

cynna gehwylcum* þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.
 [of] kinds [for] each [of] those who living move about

*Modern syntax would be "for each of kinds." In Old English, the endings *-a* and *-um* indicate that *gehwylcum* is an indirect object and *cynna*, a possessive plural.

A NOTE ON NAMES

Old English, like Modern German, contained many compound words, most of which have been lost in Modern English. Most of the names in *Beowulf* are compounds. Hrothgar is a combination of words meaning "glory" and "spear"; the name of his older brother, Heorogar, comes from "army" and "spear"; Hrothgar's sons Hrethric and Hrothmund contain the first elements of their father's name combined, respectively, with *ric* (kingdom, empire; Modern German *Reich*) and *mund* (hand, protection). As in the case of the Danish dynasty, family names often alliterate. Masculine names of the warrior class have military associations. The importance of family and the demands of alliteration frequently lead to the designation of characters by formulas identifying them in terms of relationships. Thus Beowulf is referred to as "son of Ecgtheow" or "kinsman of Hygelac" (his uncle and lord).

The Old English spellings of names are mostly preserved in the translation. A few rules of pronunciation are worth keeping in mind. Initial *H* before *r* was sounded, and so Hrothgar's name alliterates with that of his brother Heorogar. The combination *cg* has the value of *dg* in words like "edge." The first element in the name of Beowulf's father "Ecgtheow" is the same word as "edge," and, by the figure of speech called synecdoche (a part of something stands for the whole), *ecg* stands for *sword* and Ecgtheow means "sword-servant."

For more information about *Beowulf*, see "The Linguistic and Literary Contexts of *Beowulf*," in the NAEL Archive.

Beowulf*

[PROLOGUE: THE RISE OF THE DANISH NATION]

So. The Spear-Danes¹ in days gone by
 and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
 We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson,² scourge of many tribes,
 5 a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
 This terror of the hall-troops had come far.
 A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
 as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
 In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
 10 beyond the whale-road had to yield to him
 and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

*The translation is by Seamus Heaney.

1. There are different compound names for tribes, often determined by alliteration in Old English poetry. Line 1 reads, "*Hwæt, we Gardena in gear-dagum*," where alliteration falls on *Gar* (spear) and *gear* (year). Old English hard and soft *g* (spelled *y* in Modern English) alliterate. The compound *geardagum* derives from "year," used in the special sense of "long ago," and "days"

and survives in the archaic expression "days of yore."

2. Shield is the name of the founder of the Danish royal line. Sheafson translates *Scefing*, i.e., *sheaf* + the patronymic suffix *-ing*. Because Sheaf was a "foundling" (line 7: *feascaft funden*, i.e., found destitute) who arrived by sea (lines 45–46), it is likely that as a child Shield brought with him only a sheaf, a symbol of fruitfulness.

Afterward a boy-child was born to Shield,
 a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
 by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,³
 15 the long times and troubles they'd come through
 without a leader; so the Lord of Life,
 the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.
 Shield had fathered a famous son:
 Beow's name was known through the north.
 20 And a young prince must be prudent like that,
 giving freely while his father lives
 so that afterward in age when fighting starts
 steadfast companions will stand by him
 and hold the line. Behavior that's admired
 25 is the path to power among people everywhere.

Shield was still thriving when his time came
 and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.
 His warrior band did what he bade them
 when he laid down the law among the Danes:
 30 they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,
 the chief they revered who had long ruled them.
 A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbor,
 ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.
 They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,
 35 laid out by the mast, amidships,
 the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures
 were piled upon him, and precious gear.
 I never heard before of a ship so well furbished
 with battle-tackle, bladed weapons
 40 and coats of mail. The massed treasure
 was loaded on top of him: it would travel far
 on out into the ocean's sway.
 They decked his body no less bountifully
 with offerings than those first ones did
 45 who cast him away when he was a child
 and launched him alone out over the waves.⁴
 And they set a gold standard up
 high above his head and let him drift
 to wind and tide, bewailing him
 50 and mourning their loss. No man can tell,
 no wise man in hall or weathered veteran
 knows for certain who salvaged that load.
 Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.
 He was well regarded and ruled the Danes
 55 for a long time after his father took leave
 of his life on earth. And then his heir,
 the great Haldane,⁵ held sway
 for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.
 He was four times a father, this fighter prince:

3. Suffered, endured.

4. See n. 2, above. Since Shield was found destitute, "no less bountifully" is litotes or understatement; the ironic reminder that he came with

nothing (line 43) emphasizes the reversal of his fortunes.

5. Probably named so because, according to one source, his mother was a Swedish princess.

60 one by one they entered the world,
 Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga,
 and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,
 a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.
 The fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.
 65 Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,
 young followers, a force that grew
 to be a mighty army. So his mind turned
 to hall-building: he handed down orders
 for men to work on a great mead-hall
 70 meant to be a wonder of the world forever;
 it would be his throne-room and there he would dispense
 his God-given goods to young and old—
 but not the common land or people's lives.⁶
 Far and wide through the world, I have heard,
 75 orders for work to adorn that wallstead
 were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there
 finished and ready, in full view,
 the hall of halls. Heorot was the name⁷
 he had settled on it, whose utterance was law.
 80 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings
 and torques at the table. The hall towered,
 its gables wide and high and awaiting
 a barbarous burning.⁸ That doom abided,
 but in time it would come: the killer instinct
 85 unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.⁹

[HEOROT IS ATTACKED]

Then a powerful demon,¹ a prowler through the dark,
 nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him
 to hear the din of the loud banquet
 every day in the hall, the harp being struck
 90 and the clear song of a skilled poet
 telling with mastery of man's beginnings,
 how the Almighty had made the earth
 a gleaming plain girdled with waters;
 in His splendor He set the sun and the moon
 95 to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,
 and filled the broad lap of the world
 with branches and leaves; and quickened life
 in every other thing that moved.

So times were pleasant for the people there
 100 until finally one, a fiend out of hell,
 began to work his evil in the world.
 Grendel was the name of this grim demon

6. The king could not dispose of land used by all, such as a common pasture, or of slaves.

7. I.e., "Hart," from antlers fastened to the gables, or because the crossed gable-ends resembled a stag's antlers; the hart was also an icon of royalty.

8. An allusion to the future destruction of Heorot by fire, probably in a raid by the Heatho-Bards.

9. As told later (lines 2020–69), Hrothgar plans to marry a daughter to Ingeld, chief of the Heatho-Bards, in hopes of resolving a long-standing feud. See previous note.

1. The poet withholds the name for several lines. He does the same with the name of the hero as well as others.

haunting the marches, marauding round the heath
 and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
 105 in misery among the banished monsters,
 Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
 and condemned as outcasts.² For the killing of Abel
 the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
 Cain got no good from committing that murder
 110 because the Almighty made him anathema
 and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
 ogres and elves and evil phantoms
 and the giants too who strove with God
 time and again until He gave them their reward.

115 So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
 for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes
 were settling into it after their drink,
 and there he came upon them, a company of the best
 asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain
 120 and human sorrow. Suddenly then
 the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:
 greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men
 from their resting places and rushed to his lair,
 flushed up and inflamed from the raid,
 125 blundering back with the butchered corpses.

Then as dawn brightened and the day broke,
 Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:
 their wassail was over, they wept to heaven
 and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,
 130 the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,
 humiliated by the loss of his guard,
 bewildered and stunned, staring aghast
 at the demon's trail, in deep distress.
 He was numb with grief, but got no respite
 135 for one night later merciless Grendel
 struck again with more gruesome murders.
 Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.
 It was easy then to meet with a man
 shifting himself to a safer distance
 140 to bed in the bothies³ for who could be blind
 to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness
 of the hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped
 kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,
 145 one against all, until the greatest house
 in the world stood empty, a deserted wallstead.
 For twelve winters, seasons of woe,
 the lord of the Shieldings⁴ suffered under
 his load of sorrow; and so, before long,
 150 the news was known over the whole world.

2. See Genesis 4.9–12.

3. Huts, outlying buildings. Evidently Grendel wants only to dominate the hall.

4. The descendants of Shield, another name for the Danes.

Sad lays were sung about the beset king,
 the vicious raids and ravages of Grendel,
 his long and unrelenting feud,
 nothing but war; how he would never
 155 parley or make peace with any Dane
 nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.⁵

No counselor could ever expect
 fair reparation from those rabid hands.
 All were endangered; young and old
 160 were hunted down by that dark death-shadow
 who lurked and swooped in the long nights
 on the misty moors; nobody knows
 where these reavers from hell roam on their errands.

So Grendel waged his lonely war,
 165 inflicting constant cruelties on the people,
 atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,
 haunted the glittering hall after dark,
 but the throne itself, the treasure-seat,
 he was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's outcast.

170 These were hard times, heartbreaking
 for the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counselors,
 the highest in the land, would lend advice,
 plotting how best the bold defenders
 might resist and beat off sudden attacks.

175 Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed
 offerings to idols, swore oaths
 that the killer of souls⁶ might come to their aid
 and save the people. That was their way,
 their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts
 180 they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge
 of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,
 Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,
 was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he
 who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul
 185 in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;
 he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he
 who after death can approach the Lord
 and find friendship in the Father's embrace.

