

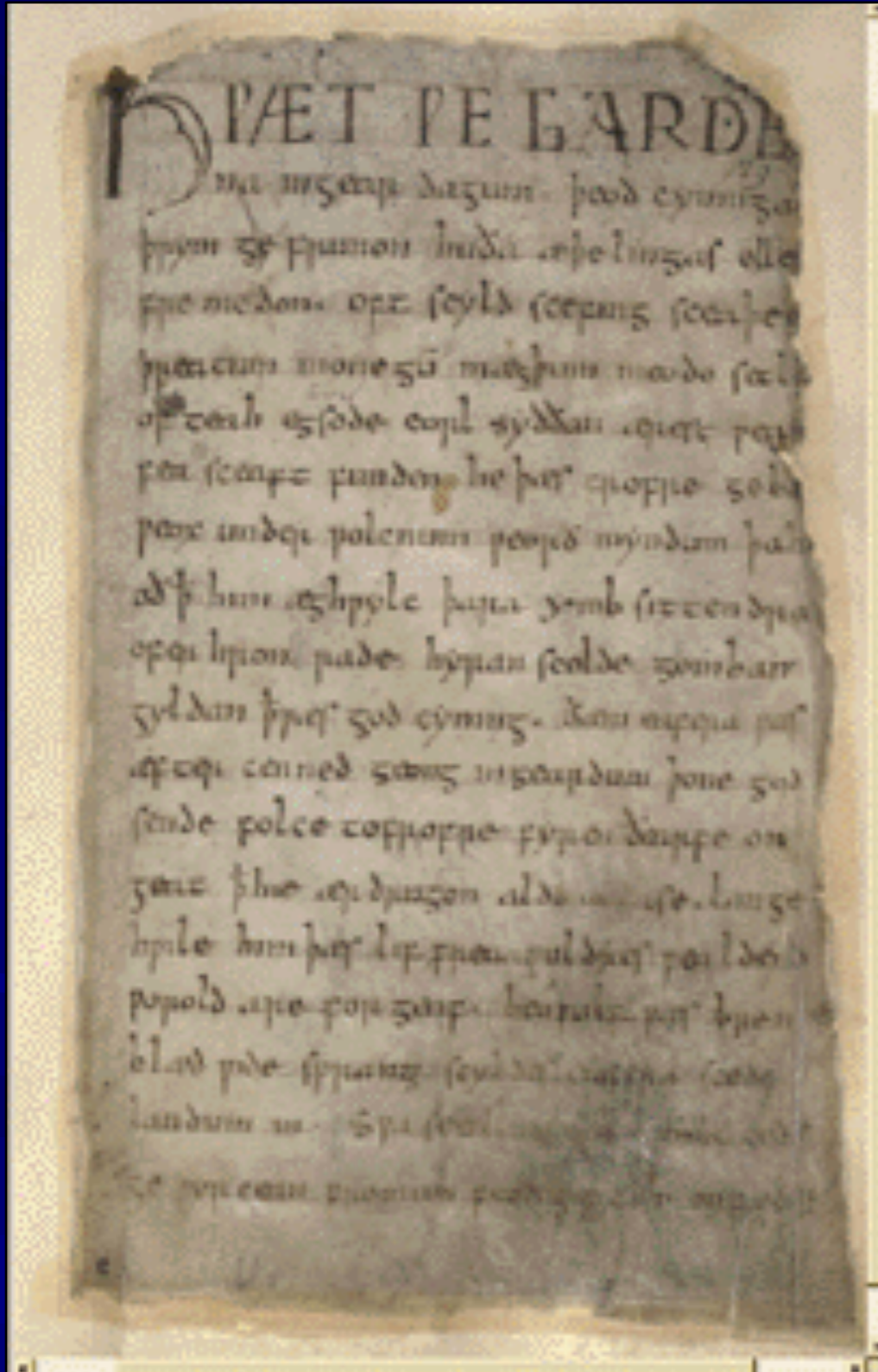


■ ***One of the most important remains of Anglo-Saxon literature is the epic poem Beowulf. Its age is unknown; but it comes from a very distant and hoar antiquity . . . It is like a piece of ancient armor; rusty and battered, and yet strong.***

