihtguman drēamum lifdon,
 ēadiglice, oð ðæt ān ongan 100
 fyrene fre(m)man fēond on helle;
 wæs se grimma gæst Grendel hāten,
 mære mearcstapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
 fen ond fæsten; fifelcynnes eard
 wonsælī wer weardode hwīle,
 siþðan him Scyppend forscifen hæfde
 in Caines cynne – þone cwealm gewræc
 ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Ābel slōg;
 ne gefeah hē þære fæhðe, ac hē hine feor forwræc,
 Metod for þy māne mancynne fram. 110
 Þanon untýdras ealle onwōcon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnêas,
 swylce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon
 lange þrāge; hē him ðæs lēan forgeald.

II

Gewāt ðā nēosian, syþðan niht becōm,
 hēan hūses, hū hit Hring-Dene
 æfter bēorþege gebūn hæfdon.
 Fand þā ðær inne æþelinga gedriht
 swefan æfter symble; sorgne ne cūðon,
 wonscaft wera. Wiht unhælo, 120
 grim ond grædig, gearo sōna wæs,
 rēoc ond rēþe, ond on ræste genam
 þrītīg þegna; þanon eft gewāt
 hūðe hrēmig tō hām faran,

set up in triumph sun and moon
 as lights to enlighten land-dwellers,
 arrayed every region in rich clothing,
 leafy woodland. Life He created
 in every kind that is quick upon earth.
 So this band of men lived in blessedness,
 a fortunate time, until someone, 100
 a fiend out of hell, enforced a feud.
 That grim guest was known as Grendel,
 who ranged borderlands, ruled the wastes,
 fens and fastnesses. He had had his home,
 the wretched creature, with the race of monsters
 whom the Creator Himself exiled as outlaws,
 kin to Cain. He avenged that killing,
 the Eternal Lord, when Abel was slain.*
 That feud found no favour; God drove him far,
 for his huge offence, from humankind. 110
 From Cain were born all kinds of evil,
 ogres and elves and all wicked spirits,
 and also the giants who grappled with God
 for such a while.* They had their reward.

II

Then Grendel came, with the coming of night,
 to the splendid hall, to see how the Ring-Danes,
 after their drinking, had settled down.
 He found inside a host of heroes
 asleep after feasting. They knew no sorrows,
 no human cares. The damned creature, 120
 grim and greedy, was quick to act;
 cruel and savage, he seized from their sleep
 thirty thanes, then went away,
 proud of his plunder, to find his home,

mid þære wælfylle wīca nēosan.
 Ðā wæs on ūhtan mid ærdæge
 Grendles gūðcræft gumum undyrne;
 þā wæs æfter wiste wōp up āhafen,
 micel morgenswēg. Mære þeoden,
 æþeling ærgod, unblīðe sæt, 130
 þolode ðryðswyð þegnsorge drēah,
 syðþan hīe þæs lāðan lāst scēawedon,
 wergan gāstes; wæs þæt gewin tō strang,
 lāð ond longsum! Næs hit lengra fyrst,
 ac ymb āne niht eft gefremede
 morðbeala māre, ond nō mearn fore,
 fæhðe ond fyrene; wæs tō fæst on þām.
 Þā wæs ēaðfynde þē him elles hwær
 gerūmlīcor ræste [sōhte],
 bed æfter būrum, ðā him gebēacnod wæs, 140
 gesægd sōðlice sweotolan tācne
 healðegnes hete; hēold hyne syðþan
 fyr ond fæstor sē þæm fēonde ætwand.
 Swā rīxode ond wið rihte wan,
 āna wið eallum, oð þæt īdel stōd
 hūsa sēlest. Wæs sēo hwīl micel;
 twelf wintra tīd torn geþolode
 wine Scyldīnga, wēana gehwelcne,
 sīdra sorga; forðām [secgum] wearð,
 ylða bearnum undyrne cūð 150
 gyddum geōmōre, þætte Grendel wan
 hwīle wið Hrōþgār, hetenīðas wæg,
 fyrene ond fæhðe fela missēra,
 singāle sæce; sibbe ne wolde
 wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
 feorhbealo feorran, fēa þīngian,
 nē þær nānig witenā wēnan þorfte