[THE HERO COMES TO HEOROT]

So that troubled time continued, woe
 190 that never stopped, steady affliction
 for Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.
 There was panic after dark, people endured
 raids in the night, riven by the terror.

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane
 195 was on home ground, over in Geatland.
 There was no one else like him alive.

5. I.e., *wergild* (man-price); monetary compensation for the life of the slain man is the only way, according to Germanic law, to settle a feud

peacefully.

6. I.e., the devil. Heathen gods were thought to be devils.

In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,
 highborn and powerful. He ordered a boat
 that would ply the waves. He announced his plan:
 200 to sail the swan's road and seek out that king,
 the famous prince who needed defenders.
 Nobody tried to keep him from going,
 no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.
 Instead, they inspected omens and spurred
 205 his ambition to go, whilst he moved about
 like the leader he was, enlisting men,
 the best he could find; with fourteen others
 the warrior boarded the boat as captain,
 a canny pilot along coast and currents.
 210 Time went by, the boat was on water,
 in close under the cliffs.
 Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,
 sand churned in surf, warriors loaded
 a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear
 215 in the vessel's hold, then heaved out,
 away with a will in their wood-wreathed ship.
 Over the waves, with the wind behind her
 and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird
 until her curved prow had covered the distance,
 220 and on the following day, at the due hour,
 those seafarers sighted land,
 sunlit cliffs, sheer crags
 and looming headlands, the landfall they sought.
 It was the end of their voyage and the Geats vaulted
 225 over the side, out on to the sand,
 and moored their ship. There was a clash of mail
 and a thresh of gear. They thanked God
 for that easy crossing on a calm sea.

When the watchman on the wall, the Shieldings' lookout
 230 whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs,
 saw shields glittering on the gangplank
 and battle-equipment being unloaded
 he had to find out who and what
 the arrivals were. So he rode to the shore,
 235 this horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them
 in formal terms, flourishing his spear:
 "What kind of men are you who arrive
 rigged out for combat in your coats of mail,
 sailing here over the sea-lanes
 240 in your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed
 as lookout on this coast for a long time.
 My job is to watch the waves for raiders,
 any danger to the Danish shore.
 Never before has a force under arms
 245 disembarked so openly—not bothering to ask
 if the sentries allowed them safe passage
 or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen
 a mightier man-at-arms on this earth

than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,
 250 he is truly noble. This is no mere
 hanger-on in a hero's armor.

So now, before you fare inland
 as interlopers, I have to be informed
 about who you are and where you hail from.

255 Outsiders from across the water,
 I say it again: the sooner you tell
 where you come from and why, the better."

The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;
 the distinguished one delivered this answer:

260 "We belong by birth to the Geat people
 and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.

In his day, my father was a famous man,
 a noble warrior-lord named Ecgtheow.

265 He outlasted many a long winter
 and went on his way. All over the world
 men wise in counsel continue to remember him.

We come in good faith to find your lord
 and nation's shield, the son of Halfdane.

Give us the right advice and direction.

270 We have arrived here on a great errand
 to the lord of the Danes, and I believe therefore
 there should be nothing hidden or withheld between us.

So tell us if what we have heard is true
 about this threat, whatever it is,

275 this danger abroad in the dark nights,
 this corpse-maker mongering death
 in the Shieldings' country. I come to proffer
 my wholehearted help and counsel.

I can show the wise Hrothgar a way
 280 to defeat his enemy and find respite—
 if any respite is to reach him, ever.

I can calm the turmoil and terror in his mind.
 Otherwise, he must endure woes

and live with grief for as long as his hall
 285 stands at the horizon on its high ground."

Undaunted, sitting astride his horse,
 the coast-guard answered: "Anyone with gumption
 and a sharp mind will take the measure
 of two things: what's said and what's done.

290 I believe what you have told me, that you are a troop
 loyal to our king. So come ahead
 with your arms and your gear, and I will guide you.

What's more, I'll order my own comrades
 on their word of honor to watch your boat
 295 down there on the strand—keep her safe
 in her fresh tar, until the time comes
 for her curved prow to preen on the waves
 and bear this hero back to Geatland.

May one so valiant and venturesome
 300 come unharmed through the clash of battle."

So they went on their way. The ship rode the water,
 broad-beamed, bound by its hawser
 and anchored fast. Boar-shapes⁷ flashed
 above their cheek-guards, the brightly forged
 305 work of goldsmiths, watching over
 those stern-faced men. They marched in step,
 hurrying on till the timbered hall
 rose before them, radiant with gold.
 Nobody on earth knew of another
 310 building like it. Majesty lodged there,
 its light shone over many lands.
 So their gallant escort guided them
 to that dazzling stronghold and indicated
 the shortest way to it; then the noble warrior
 315 wheeled on his horse and spoke these words:
 "It is time for me to go. May the Almighty
 Father keep you and in His kindness
 watch over your exploits. I'm away to the sea,
 back on alert against enemy raiders."

320 It was a paved track, a path that kept them
 in marching order. Their mail-shirts glinted,
 hard and hand-linked; the high-gloss iron
 of their armor rang. So they duly arrived
 in their grim war-graith⁸ and gear at the hall,
 325 and, weary from the sea, stacked wide shields
 of the toughest hardwood against the wall,
 then collapsed on the benches; battle-dress
 and weapons clashed. They collected their spears
 in a seafarers' stook, a stand of grayish
 330 tapering ash. And the troops themselves
 were as good as their weapons.

Then a proud warrior
 questioned the men concerning their origins:
 "Where do you come from, carrying these
 decorated shields and shirts of mail,
 335 these cheek-hinged helmets and javelins?
 I am Hrothgar's herald and officer.
 I have never seen so impressive or large
 an assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart,
 bravery not banishment, must have brought you to Hrothgar."

340 The man whose name was known for courage,
 the Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,
 answered in return: "We are retainers
 from Hygelac's band. Beowulf is my name.
 If your lord and master, the most renowned
 345 son of Halfdane, will hear me out
 and graciously allow me to greet him in person,
 I am ready and willing to report my errand."

Wulfgar replied, a Wendel chief

7. Carved images of boars were placed on helmets, probably as charms to protect the warriors.

8. "Graith": archaic for apparel.

renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom
 350 and the temper of his mind: "I will take this message,
 in accordance with your wish, to our noble king,
 our dear lord, friend of the Danes,
 the giver of rings. I will go and ask him
 about your coming here, then hurry back
 355 with whatever reply it pleases him to give."

With that he turned to where Hrothgar sat,
 an old man among retainers;
 the valiant follower stood foursquare
 in front of his king: he knew the courtesies.
 360 Wulfgar addressed his dear lord:
 "People from Geatland have put ashore.
 They have sailed far over the wide sea.
 They call the chief in charge of their band
 by the name of Beowulf. They beg, my lord,
 365 an audience with you, exchange of words
 and formal greeting. Most gracious Hrothgar,
 do not refuse them, but grant them a reply.
 From their arms and appointment, they appear well born
 and worthy of respect, especially the one
 370 who has led them this far: he is formidable indeed."

Hrothgar, protector of Shieldings, replied:
 "I used to know him when he was a young boy.
 His father before him was called Ecgtheow.
 Hrethel the Geat⁹ gave Ecgtheow
 375 his daughter in marriage. This man is their son,
 here to follow up an old friendship.
 A crew of seamen who sailed for me once
 with a gift-cargo across to Geatland
 returned with marvelous tales about him:
 380 athane, they declared, with the strength of thirty
 in the grip of each hand. Now Holy God
 has, in His goodness, guided him here
 to the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel.
 This is my hope; and for his heroism
 385 I will recompense him with a rich treasure.
 Go immediately, bid him and the Geats
 he has in attendance to assemble and enter.
 Say, moreover, when you speak to them,
 they are welcome to Denmark."

At the door of the hall,
 390 Wulfgar duly delivered the message:
 "My lord, the conquering king of the Danes,
 bids me announce that he knows your ancestry;
 also that he welcomes you here to Heorot
 and salutes your arrival from across the sea.
 395 You are free now to move forward
 to meet Hrothgar in helmets and armor,
 but shields must stay here and spears be stacked

9. Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.

until the outcome of the audience is clear.”

The hero arose, surrounded closely
 400 by his powerful thanes. A party remained
 under orders to keep watch on the arms;
 the rest proceeded, led by their prince
 under Heorot's roof. And standing on the hearth
 in webbed links that the smith had woven,
 405 the fine-forged mesh of his gleaming mail-shirt,
 resolute in his helmet, Beowulf spoke:
 “Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman,
 one of his hall-troop. When I was younger,
 I had great triumphs. Then news of Grendel,
 410 hard to ignore, reached me at home:
 sailors brought stories of the plight you suffer
 in this legendary hall, how it lies deserted,
 empty and useless once the evening light
 hides itself under heaven's dome.
 415 So every elder and experienced councilman
 among my people supported my resolve
 to come here to you, King Hrothgar,
 because all knew of my awesome strength.
 They had seen me boltered¹ in the blood of enemies
 420 when I battled and bound five beasts,
 raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea
 slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes
 and avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it
 upon themselves; I devastated them).
 425 Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,
 settle the outcome in single combat.
 And so, my request, O king of Bright-Danes,
 dear prince of the Shieldings, friend of the people
 and their ring of defense, my one request
 430 is that you won't refuse me, who have come this far,
 the privilege of purifying Heorot,
 with my own men to help me, and nobody else.
 I have heard moreover that the monster scorns
 in his reckless way to use weapons;
 435 therefore, to heighten Hygelac's fame
 and gladden his heart, I hereby renounce
 sword and the shelter of the broad shield,
 the heavy war-board: hand-to-hand
 is how it will be, a life-and-death
 440 fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells
 must deem it a just judgment by God.
 If Grendel wins, it will be a gruesome day;
 he will glut himself on the Geats in the war-hall,
 swoop without fear on that flower of manhood
 445 as on others before. Then my face won't be there
 to be covered in death: he will carry me away
 as he goes to ground, gorged and bloodied;

1. Clotted, sticky.

he will run gloating with my raw corpse
 and feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy
 450 fouling his moor-nest. No need then
 to lament for long or lay out my body:²
 if the battle takes me, send back
 this breast-webbing that Weland³ fashioned
 and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.
 455 Fate goes ever as fate must.”