**-- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(American Poet)**

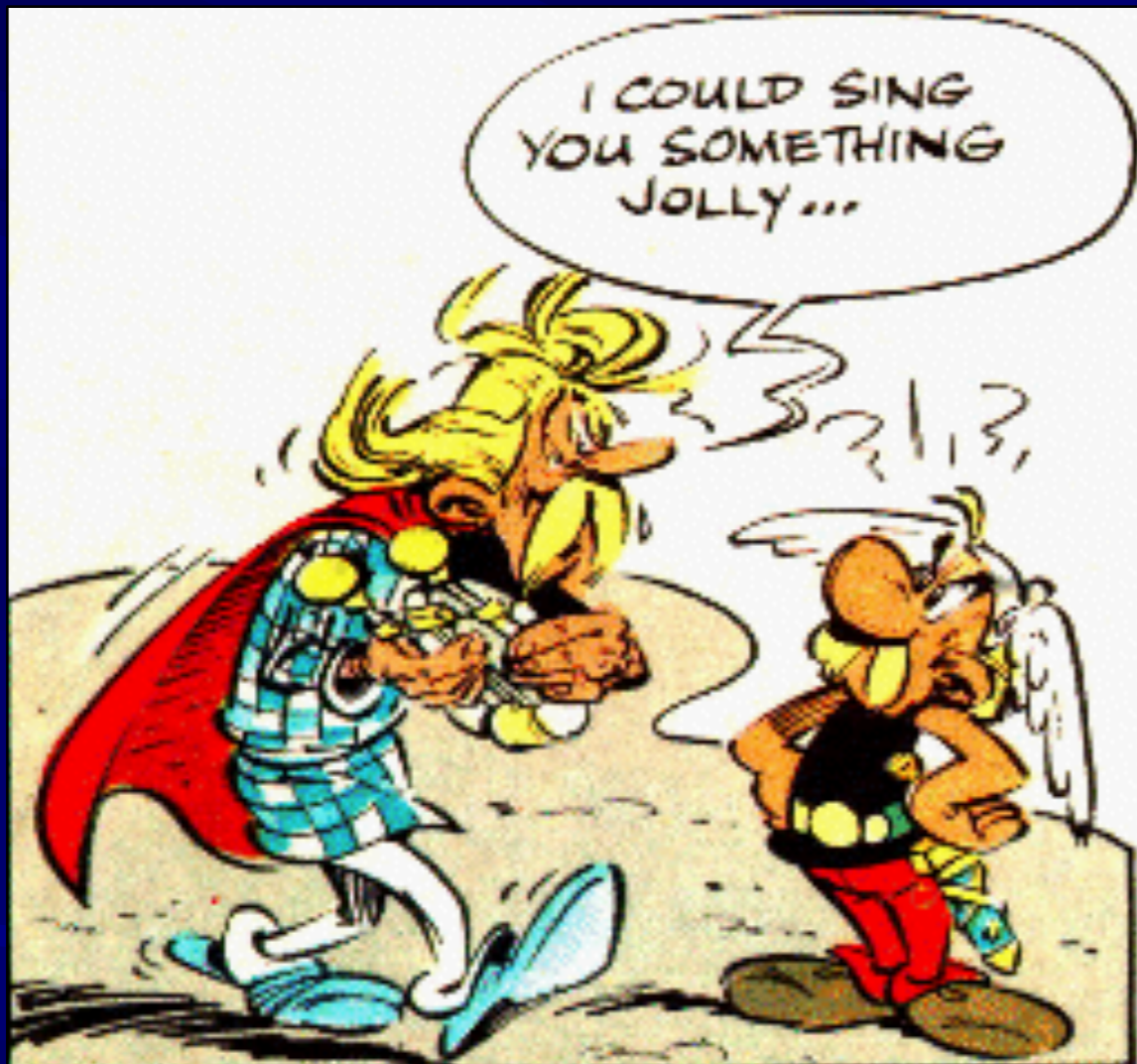
Beowulf:

Background Information



- The oldest surviving piece of Anglo-Saxon literature
- Author unknown
 - Probably written by one man
 - Lived in what is now England
 - Was highly skilled in poetic technique
 - Was thoroughly familiar with the traditions and legends of early Germanic culture
- Composed between the mid-seventh century and the end of the tenth century (A.D. 700-1000)
- Existed through oral tradition for an estimated 300 years – passed on from one scop (shop) to another
- Written in what is now called Old English
- Only one complete original manuscript remains

Anglo-saxon Storytellers



- An Anglo-Saxon storyteller was called a scop - (pronounced shkop) in Anglo-Saxon lands.

Literary Devices

■ Anglo-Saxon scopos relied on certain poetic devices to aid their memory and give their poems structure and impact. Three of these devices can be found in Beowulf:

- Alliteration
- Kennings
- Caesura



Alliteration

- Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words that are close together in a poem.
 - “Hrothgar’s men lived happy in his hall.”
 - “miserable, mighty men tormented”



Kenning

■ Kennings are special kinds of metaphors that use compound words, prepositional phrases, or possessives to name a person, place, thing, or event indirectly.

Compound Words	Prepositional Phrases	Possessives
"hell-forged" "banquet-rich" "ring-giver" "mead-cup" "she-wolf"	"Shelter of warriors" "shapes of darkness" "shepherd of evil" "tormentor of their days" "journey into darkness"	"ocean's/Furrows" "God's bright beacon" "Heaven's high arch" "Geats'/Brave prince" "hell's captive"

Caesura

- An obvious pause in a line of poetry.
- In Old English poetry, it usually comes near the middle of a line, with two stressed syllables before and two after, often allowing little or no “run-on” of meaning from the first half line to the second.
 - “A prince of the Geats / had killed Grendel.”



Translation from old English

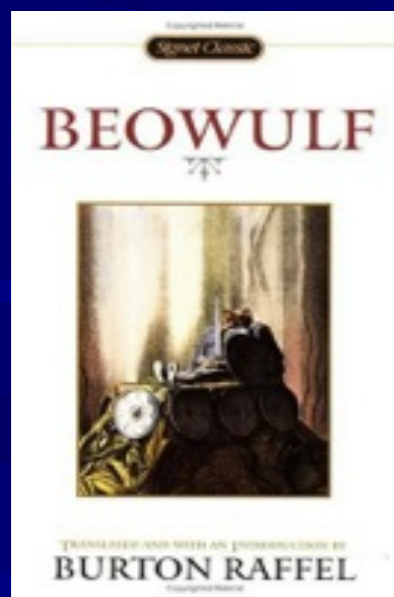
■ Beowulf was written in Old English so it has to be translated into Modern English for us to read it.

■ Here is a sample of the text in Old English:

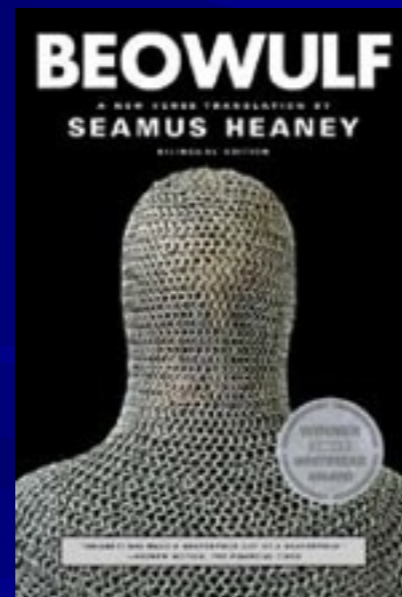
– Cōm on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga.
þa þæt hornreced
ealle būton ānum.
þæt hīe ne mōste,
se scyscaþa under

Scēotend swæfon,
healdan scoldon –
þæt wæs yldum cūþ,
þā metod nolde,
sceadu bregdan;

■ Our reading will come from the translation by Burton Raffel.