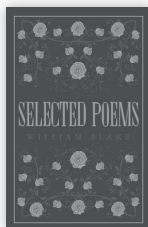
to seek his dwelling with his surfeit of slaughter.
 Then in the dawn, as day was breaking,
 his battle strength was abundantly clear.
 Hard on mirth, lamenting was heard,
 loud through the morning. The mighty prince,
 tried and trusted, sat there unblithe. 130
 The strong man suffered, sorrowed for his thanes,
 when the spoor was found of his savage foe,
 his fiendish guest. That fight was too harsh,
 brutal and lasting. No breathing space,
 but the very next night he renewed the attack,
 with great slaughter, and without regret.
 That evil feud was too fierce and fast.
 Then it was easy to find fellows who elsewhere
 went to their rest, some distance away,
 on a bed in outbuildings, having been shown 140
 clear signs, with no deceit,
 of this hall thane's hatred. Henceforth he kept himself
 farther and safer who eluded the fiend.
 So Grendel ruled and right was routed,
 one against all, till the great house
 was standing idle. And so it stayed.
 Twelve winters long the lord of the Scyldings
 suffered great care, all kinds of anguish,
 sore distress. Soon it was known
 to the children of men (it could hardly be hidden) 150
 through woeful songs how Grendel warred
 so long on Hrothgar, heaped up hatred
 with sinful strife over many seasons,
 unending feud. He wanted no friendship
 with any man of the Danish might,
 or to cease feuding, settle with money.
 None who was wise nourished much hope

beorhtre bōte tō banan folmum;
 (ac se) æglæca ēhtende wæs,
 deorc deāþsca, duguþe ond geogoþe, 160
 seomade ond syrede; sinniht hēold
 mistige mōras; men ne cunnon,
 hwyder helrūnan hwyrftum scrīþað.
 Swā fela fyrena fēond mancynnes,
 atol āngengea oft gefremede,
 heardra hȳnða; Heorot eardode,
 sincfāge sel sweartum nihtum; –
 nō hē þone gifstōl grētan mōste,
 māþðum for Metode, nē his myne wisse. –
 Ðæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga, 170
 mōdes brecða. Monig oft gesæt
 rīce tō rūne; ræd eahtedon,
 hwæt swiðferhðum sēlest wære
 wið færgryrum tō gefremmanne.
 Hwīlum hīe gehēton æt hærgtrafum
 wīgweorþunga, wordum bædon,
 þæt him gāstbona gēoce gefremede
 wið þēodþrēaum. Swylc wæs þēaw hyra,
 hāþenra hyht; helle gemundon
 in mōdsefan, Metod hīe ne cūþon, 180
 dæda Dēmend, ne wiston hīe Drihten God,
 nē hīe hūru heofena Helm herian ne cūþon,
 wuldres Waldend. Wā bið þæm ðe seal
 þurh slīðne nīð sāwle bescūfan
 in fȳres fæþm, frōfre ne wēnan,
 wihte gewendan! Wēl bið þæm þe mōt
 æfter dēaðdæge Drihten sēcean
 ond tō Fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian!

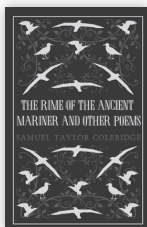
of huge amends at the hands of the killer.
Their foul afflicter was too fond of fighting
with seasoned warriors, that shadow of death. 160
He hid to their harm, holding in darkness
to the moors and mist. No man knows
whither hell's henchmen wend as they wander.
So this foe to mankind committed his crimes,
time and again, this grim loner,
with harsh humiliation. He inhabited Heorot,
the treasure-decked, in the dead of night.
But he dared not approach the precious throne,
the seat of God, or see His love.
That was sheer misery for the Scyldings' lord, 170
heart-breaking. To decide what was best
wise men considered, weighed advice
in secret council, how they might cope
with the constant terror of sudden attacks.
At times they prayed at pagan shrines,
honoured idols with idle vows,
urged the slayer of souls to send them aid
in the general woe. Such was their way,
the hope of the heathen, with hell in their hearts.
They put no trust in the true God, 180
Who weighs our deeds, the one Lord.
They could not praise the Protector of Heaven,
Wielder of Wonders. Woe to him
who drives his soul, through dire distress,
into the hands of fire, hopeless of comfort,
or any change. Well for him who chooses,
when he comes to die, to call on the Lord,
the Father's embrace, and beg His protection.

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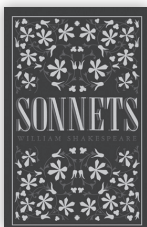
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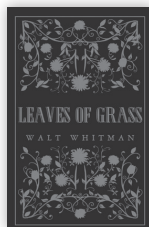
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