Hrothgar, the helmet of Shieldings, spoke:
 “Beowulf, my friend, you have traveled here
 to favor us with help and to fight for us.
 There was a feud one time, begun by your father.
 460 With his own hands he had killed Heatholaf
 who was a Wulfing; so war was looming
 and his people, in fear of it, forced him to leave.
 He came away then over rolling waves
 to the South-Danes here, the sons of honor.
 465 I was then in the first flush of kingship,
 establishing my sway over the rich strongholds
 of this heroic land. Heorogar,
 my older brother and the better man,
 also a son of Halfdane’s, had died.
 470 Finally I healed the feud by paying:
 I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings,
 and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance.

“It bothers me to have to burden anyone
 with all the grief that Grendel has caused
 475 and the havoc he has wreaked upon us in Heorot,
 our humiliations. My household guard
 are on the wane, fate sweeps them away
 into Grendel’s clutches—but God can easily
 halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

480 “Time and again, when the goblets passed
 and seasoned fighters got flushed with beer
 they would pledge themselves to protect Heorot
 and wait for Grendel with their whetted swords.
 But when dawn broke and day crept in
 485 over each empty, blood-spattered bench,
 the floor of the mead-hall where they had feasted
 would be slick with slaughter. And so they died,
 faithful retainers, and my following dwindled.
 Now take your place at the table, relish
 490 the triumph of heroes to your heart’s content.”

[FEAST AT HEOROT]

Then a bench was cleared in that banquet hall
 so the Geats could have room to be together
 and the party sat, proud in their bearing,

2. I.e., for burial. Hrothgar will not need to give Beowulf an expensive funeral.

3. Famed blacksmith in Germanic legend.

to his night's rest. He realized
 that the demon was going to descend on the hall,
 that he had plotted all day, from dawn light
 until darkness gathered again over the world
 650 and stealthy night-shapes came stealing forth
 under the cloud-murk. The company stood
 as the two leaders took leave of each other:
 Hrothgar wished Beowulf health and good luck,
 named him hall-warden and announced as follows:
 655 "Never, since my hand could hold a shield
 have I entrusted or given control
 of the Danes' hall to anyone but you.
 Ward and guard it, for it is the greatest of houses.
 Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame,
 660 beware of the enemy. There's nothing you wish for
 that won't be yours if you win through alive."

[THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL]

Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.
 The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,
 left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,
 665 his queen and bedmate. The King of Glory
 (as people learned) had posted a lookout
 who was a match for Grendel, a guard against monsters,
 special protection to the Danish prince.
 And the Geat placed complete trust
 670 in his strength of limb and the Lord's favor.
 He began to remove his iron breast-mail,
 took off the helmet and handed his attendant
 the patterned sword, a smith's masterpiece,
 ordering him to keep the equipment guarded.
 675 And before he bedded down, Beowulf,
 that prince of goodness, proudly asserted:
 "When it comes to fighting, I count myself
 as dangerous any day as Grendel.
 So it won't be a cutting edge I'll wield
 680 to mow him down, easily as I might.
 He has no idea of the arts of war,
 of shield or sword-play, although he does possess
 a wild strength. No weapons, therefore,
 for either this night: unarmed he shall face me
 685 if face me he dares. And may the Divine Lord
 in His wisdom grant the glory of victory
 to whichever side He sees fit."
 Then down the brave man lay with his bolster
 under his head and his whole company
 690 of sea-rovers at rest beside him.
 None of them expected he would ever see
 his homeland again or get back
 to his native place and the people who reared him.
 They knew too well the way it was before,

695 how often the Danes had fallen prey
 to death in the mead-hall. But the Lord was weaving
 a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats.
 Through the strength of one they all prevailed;
 they would crush their enemy and come through
 700 in triumph and gladness. The truth is clear:
 Almighty God rules over mankind
 and always has.

Then out of the night
 came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift.
 The hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,
 705 all except one; it was widely understood
 that as long as God disallowed it,
 the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.
 One man, however, was in fighting mood,
 awake and on edge, spoiling for action.

710 In off the moors, down through the mist-bands
 God-cursed Grendel came greedily loping.
 The bane of the race of men roamed forth,
 hunting for a prey in the high hall.
 Under the cloud-murk he moved toward it
 715 until it shone above him, a sheer keep
 of fortified gold. Nor was that the first time
 he had scouted the grounds of Hrothgar's dwelling—
 although never in his life, before or since,
 did he find harder fortune or hall-defenders.
 720 Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead
 and arrived at the bawn.⁵ The iron-braced door
 turned on its hinge when his hands touched it.
 Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open
 the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,
 725 pacing the length of the patterned floor
 with his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,
 flame more than light, flared from his eyes.
 He saw many men in the mansion, sleeping,
 a ranked company of kinsmen and warriors
 730 quartered together. And his glee was demonic,
 picturing the mayhem: before morning
 he would rip life from limb and devour them,
 feed on their flesh; but his fate that night
 was due to change, his days of ravaging
 735 had come to an end.

Mighty and canny,
 Hygelac's kinsman was keenly watching
 for the first move the monster would make.
 Nor did the creature keep him waiting
 but struck suddenly and started in;
 740 he grabbed and mauled a man on his bench,
 bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood
 and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body

5. See p. 53, n. 4.

utterly lifeless, eaten up
 hand and foot. Venturing closer,
 745 his talon was raised to attack Beowulf
 where he lay on the bed, he was bearing in
 with open claw when the alert hero's
 comeback and armlock forestalled him utterly.
 The captain of evil discovered himself
 750 in a handgrip harder than anything
 he had ever encountered in any man
 on the face of the earth. Every bone in his body
 quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.
 He was desperate to flee to his den and hide
 755 with the devil's litter, for in all his days
 he had never been clamped or cornered like this.
 Then Hygelac's trusty retainer recalled
 his bedtime speech, sprang to his feet
 and got a firm hold. Fingers were bursting,
 760 the monster back-tracking, the man overpowering.
 The dread of the land was desperate to escape,
 to take a roundabout road and flee
 to his lair in the fens. The latching power
 in his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip
 765 the terror-monger had taken to Heorot.
 And now the timbers trembled and sang,
 a hall-session⁶ that harrowed every Dane
 inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,
 the two contenders crashed through the building.
 770 The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow
 survived the onslaught and kept standing:
 it was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame
 braced with the best of blacksmith's work
 inside and out. The story goes
 775 that as the pair struggled, mead-benches were smashed
 and sprung off the floor, gold fittings and all.
 Before then, no Shielding elder would believe
 there was any power or person upon earth
 capable of wrecking their horn-rigged hall
 780 unless the burning embrace of a fire
 engulf it in flame. Then an extraordinary
 wail arose, and bewildering fear
 came over the Danes. Everyone felt it
 who heard that cry as it echoed off the wall,
 785 a God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,
 the howl of the loser, the lament of the hell-serf
 keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,
 manacled tight by the man who of all men
 was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.
 790 But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined
 to allow his caller to depart alive:

6. In Hiberno-English the word "session" (*seisiúin* in Irish) can mean a gathering where musicians and singers perform for their own enjoyment [Translator's note].

he did not consider that life of much account
 to anyone anywhere. Time and again,
 Beowulf's warriors worked to defend
 795 their lord's life, laying about them
 as best they could, with their ancestral blades.
 Stalwart in action, they kept striking out
 on every side, seeking to cut
 straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle
 800 there was something they could not have known at the time,
 that no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art
 could ever damage their demon opponent.
 He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge
 of every weapon.⁷ But his going away
 805 out of this world and the days of his life
 would be agony to him, and his alien spirit
 would travel far into fiends' keeping.

Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men
 with pain and affliction in former times
 810 and had given offense also to God
 found that his bodily powers failed him.
 Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly
 locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived,
 he was hateful to the other. The monster's whole
 815 body was in pain; a tremendous wound
 appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split
 and the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted
 the glory of winning; Grendel was driven
 under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,
 820 to his desolate lair. His days were numbered,
 the end of his life was coming over him,
 he knew it for certain; and one bloody clash
 had fulfilled the dearest wishes of the Danes.
 The man who had lately landed among them,
 825 proud and sure, had purged the hall,
 kept it from harm; he was happy with his nightwork
 and the courage he had shown. The Geat captain
 had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes:
 he had healed and relieved a huge distress,
 830 unremitting humiliations,
 the hard fate they'd been forced to undergo,
 no small affliction. Clear proof of this
 could be seen in the hand the hero displayed
 high up near the roof: the whole of Grendel's
 835 shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.