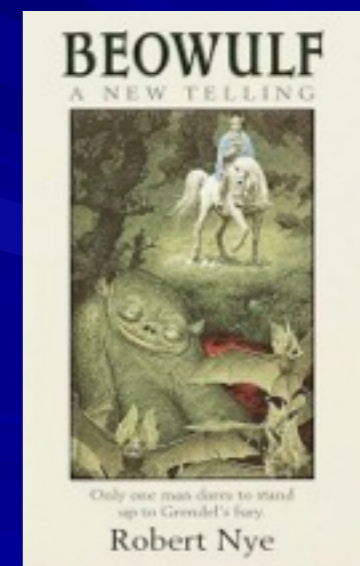
Burton Raffel



Seamus Heaney



Gareth Hinds



Robert Nye

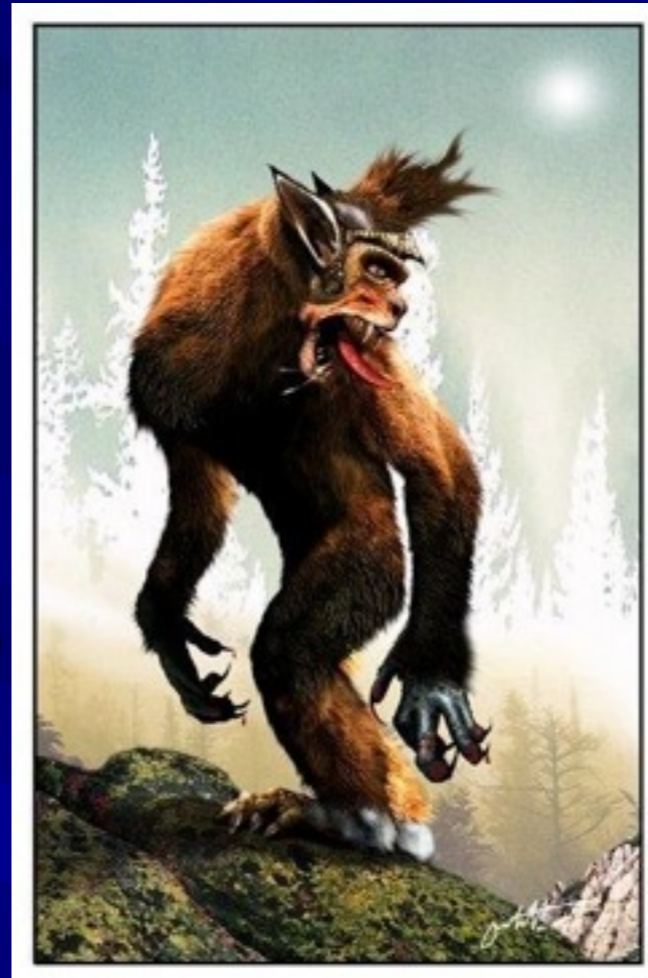
Beowulf : The Epic Poem

- *Beowulf* is an early Anglo-Saxon epic.
- An epic is a long narrative poem that recounts, in formal language, the exploits of a larger-than-life hero.
- The epic hero is usually a man of high social status and is often important in the history of his people.
- Epic plots usually involve:
 - Supernatural events
 - Long time periods
 - Life and death struggles
- In epics, the hero always represents good and the forces that threaten people represent evil.
- To overcome the people's enemies, the hero requires great physical strength.



Epics

- Epics were originally sung or recited orally with musical accompaniment.
- At that time, very few people could read.
- Audiences were enthralled by monsters, perilous journeys, and fierce battles.
- The Anglo-Saxons, in their primitive and harsh environment, demanded of their heroes . . .
 - courage,
 - physical strength
 - loyalty to a tribal king
 - wisdom in guiding others
 - supreme self-confidence
- The heroes in *Beowulf* meet these qualifications.