[CELEBRATION AT HEOROT]

Then morning came and many a warrior
 gathered, as I've heard, around the gift-hall,
 clan-chiefs flocking from far and near
 down wide-ranging roads, wondering greatly

7. Grendel is protected by a charm against metals.

1230 The thanes have one purpose, the people are ready:
 having drunk and pledged, the ranks do as I bid."
 She moved then to her place. Men were drinking wine
 at that rare feast; how could they know fate,
 the grim shape of things to come,
 1235 the threat looming over many thanes
 as night approached and King Hrothgar prepared
 to retire to his quarters? Retainers in great numbers
 were posted on guard as so often in the past.
 Benches were pushed back, bedding gear and bolsters
 1240 spread across the floor, and one man
 lay down to his rest, already marked for death.
 At their heads they placed their polished timber
 battle-shields; and on the bench above them,
 each man's kit was kept to hand:
 1245 a towering war-helmet, webbed mail-shirt
 and great-shafted spear. It was their habit
 always and everywhere to be ready for action,
 at home or in the camp, in whatever case
 and at whatever time the need arose
 1250 to rally round their lord. They were a right people.

[ANOTHER ATTACK]

They went to sleep. And one paid dearly
 for his night's ease, as had happened to them often,
 ever since Grendel occupied the gold-hall,
 committing evil until the end came,
 1255 death after his crimes. Then it became clear,
 obvious to everyone once the fight was over,
 that an avenger lurked and was still alive,
 grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,
 monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.
 1260 She had been forced down into fearful waters,
 the cold depths, after Cain had killed
 his father's son, felled his own
 brother with a sword. Branded an outlaw,
 marked by having murdered, he moved into the wilds,
 1265 shunned company and joy. And from Cain there sprang
 misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel,
 the banished and accursed, due to come to grips
 with that watcher in Heorot waiting to do battle.
 The monster wrenched and wrestled with him,
 1270 but Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength,
 the wondrous gifts God had showered on him:
 he relied for help on the Lord of All,
 on His care and favor. So he overcame the foe,
 brought down the hell-brute. Broken and bowed,
 1275 outcast from all sweetness, the enemy of mankind
 made for his death-den. But now his mother
 had sallied forth on a savage journey,
 grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge.

She came to Heorot. There, inside the hall,
 1280 Danes lay asleep, earls who would soon endure
 a great reversal, once Grendel's mother
 attacked and entered. Her onslaught was less
 only by as much as an amazon warrior's
 strength is less than an armed man's
 1285 when the hefted sword, its hammered edge
 and gleaming blade slathered in blood,
 razes the sturdy boar-ridge off a helmet.
 Then in the hall, hard-honed swords
 were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield
 1290 lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets
 or woven mail when they woke in terror.

The hell-dam was in panic, desperate to get out,
 in mortal terror the moment she was found.
 She had pounced and taken one of the retainers
 1295 in a tight hold, then headed for the fen.
 To Hrothgar, this man was the most beloved
 of the friends he trusted between the two seas.
 She had done away with a great warrior,
 ambushed him at rest.

Beowulf was elsewhere.

1300 Earlier, after the award of the treasure,
 the Geat had been given another lodging.

There was uproar in Heorot. She had snatched their trophy,
 Grendel's bloodied hand. It was a fresh blow
 to the afflicted bawn. The bargain was hard,
 1305 both parties having to pay
 with the lives of friends. And the old lord,
 the gray-haired warrior, was heartsore and weary
 when he heard the news: his highest-placed adviser,
 his dearest companion, was dead and gone.
 1310 Beowulf was quickly brought to the chamber:
 the winner of fights, the arch-warrior,
 came first-footing in with his fellow troops
 to where the king in his wisdom waited,
 still wondering whether Almighty God
 1315 would ever turn the tide of his misfortunes.
 So Beowulf entered with his band in attendance
 and the wooden floorboards banged and rang
 as he advanced, hurrying to address
 the prince of the Ingwins, asking if he'd rested
 1320 since the urgent summons had come as a surprise.

Then Hrothgar, the Shieldings' helmet, spoke:
 "Rest? What is rest? Sorrow has returned.
 Alas for the Danes! Aeschere is dead.
 He was Yrmenlaf's elder brother
 1325 and a soul-mate to me, a true mentor,
 my right-hand man when the ranks clashed
 and our boar-crests had to take a battering
 in the line of action. Aeschere was everything
 the world admires in a wise man and a friend.

- 1330 Then this roaming killer came in a fury
and slaughtered him in Heorot. Where she is hiding,
glutting on the corpse and glorying in her escape,
I cannot tell; she has taken up the feud
because of last night, when you killed Grendel,
1335 wrestled and racked him in ruinous combat
since for too long he had terrorized us
with his depredations. He died in battle,
paid with his life; and now this powerful
other one arrives, this force for evil
1340 driven to avenge her kinsman's death.
Or so it seems to thanes in their grief,
in the anguish every thane endures
at the loss of a ring-giver, now that the hand
that bestowed so richly has been stilled in death.
- 1345 "I have heard it said by my people in hall,
counselors who live in the upland country,
that they have seen two such creatures
prowling the moors, huge marauders
from some other world. One of these things,
1350 as far as anyone ever can discern,
looks like a woman; the other, warped
in the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale
bigger than any man, an unnatural birth
called Grendel by the country people
1355 in former days. They are fatherless creatures,
and their whole ancestry is hidden in a past
of demons and ghosts. They dwell apart
among wolves on the hills, on windswept crags
and treacherous keshes, where cold streams
1360 pour down the mountain and disappear
under mist and moorland.
- A few miles from here
a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch
above a mere; the overhanging bank
is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.
- 1365 At night there, something uncanny happens:
the water burns. And the mere bottom
has never been sounded by the sons of men.
On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:
the hart in flight from pursuing hounds
1370 will turn to face them with firm-set horns
and die in the wood rather than dive
beneath its surface. That is no good place.
When wind blows up and stormy weather
makes clouds scud and the skies weep,
1375 out of its depths a dirty surge
is pitched toward the heavens. Now help depends
again on you and on you alone.
The gap of danger where the demon waits
is still unknown to you. Seek it if you dare.
- 1380 I will compensate you for settling the feud

as I did the last time with lavish wealth,
coffers of coiled gold, if you come back."

[BEOWULF FIGHTS GREDEL'S MOTHER]

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:

1385 "Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.
For every one of us, living in this world
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,
that will be his best and only bulwark.
1390 So arise, my lord, and let us immediately
set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.
I guarantee you: she will not get away,
not to dens under ground nor upland groves
nor the ocean floor. She'll have nowhere to flee to.
1395 Endure your troubles today. Bear up
and be the man I expect you to be."

With that the old lord sprang to his feet
and praised God for Beowulf's pledge.
Then a bit and halter were brought for his horse
1400 with the plaited mane. The wise king mounted
the royal saddle and rode out in style
with a force of shield-bearers. The forest paths
were marked all over with the monster's tracks,
her trail on the ground wherever she had gone
1405 across the dark moors, dragging away
the body of that thane, Hrothgar's best
counselor and overseer of the country.
So the noble prince proceeded undismayed
up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths
1410 and ways where they were forced into single file,
ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.
He went in front with a few men,
good judges of the lie of the land,
and suddenly discovered the dismal wood,
1415 mountain trees growing out at an angle
above gray stones: the bloodshot water
surged underneath. It was a sore blow
to all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,
a hurt to each and every one
1420 of that noble company when they came upon
Aeschere's head at the foot of the cliff.

Everybody gazed as the hot gore
kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn
repeated its notes: the whole party
1425 sat down to watch. The water was infested
with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons
and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,
serpents and wild things such as those that often
surface at dawn to roam the sail-road

1430 and doom the voyage. Down they plunged,
 lashing in anger at the loud call
 of the battle-bugle. An arrow from the bow
 of the Geat chief got one of them
 as he surged to the surface: the seasoned shaft
 1435 stuck deep in his flank and his freedom in the water
 got less and less. It was his last swim.
 He was swiftly overwhelmed in the shallows,
 prodded by barbed boar-spears,
 cornered, beaten, pulled up on the bank,
 1440 a strange lake-birth, a loathsome catch
 men gazed at in awe.

Beowulf got ready,
 donned his war-gear, indifferent to death;
 his mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail
 would soon meet with the menace underwater.
 1445 It would keep the bone-cage of his body safe:
 no enemy's clasp could crush him in it,
 no vicious armlock choke his life out.
 To guard his head he had a glittering helmet
 that was due to be muddied on the mere bottom
 1450 and blurred in the upswirl. It was of beaten gold,
 princely headgear hooped and hasped
 by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders
 in days gone by and adorned it with boar-shapes;
 since then it had resisted every sword.
 1455 And another item lent by Unferth
 at that moment of need was of no small importance:
 the brehon⁴ handed him a hilted weapon,
 a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.
 The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns
 1460 had been tempered in blood. It had never failed
 the hand of anyone who hefted it in battle,
 anyone who had fought and faced the worst
 in the gap of danger. This was not the first time
 it had been called to perform heroic feats.

1465 When he lent that blade to the better swordsman,
 Unferth, the strong-built son of Ecglaf,
 could hardly have remembered the ranting speech
 he had made in his cups. He was not man enough
 to face the turmoil of a fight under water
 1470 and the risk to his life. So there he lost
 fame and repute. It was different for the other
 rigged out in his gear, ready to do battle.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:
 "Wisest of kings, now that I have come
 1475 to the point of action, I ask you to recall
 what we said earlier: that you, son of Halfdane
 and gold-friend to retainers, that you, if I should fall

4. One of an ancient class of lawyers in Ireland [Translator's note]. The Old English word for Unferth's office, *thyle*, has been interpreted as "orator" and "spokesman."

and suffer death while serving your cause,
would act like a father to me afterward.

1480 If this combat kills me, take care
of my young company, my comrades in arms.
And be sure also, my beloved Hrothgar,
to send Hygelac the treasures I received.
Let the lord of the Geats gaze on that gold,
1485 let Hrethel's son take note of it and see
that I found a ring-giver of rare magnificence
and enjoyed the good of his generosity.
And Unferth is to have what I inherited:
to that far-famed man I bequeath my own
1490 sharp-honed, wave-sheened wonder-blade.
With Hrunting I shall gain glory or die."

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats
was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:
without more ado, he dived into the heaving
1495 depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day
before he could see the solid bottom.

Quickly the one who haunted those waters,
who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds
for a hundred seasons, sensed a human
1500 observing her outlandish lair from above.
So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him
in her brutal grip; but his body, for all that,
remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail
saved him on the outside. Her savage talons
1505 failed to rip the web of his war-shirt.
Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish swimmer
carried the ring-mailed prince to her court
so that for all his courage he could never use
the weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde
1510 came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts
who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail
in a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man
could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole
and yet the water there did not work against him
1515 because the hall-roofing held off
the force of the current; then he saw firelight,
a gleam and flare-up, a glimmer of brightness.

The hero observed that swamp-thing from hell,
the tarn-hag in all her terrible strength,
1520 then heaved his war-sword and swung his arm:
the decorated blade came down ringing
and singing on her head. But he soon found
his battle-torch extinguished; the shining blade
refused to bite. It spared her and failed
1525 the man in his need. It had gone through many
hand-to-hand fights, had hewed the armor
and helmets of the doomed, but here at last
the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.

Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about

- 1530 his name and fame: he never lost heart.
 Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away.
 The keen, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel
 was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely
 on the might of his arm. So must a man do
 1535 who intends to gain enduring glory
 in a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought.
 Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight
 with Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder
 and laid about him in a battle frenzy:
 1540 he pitched his killer opponent to the floor
 but she rose quickly and retaliated,
 grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.
 The sure-footed fighter felt daunted,
 the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.
 1545 So she pounced upon him and pulled out
 a broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge
 her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail
 on Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,
 turned the edge and tip of the blade.
 1550 The son of Ecgtheow would have surely perished
 and the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth
 had the strong links and locks of his war-gear
 not helped to save him: holy God
 decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,
 1555 the Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance
 once Beowulf got back up on his feet.
 Then he saw a blade that boded well,
 a sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom
 from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,
 1560 one that any warrior would envy,
 but so huge and heavy of itself
 only Beowulf could wield it in a battle.
 So the Shieldings' hero hard-pressed and enraged,
 took a firm hold of the hilt and swung
 1565 the blade in an arc, a resolute blow
 that bit deep into her neck-bone
 and severed it entirely, toppling the doomed
 house of her flesh; she fell to the floor.
 The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was elated.
 1570 A light appeared and the place brightened
 the way the sky does when heaven's candle
 is shining clearly. He inspected the vault:
 with sword held high, its hilt raised
 to guard and threaten, Hygelac's thane
 1575 scouted by the wall in Grendel's wake.
 Now the weapon was to prove its worth.
 The warrior determined to take revenge
 for every gross act Grendel had committed—
 and not only for that one occasion
 1580 when he'd come to slaughter the sleeping troops,
 fifteen of Hrothgar's house-guards

surprised on their benches and ruthlessly devoured,
 and as many again carried away,
 a brutal plunder. Beowulf in his fury
 1585 now settled that score: he saw the monster
 in his resting place, war-weary and wrecked,
 a lifeless corpse, a casualty
 of the battle in Heorot. The body gaped
 at the stroke dealt to it after death:
 1590 Beowulf cut the corpse's head off.

Immediately the counselors keeping a lookout
 with Hrothgar, watching the lake water,
 saw a heave-up and surge of waves
 and blood in the backwash. They bowed gray heads,
 1595 spoke in their sage, experienced way
 about the good warrior, how they never again
 expected to see that prince returning
 in triumph to their king. It was clear to many
 that the wolf of the deep had destroyed him forever.

1600 The ninth hour of the day arrived.
 The brave Shieldings abandoned the cliff-top
 and the king went home; but sick at heart,
 staring at the mere, the strangers held on.
 They wished, without hope, to behold their lord,
 Beowulf himself.

1605 Meanwhile, the sword
 began to wilt into gory icicles
 to slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,
 the way it all melted as ice melts
 when the Father eases the fetters off the frost
 1610 and unravels the water-ropes, He who wields power
 over time and tide: He is the true Lord.

The Geat captain saw treasure in abundance
 but carried no spoils from those quarters
 except for the head and the inlaid hilt
 1615 embossed with jewels; its blade had melted
 and the scrollwork on it burned, so scalding was the blood
 of the poisonous fiend who had perished there.
 Then away he swam, the one who had survived
 the fall of his enemies, flailing to the surface.
 1620 The wide water, the waves and pools,
 were no longer infested once the wandering fiend
 let go of her life and this unreliable world.

The seafarers' leader made for land,
 resolutely swimming, delighted with his prize,
 1625 the mighty load he was lugging to the surface.
 His thanes advanced in a troop to meet him,
 thanking God and taking great delight
 in seeing their prince back safe and sound.
 Quickly the hero's helmet and mail-shirt
 1630 were loosed and unlaced. The lake settled,
 clouds darkened above the bloodshot depths.

With high hearts they headed away

along footpaths and trails through the fields,
 roads that they knew, each of them wrestling
 1635 with the head they were carrying from the lakeside cliff,
 men kingly in their courage and capable
 of difficult work. It was a task for four
 to hoist Grendel's head on a spear
 and bear it under strain to the bright hall.
 1640 But soon enough they neared the place,
 fourteen Geats in fine fettle,
 striding across the outlying ground
 in a delighted throng around their leader.
 In he came then, the thanes' commander,
 1645 the arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:
 his courage was proven, his glory was secure.
 Grendel's head was hauled by the hair,
 dragged across the floor where the people were drinking,
 a horror for both queen and company to behold.
 1650 They stared in awe. It was an astonishing sight.

[ANOTHER CELEBRATION AT HEOROT]

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:
 "So, son of Halfdane, prince of the Shieldings,
 we are glad to bring this booty from the lake.
 It is a token of triumph and we tender it to you.
 1655 I barely survived the battle under water.
 It was hard-fought, a desperate affair
 that could have gone badly; if God had not helped me,
 the outcome would have been quick and fatal.
 Although Hrunting is hard-edged,
 1660 I could never bring it to bear in battle.
 But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold—
 for He often helps the unbefriended—
 an ancient sword shining on the wall,
 a weapon made for giants, there for the wielding.
 1665 Then my moment came in the combat and I struck
 the dwellers in that den. Next thing the damascened
 sword blade melted; it bloated and it burned
 in their rushing blood. I have wrested the hilt
 from the enemy's hand, avenged the evil
 1670 done to the Danes; it is what was due.
 And this I pledge, O prince of the Shieldings:
 you can sleep secure with your company of troops
 in Heorot Hall. Never need you fear
 for a single thane of your sept or nation,
 1675 young warriors or old, that laying waste of life
 that you and your people endured of yore."
 Then the gold hilt was handed over
 to the old lord, a relic from long ago
 for the venerable ruler. That rare smithwork
 1680 was passed on to the prince of the Danes
 when those devils perished; once death removed

each was concerned for the other's good.

I heard he presented Hygd with a gorget,
the priceless torque that the prince's daughter,
Wealhtheow, had given him; and three horses,
2175 supple creatures brilliantly saddled.
The bright necklace would be luminous on Hygd's breast.

Thus Beowulf bore himself with valor;
he was formidable in battle yet behaved with honor
and took no advantage; never cut down
2180 a comrade who was drunk, kept his temper
and, warrior that he was, watched and controlled
his God-sent strength and his outstanding
natural powers. He had been poorly regarded
for a long time, was taken by the Geats
2185 for less than he was worth:⁴ and their lord too
had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.
They firmly believed that he lacked force,
that the prince was a weakling; but presently
every affront to his deserving was reversed.

2190 The battle-famed king, bulwark of his earls,
ordered a gold-chased heirloom of Hrethel's⁵
to be brought in; it was the best example
of a gem-studded sword in the Geat treasury.
This he laid on Beowulf's lap
2195 and then rewarded him with land as well,
seven thousand hides; and a hall and a throne.
Both owned land by birth in that country,
ancestral grounds; but the greater right
and sway were inherited by the higher born.