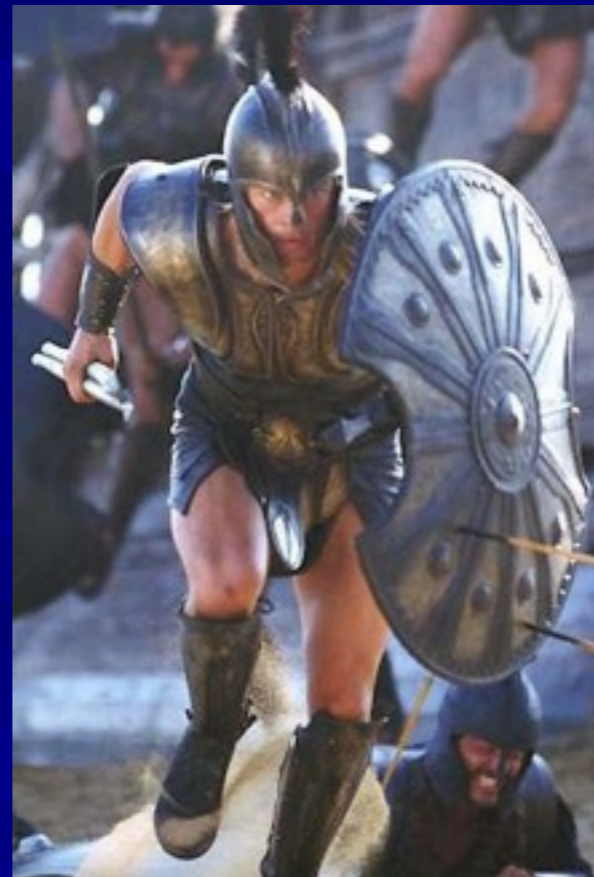
Other Epics

@Gilgamesh (Babylonian, unknown)

@The Odyssey (Greek, Homer)

@The Iliad (Greek, Homer)

@The Aeneid (Roman, Virgil)





Epic Heroes

■ Characteristics of an Epic Hero:

- Is significant and glorified
- Is on a quest
- Has supernatural strength, intelligence, and courage
- Is Ethical
- Risks death for the good of society
- Performs brave deeds
- Is a strong and responsible leader
- Reflects the ideas and values of his society

■ The epic hero is a mythical character who is strong, courageous, morally upright, and driven by the desire for glory.

■ He faces enormous obstacles in these pursuits, usually some force or character that represents evil

■ Even if he loses his life, he is victorious in his pursuit of glory.

English Literature?

- Even though *Beowulf* is the oldest surviving English epic, it is not set in England and its characters are not English.
- In the 400s, Germanic peoples known as Anglo Saxons invaded the territory that would become known as England
 - They brought the story of *Beowulf* with them.
- The text of *Beowulf* shows both Norse pagan belief and Christianity, often in the same line.



When, Where, and Who?

Setting

– When?

■ The 6th Century

– Where?

■ Scandinavia

Characters

– The people are the Goths from Sweden and the Danes from Denmark



Who was Beowulf?

- Beowulf was a brave warrior who vanquished evil monsters.
- He embodies courage, loyalty, and generosity.
- He traveled to Denmark from his home in Geatland (now southern Sweden) to slay Grendel.
 - Grendel is a monster with human qualities that has been terrorizing Herot for twelve years.
 - Herot is a banquet hall in Denmark built by the Danish king Hrothgar



Grendel

- An enormous ogre or demon-like creature
- A descendent of the biblical Cain
 - Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain killed Abel out of jealousy.
- Despises mankind's joy
- Menaces Hrothgar and the Danes for twelve years before facing Beowulf in battle