[THE DRAGON WAKES]

2200 A lot was to happen in later days
in the fury of battle. Hygelac fell
and the shelter of Heardred's shield proved useless
against the fierce aggression of the Shylfings:⁶
ruthless swordsmen, seasoned campaigners,
2205 they came against him and his conquering nation,
and with cruel force cut him down

4. There is no other mention of Beowulf's unpromising youth. This motif of the "Cinderella hero" and others, such as Grendel's magic pouch, are examples of folklore material, probably circulating orally, that made its way into the poem.

5. Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.

6. There are several references, some of them lengthy, to the wars between the Geats and the Swedes. Because these are highly allusive and not in chronological order, they are difficult to follow and keep straight. This outline, along with the Genealogies (pp. 40–41), may serve as a guide. *Phase 1*: After the death of the Geat patriarch, King Hrethel (lines 2462–70), Ohthere and Onela, the sons of the Swedish king Ongentheow, invade Geat territory and inflict heavy casualties in a battle at Hreosnahl (lines 2472–78). *Phase 2*: The Geats invade Sweden under Haethcyn, King Hrethel's son who

has succeeded him. At the battle of Ravenswood, the Geats capture Ongentheow's queen, but Ongentheow counterattacks, rescues the queen, and kills Haethcyn. Hygelac, Haethcyn's younger brother, arrives with reinforcements; Ongentheow is killed in savage combat with two of Hygelac's men; and the Swedes are routed (lines 2479–89 and 2922–90). *Phase 3*: Eanmund and Eadgils, the sons of Ohthere (presumably dead), are driven into exile by their uncle Onela, who is now king of the Swedes. They are given refuge by Hygelac's son Heardred, who has succeeded his father. Onela invades Geatland and kills Heardred; his retainer Weohstan kills Eanmund; and after the Swedes withdraw, Beowulf becomes king (lines 2204–8, which follow, and 2379–90). *Phase 4*: Eadgils, supported by Beowulf, invades Sweden and kills Onela (lines 2391–96).

so that afterwards
 the wide kingdom
 reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well
 for fifty winters, grew old and wise
 2210 as warden of the land

 until one began
 to dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl
 from the steep vaults of a stone-roofed barrow
 where he guarded a hoard; there was a hidden passage,
 unknown to men, but someone⁷ managed
 2215 to enter by it and interfere
 with the heathen trove. He had handled and removed
 a gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,
 though with a thief's wiles he had outwitted
 the sleeping dragon. That drove him into rage,
 2220 as the people of that country would soon discover.

The intruder who broached the dragon's treasure
 and moved him to wrath had never meant to.

It was desperation on the part of a slave
 fleeing the heavy hand of some master,
 2225 guilt-ridden and on the run,
 going to ground. But he soon began
 to shake with terror;⁸ in shock
 the wretch

. panicked and ran
 2230 away with the precious
 metalwork. There were many other
 heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house,
 because long ago, with deliberate care,
 some forgotten person had deposited the whole
 2235 rich inheritance of a highborn race
 in this ancient cache. Death had come
 and taken them all in times gone by
 and the only one left to tell their tale,
 the last of their line, could look forward to nothing
 2240 but the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his joy
 in the treasure would be brief.

 A newly constructed
 barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland
 close to the waves, its entryway secured.
 Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried
 2245 all the goods and golden ware
 worth preserving. His words were few:
 "Now, earth, hold what earls once held
 and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first
 by honorable men. My own people
 2250 have been ruined in war; one by one
 they went down to death, looked their last

7. The following section was damaged by fire. In lines 2215–31 entire words and phrases are missing or indicated by only a few letters. Editorial attempts to reconstruct the text are conjec-

tural and often disagree.

8. Lines 2227–30 are so damaged that they defy guesswork to reconstruct them.

on sweet life in the hall. I am left with nobody
 to bear a sword or to burnish plated goblets,
 put a sheen on the cup. The companies have departed.
 2255 The hard helmet, hasped with gold,
 will be stripped of its hoops; and the helmet-shiner
 who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps;
 the coat of mail that came through all fights,
 through shield-collapse and cut of sword,
 2260 decays with the warrior. Nor may webbed mail
 range far and wide on the warlord's back
 beside his mustered troops. No trembling harp,
 no tuned timber, no tumbling hawk
 swerving through the hall, no swift horse
 2265 pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter
 have emptied the earth of entire peoples."
 And so he mourned as he moved about the world,
 deserted and alone, lamenting his unhappiness
 day and night, until death's flood
 2270 brimmed up in his heart.

Then an old harrower of the dark
 happened to find the hoard open,
 the burning one who hunts out barrows,
 the slick-skinned dragon, threatening the night sky
 with streamers of fire. People on the farms
 2275 are in dread of him. He is driven to hunt out
 hoards under ground, to guard heathen gold
 through age-long vigils, though to little avail.
 For three centuries, this scourge of the people
 had stood guard on that stoutly protected
 2280 underground treasury, until the intruder
 unleashed its fury; he hurried to his lord
 with the gold-plated cup and made his plea
 to be reinstated. Then the vault was rifled,
 the ring-hoard robbed, and the wretched man
 2285 had his request granted. His master gazed
 on that find from the past for the first time.

When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again.
 He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger
 when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen
 2290 too close to his dreaming head.
 So may a man not marked by fate
 easily escape exile and woe
 by the grace of God.

The hoard-guardian
 scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted
 2295 for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep.
 Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling
 the outside of the mound. No man appeared
 in that desert waste, but he worked himself up
 by imagining battle; then back in he'd go
 2300 in search of the cup, only to discover
 signs that someone had stumbled upon

the golden treasures. So the guardian of the mound,
 the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming
 with fierce impatience; his pent-up fury
 2305 at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back
 and lash out in flames. Then, to his delight,
 the day waned and he could wait no longer
 behind the wall, but hurtled forth
 in a fiery blaze. The first to suffer
 2310 were the people on the land, but before long
 it was their treasure-giver who would come to grief.

The dragon began to belch out flames
 and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow
 that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger
 2315 would leave nothing alive in his wake.
 Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.
 Far and near, the Geat nation
 bore the brunt of his brutal assaults
 and virulent hate. Then back to the hoard
 2320 he would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den.
 He had swinged the land, swathed it in flame,
 in fire and burning, and now he felt secure
 in the vaults of his barrow; but his trust was unavailing.

Then Beowulf was given bad news,
 2325 the hard truth: his own home,
 the best of buildings, had been burned to a cinder,
 the throne-room of the Geats. It threw the hero
 into deep anguish and darkened his mood:
 the wise man thought he must have thwarted
 2330 ancient ordinance of the eternal Lord,
 broken His commandment. His mind was in turmoil,
 unaccustomed anxiety and gloom
 confused his brain; the fire-dragon
 had razed the coastal region and reduced
 2335 forts and earthworks to dust and ashes,
 so the war-king planned and plotted his revenge.
 The warriors' protector, prince of the hall-troop,
 ordered a marvelous all-iron shield
 from his smithy works. He well knew
 2340 that linden boards would let him down
 and timber burn. After many trials,
 he was destined to face the end of his days,
 in this mortal world, as was the dragon,
 for all his long leasehold on the treasure.

2345 Yet the prince of the rings was too proud
 to line up with a large army
 against the sky-plague. He had scant regard
 for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all
 of its courage or strength, for he had kept going
 2350 often in the past, through perils and ordeals
 of every sort, after he had purged
 Hrothgar's hall, triumphed in Heorot
 and beaten Grendel. He outgrappled the monster

and his evil kin.

2355 One of his crudest
hand-to-hand encounters had happened
when Hygelac, king of the Geats, was killed
in Friesland: the people's friend and lord,
Hrethel's son, slaked a swordblade's
2360 thirst for blood. But Beowulf's prodigious
gifts as a swimmer guaranteed his safety:
he arrived at the shore, shouldering thirty
battle-dresses, the booty he had won.
There was little for the Hetware⁹ to be happy about
as they shielded their faces and fighting on the ground
2365 began in earnest. With Beowulf against them,
few could hope to return home.

Across the wide sea, desolate and alone,
the son of Ecgtheow swam back to his people.
There Hygd offered him throne and authority
2370 as lord of the ring-hoard: with Hygelac dead,
she had no belief in her son's ability
to defend their homeland against foreign invaders.
Yet there was no way the weakened nation
could get Beowulf to give in and agree
2375 to be elevated over Heardred as his lord
or to undertake the office of kingship.
But he did provide support for the prince,
honored and minded him until he matured
as the ruler of Geatland.

2380 Then over sea-roads
exiles arrived, sons of Ohthere.¹
They had rebelled against the best of all
the sea-kings in Sweden, the one who held sway
in the Shylfing nation, their renowned prince,
lord of the mead-hall. That marked the end
2385 for Hygelac's son: his hospitality
was mortally rewarded with wounds from a sword.
Heardred lay slaughtered and Onela returned
to the land of Sweden, leaving Beowulf
to ascend the throne, to sit in majesty
2390 and rule over the Geats. He was a good king.

In days to come, he contrived to avenge
the fall of his prince; he befriended Eadgils
when Eadgils was friendless, aiding his cause
with weapons and warriors over the wide sea,
2395 sending him men. The feud was settled
on a comfortless campaign when he killed Onela.

And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived
every extreme, excelling himself
in daring and in danger, until the day arrived
2400 when he had to come face to face with the dragon.
The lord of the Geats took eleven comrades

9. A tribe of the Franks allied with the Frisians.

1. See p. 89, n. 6, Phases 3 and 4.

and went in a rage to reconnoiter.
 By then he had discovered the cause of the affliction
 being visited on the people. The precious cup
 2405 had come to him from the hand of the finder,
 the one who had started all this strife
 and was now added as a thirteenth to their number.
 They press-ganged and compelled this poor creature
 to be their guide. Against his will
 2410 he led them to the earth-vault he alone knew,
 an underground barrow near the sea-billows
 and heaving waves, heaped inside
 with exquisite metalwork. The one who stood guard
 was dangerous and watchful, warden of the trove
 2415 buried under earth: no easy bargain
 would be made in that place by any man.

The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.
 He wished good luck to the Geats who had shared
 his hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,
 2420 unsettled yet ready, sensing his death.
 His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain:
 it would soon claim his coffered soul,
 part life from limb. Before long
 the prince's spirit would spin free from his body.

2425 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:
 "Many a skirmish I survived when I was young
 and many times of war: I remember them well.
 At seven, I was fostered out by my father,
 left in the charge of my people's lord.
 2430 King Hrethel kept me and took care of me,
 was openhanded, behaved like a kinsman.
 While I was his ward, he treated me no worse
 as a wean² about the place than one of his own boys,
 Herebeald and Haethcyn, or my own Hygelac.
 2435 For the eldest, Herebeald, an unexpected
 deathbed was laid out, through a brother's doing,
 when Haethcyn bent his horn-tipped bow
 and loosed the arrow that destroyed his life.
 He shot wide and buried a shaft
 2440 in the flesh and blood of his own brother.
 That offense was beyond redress; a wrongfooting
 of the heart's affections; for who could avenge
 the prince's life or pay his death-price?
 It was like the misery endured by an old man
 2445 who has lived to see his son's body
 swing on the gallows. He begins to keen
 and weep for his boy, watching the raven
 gloat where he hangs: he can be of no help.
 The wisdom of age is worthless to him.
 2450 Morning after morning, he wakes to remember
 that his child is gone; he has no interest

2. A young child [Northern Ireland; Translator's note].

in living on until another heir
is born in the hall, now that his first-born
has entered death's dominion forever.

2455 He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling,
the banquet hall bereft of all delight,
the windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are sleeping,
the warriors under ground; what was is no more.
No tunes from the harp, no cheer raised in the yard.
2460 Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed
and sings a lament; everything seems too large,
the steadings and the fields.

Such was the feeling
of loss endured by the lord of the Geats
after Herebeald's death. He was helplessly placed
2465 to set to rights the wrong committed,
could not punish the killer in accordance with the law
of the blood-feud, although he felt no love for him.
Heartsore, wearied, he turned away
from life's joys, chose God's light
2470 and departed, leaving buildings and lands
to his sons, as a man of substance will.

"Then over the wide sea Swedes and Geats
battled and feuded and fought without quarter.
Hostilities broke out when Hrethel died.³
2475 Ongentheow's sons were unrelenting,
refusing to make peace, campaigning violently
from coast to coast, constantly setting up
terrible ambushes around Hreosnahill.
My own kith and kin avenged
2480 these evil events, as everybody knows,
but the price was high: one of them paid
with his life. Haethcyn, lord of the Geats,
met his fate there and fell in the battle.
Then, as I have heard, Hygelac's sword
2485 was raised in the morning against Ongentheow,
his brother's killer. When Eofor cleft
the old Swede's helmet, halved it open,
he fell, death-pale: his feud-calloused hand
could not stave off the fatal stroke.

2490 "The treasures that Hygelac lavished on me
I paid for when I fought, as fortune allowed me,
with my glittering sword. He gave me land
and the security land brings, so he had no call
to go looking for some lesser champion,
2495 some mercenary from among the Gifthas
or the Spear-Danes or the men of Sweden.
I marched ahead of him, always there
at the front of the line; and I shall fight like that
for as long as I live, as long as this sword
2500 shall last, which has stood me in good stead

3. See p. 89, n. 6, Phases 1 and 2.

late and soon, ever since I killed
 Dayraven the Frank in front of the two armies.
 He brought back no looted breastplate
 to the Frisian king but fell in battle,
 2505 their standard-bearer, highborn and brave.
 No sword blade sent him to his death:
 my bare hands stilled his heartbeats
 and wrecked the bone-house. Now blade and hand,
 sword and sword-stroke, will assay the hoard."

[BEOWULF ATTACKS THE DRAGON]

2510 Beowulf spoke, made a formal boast
 for the last time: "I risked my life
 often when I was young. Now I am old,
 but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight
 for the glory of winning, if the evil one will only
 2515 abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open."

Then he addressed each dear companion
 one final time, those fighters in their helmets,
 resolute and highborn: "I would rather not
 use a weapon if I knew another way
 2520 to grapple with the dragon and make good my boast
 as I did against Grendel in days gone by.
 But I shall be meeting molten venom
 in the fire he breathes, so I go forth
 in mail-shirt and shield. I won't shift a foot
 2525 when I meet the cave-guard: what occurs on the wall
 between the two of us will turn out as fate,
 overseer of men, decides. I am resolved.
 I scorn further words against this sky-borne foe.

"Men-at-arms, remain here on the barrow,
 2530 safe in your armor, to see which one of us
 is better in the end at bearing wounds
 in a deadly fray. This fight is not yours,
 nor is it up to any man except me
 to measure his strength against the monster
 2535 or to prove his worth. I shall win the gold
 by my courage, or else mortal combat,
 doom of battle, will bear your lord away."

Then he drew himself up beside his shield.
 The fabled warrior in his war-shirt and helmet
 2540 trusted in his own strength entirely
 and went under the crag. No coward path.

Hard by the rock-face that hale veteran,
 a good man who had gone repeatedly
 into combat and danger and come through,
 2545 saw a stone arch and a gushing stream
 that burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting
 a deadly heat. It would be hard to survive
 unscathed near the hoard, to hold firm
 against the dragon in those flaming depths.

2550 Then he gave a shout. The lord of the Geats
 unburdened his breast and broke out
 in a storm of anger. Under gray stone
 his voice challenged and resounded clearly.
 Hate was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized
 2555 a human voice, the time was over
 for peace and parleying. Pouring forth
 in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster
 burst from the rock. There was a rumble under ground.
 Down there in the barrow, Beowulf the warrior
 2560 lifted his shield: the outlandish thing
 writhed and convulsed and viciously
 turned on the king, whose keen-edged sword,
 an heirloom inherited by ancient right,
 was already in his hand. Roused to a fury,
 2565 each antagonist struck terror in the other.
 Unyielding, the lord of his people loomed
 by his tall shield, sure of his ground,
 while the serpent looped and unleashed itself.
 Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing
 2570 and racing toward its fate. Yet his shield defended
 the renowned leader's life and limb
 for a shorter time than he meant it to:
 that final day was the first time
 when Beowulf fought and fate denied him
 2575 glory in battle. So the king of the Geats
 raised his hand and struck hard
 at the enameled scales, but scarcely cut through:
 the blade flashed and slashed yet the blow
 was far less powerful than the hard-pressed king
 2580 had need of at that moment. The mound-keeper
 went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames:
 when he felt the stroke, battle-fire
 billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled
 of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,
 2585 infallible before that day,
 failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have.
 For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing
 to have to give ground like that and go
 unwillingly to inhabit another home
 2590 in a place beyond; so every man must yield
 the leasehold of his days.

Before long
 the fierce contenders clashed again.
 The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up
 and got a new wind; he who had once ruled
 2595 was furred in fire and had to face the worst.
 No help or backing was to be had then
 from his highborn comrades; that hand-picked troop
 broke ranks and ran for their lives
 to the safety of the wood. But within one heart
 2600 sorrow welled up: in a man of worth

the claims of kinship cannot be denied.

His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,
 a well-regarded Shylfing warrior
 related to Aelfhere.⁴ When he saw his lord
 2605 tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet,
 he remembered the bountiful gifts bestowed on him,
 how well he lived among the Waegmundings,
 the freehold he inherited from his father⁵ before him.
 He could not hold back: one hand brandished
 2610 the yellow-timbered shield, the other drew his sword—
 an ancient blade that was said to have belonged
 to Eanmund, the son of Ohthere, the one
 Weohstan had slain when he was an exile without friends.
 He carried the arms to the victim's kinfolk,
 2615 the burnished helmet, the webbed chain-mail
 and that relic of the giants. But Onela returned
 the weapons to him, rewarded Weohstan
 with Eanmund's war-gear. He ignored the blood-feud,
 the fact that Eanmund was his brother's son.⁶

2620 Weohstan kept that war-gear for a lifetime,
 the sword and the mail-shirt, until it was the son's turn
 to follow his father and perform his part.
 Then, in old age, at the end of his days
 among the Weather-Geats, he bequeathed to Wiglaf
 2625 innumerable weapons.

And now the youth
 was to enter the line of battle with his lord,
 his first time to be tested as a fighter.
 His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade
 would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered
 2630 as soon as they came together in the combat.