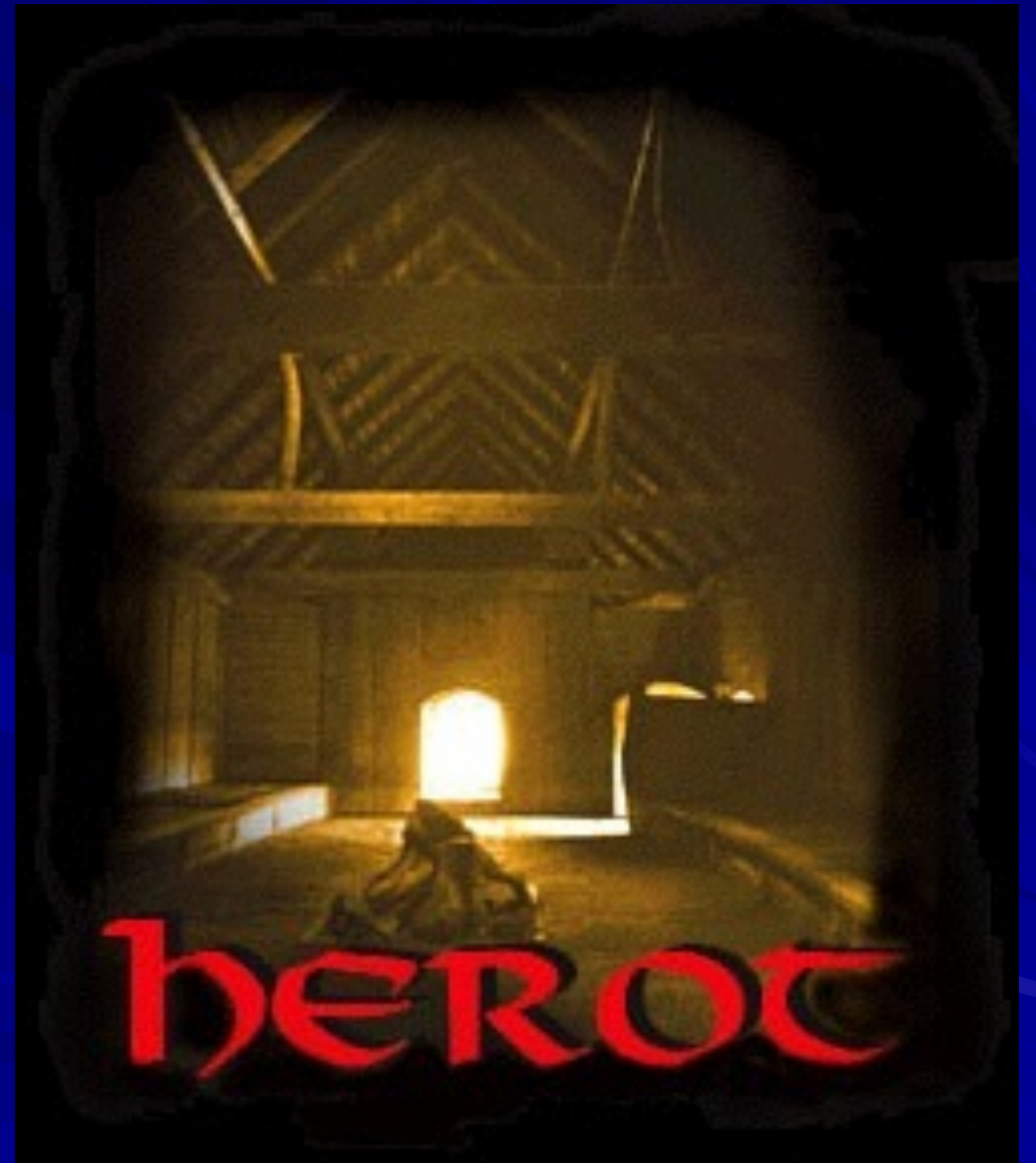
Hrothgar



- The aging king of the Danes
- Welcomes Beowulf's assistance in facing Grendel
- Built Herot (his giant mead-hall) to symbolize the kingdom's success, civilization, and joy

Herot

- Hrothgar's mead-hall
 - More like a palace
 - Symbolizes the Scyldings' (Danish people) success and mankind's joy
 - Social, governmental, and emotional center of the village
 - Grendel delights in raiding and capturing it nightly
- Mead
 - honey-based wine



Grendel's Mother

- Not as powerful as her son, but still a formidable foe
- Lives with her son Grendel in a cave beneath a swampy lake (or mere)
- In her cave is a magical, giant sword