Sad at heart, addressing his companions,
 Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:
 "I remember that time when mead was flowing,
 how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,
 2635 promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,
 make good the gift of the war-gear,
 those swords and helmets, as and when
 his need required it. He picked us out
 from the army deliberately, honored us and judged us
 2640 fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts—
 and all because he considered us the best
 of his arms-bearing thanes. And now, although
 he wanted this challenge to be one he'd face
 by himself alone—the shepherd of our land,

4. Although Wiglaf is here said to be a Shylfing (i.e., a Swede), in line 2607 we are told his family are Waegmundings, a clan of the Geats, which is also Beowulf's family. It was possible for a family to owe allegiance to more than one nation and to shift sides as a result of feuds. Nothing is known of Aelfhere.

5. I.e., Weohstan, who, as explained below, was the slayer of Onela's nephew Eanmund. Possibly,

Weohstan joined the Geats under Beowulf after Eanmund's brother, with Beowulf's help, avenged Eanmund's death on Onela and became king of the Shylfings. See p. 89, n. 6, Phase 2.

6. An ironic comment: since Onela wanted to kill Eanmund, he rewarded Weohstan for killing his nephew instead of exacting compensation or revenge.

2645 a man unequalled in the quest for glory
 and a name for daring—now the day has come
 when this lord we serve needs sound men
 to give him their support. Let us go to him,
 help our leader through the hot flame
 2650 and dread of the fire. As God is my witness,
 I would rather my body were robed in the same
 burning blaze as my gold-giver's body
 than go back home bearing arms.
 That is unthinkable, unless we have first
 2655 slain the foe and defended the life
 of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I well know
 the things he has done for us deserve better.
 Should he alone be left exposed
 to fall in battle? We must bond together,
 2660 shield and helmet, mail-shirt and sword.”
 Then he waded the dangerous reek and went
 under arms to his lord, saying only:
 “Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything
 you said you would when you were still young
 2665 and vowed you would never let your name and fame
 be dimmed while you lived. Your deeds are famous,
 so stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now
 with the whole of your strength. I shall stand by you.”

After those words, a wildness rose
 2670 in the dragon again and drove it to attack,
 heaving up fire, hunting for enemies,
 the humans it loathed. Flames lapped the shield,
 charred it to the boss, and the body armor
 on the young warrior was useless to him.
 2675 But Wiglaf did well under the wide rim
 Beowulf shared with him once his own had shattered
 in sparks and ashes.

Inspired again
 by the thought of glory, the war-king threw
 his whole strength behind a sword stroke
 2680 and connected with the skull. And Naegling snapped.
 Beowulf's ancient iron-gray sword
 let him down in the fight. It was never his fortune
 to be helped in combat by the cutting edge
 of weapons made of iron. When he wielded a sword,
 2685 no matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade,
 his hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt
 (I have heard) would ruin it. He could reap no advantage.
 Then the bane of that people, the fire-breathing dragon,
 was mad to attack for a third time.
 2690 When a chance came, he caught the hero
 in a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs
 into his neck. Beowulf's body
 ran wet with his life-blood: it came welling out.

Next thing, they say, the noble son of Weohstan
 2695 saw the king in danger at his side

and displayed his inborn bravery and strength.
 He left the head alone,⁷ but his fighting hand
 was burned when he came to his kinsman's aid.
 He lunged at the enemy lower down
 2700 so that his decorated sword sank into its belly
 and the flames grew weaker.

Once again the king
 gathered his strength and drew a stabbing knife
 he carried on his belt, sharpened for battle.
 He stuck it deep in the dragon's flank.

2705 Beowulf dealt it a deadly wound.
 They had killed the enemy, courage quelled his life;
 that pair of kinsmen, partners in nobility,
 had destroyed the foe. So every man should act,
 be at hand when needed; but now, for the king,
 2710 this would be the last of his many labors
 and triumphs in the world.

Then the wound
 dealt by the ground-burner earlier began
 to scald and swell; Beowulf discovered
 deadly poison suppurating inside him,
 2715 surges of nausea, and so, in his wisdom,
 the prince realized his state and struggled
 toward a seat on the rampart. He steadied his gaze
 on those gigantic stones, saw how the earthwork
 was braced with arches built over columns.

2720 And now that thane unequalled for goodness
 with his own hands washed his lord's wounds,
 swabbed the weary prince with water,
 bathed him clean, unbuckled his helmet.

Beowulf spoke: in spite of his wounds,
 2725 mortal wounds, he still spoke
 for he well knew his days in the world
 had been lived out to the end—his allotted time
 was drawing to a close, death was very near.

"Now is the time when I would have wanted
 2730 to bestow this armor on my own son,
 had it been my fortune to have fathered an heir
 and live on in his flesh. For fifty years
 I ruled this nation. No king
 of any neighboring clan would dare
 2735 face me with troops, none had the power
 to intimidate me. I took what came,
 cared for and stood by things in my keeping,
 never fomented quarrels, never
 swore to a lie. All this consoles me,
 2740 doomed as I am and sickening for death;
 because of my right ways, the Ruler of mankind
 need never blame me when the breath leaves my body
 for murder of kinsmen. Go now quickly,

7. I.e., he avoided the dragon's flame-breathing head.

2745 dearest Wiglaf, under the gray stone
 where the dragon is laid out, lost to his treasure;
 hurry to feast your eyes on the hoard.
 Away you go: I want to examine
 that ancient gold, gaze my fill
 on those garnered jewels; my going will be easier
 2750 for having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-go
 of the life and lordship I have long maintained."

And so, I have heard, the son of Weohstan
 quickly obeyed the command of his languishing
 war-weary lord; he went in his chain-mail
 2755 under the rock-piled roof of the barrow,
 exulting in his triumph, and saw beyond the seat
 a treasure-trove of astonishing richness,
 wall-hangings that were a wonder to behold,
 glittering gold spread across the ground,
 2760 the old dawn-scorching serpent's den
 packed with goblets and vessels from the past,
 tarnished and corroding. Rusty helmets
 all eaten away. Armbands everywhere,
 artfully wrought. How easily treasure
 2765 buried in the ground, gold hidden
 however skillfully, can escape from any man!

And he saw too a standard, entirely of gold,
 hanging high over the hoard,
 a masterpiece of filigree; it glowed with light
 2770 so he could make out the ground at his feet
 and inspect the valuables. Of the dragon there was no
 remaining sign: the sword had dispatched him.
 Then, the story goes, a certain man
 plundered the hoard in that immemorial howe,
 2775 filled his arms with flagons and plates,
 anything he wanted; and took the standard also,
 most brilliant of banners.

Already the blade
 of the old king's sharp killing-sword
 had done its worst: the one who had for long
 2780 minded the hoard, hovering over gold,
 unleashing fire, surging forth
 midnight after midnight, had been mown down.

Wiglaf went quickly, keen to get back,
 excited by the treasure. Anxiety weighed
 2785 on his brave heart—he was hoping he would find
 the leader of the Geats alive where he had left him
 helpless, earlier, on the open ground.

So he came to the place, carrying the treasure
 and found his lord bleeding profusely,
 2790 his life at an end; again he began
 to swab his body. The beginnings of an utterance
 broke out from the king's breast-cage.
 The old lord gazed sadly at the gold.

"To the everlasting Lord of all,

2795 to the King of Glory, I give thanks
 that I behold this treasure here in front of me,
 that I have been allowed to leave my people
 so well endowed on the day I die.
 Now that I have bartered my last breath
 2800 to own this fortune, it is up to you
 to look after their needs. I can hold out no longer.
 Order my troop to construct a barrow
 on a headland on the coast, after my pyre has cooled.
 It will loom on the horizon at Hronesness⁸
 2805 and be a reminder among my people—
 so that in coming times crews under sail
 will call it Beowulf's Barrow, as they steer
 ships across the wide and shrouded waters."

Then the king in his great-heartedness unclasped
 2810 the collar of gold from his neck and gave it
 to the young thane, telling him to use
 it and the war-shirt and gilded helmet well.
 "You are the last of us, the only one left
 of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us away,
 2815 sent my whole brave highborn clan
 to their final doom. Now I must follow them."

That was the warrior's last word.
 He had no more to confide. The furious heat
 of the pyre would assail him. His soul fled from his breast
 2820 to its destined place among the steadfast ones.

[BEOWULF'S FUNERAL]

It was hard then on the young hero,
 having to watch the one he held so dear
 there on the ground, going through
 his death agony. The dragon from underearth,
 2825 his nightmarish destroyer, lay destroyed as well,
 utterly without life. No longer would his snakefolds
 ply themselves to safeguard hidden gold.

Hard-edged blades, hammered out
 and keenly filed, had finished him
 2830 so that the sky-roamer lay there rigid,
 brought low beside the treasure-lodge.

Never again would he glitter and glide
 and show himself off in midnight air,
 exulting in his riches: he fell to earth
 2835 through the battle-strength in Beowulf's arm.
 There were few, indeed, as far as I have heard,
 big and brave as they may have been,
 few who would have held out if they had had to face
 the outpourings of that poison-breather
 2840 or gone foraging on the ring-hall floor
 and found the deep barrow-dweller

8. A headland by the sea. The name means "Whalesness."