

# Beowulf vs. Grendel

## The Mead-Hall Smack-Down

Translated by Frederick Rebsamen

He moved through the mist past moors and ice-streams  
Grendel gliding God's wrath on him  
simmering to snare some sleeping hall-thanes  
trap some visitors in that tall gift-house.  
He moved under cloudbanks crossed the meadowlands  
till the wine-hall towered tall gold-gables  
rising in night-sky. Not for the first time  
he came to Heorot Hrothgar's gift-hall—  
never had he come craving a blood-feast  
with worse slaughter-luck waiting there inside.  
He came to the hall hungry for man-flesh  
exiled from joy. The ironbound door  
smith-hammered hinges sprang at his touch—  
raging then for gore he gripped in his hand-vice  
the ruined bolt-work wrenched it away  
leapt into the hall loomed with blood-rage  
aching with life-lust—from his eyes shone forth  
a fearful glowering fire-coals smoldering.  
Near him he spied sleeping together  
close war-brothers waiting peacefully  
prime for plucking. He exploded with fury  
growled with greed-hunger glared all around him  
burning to separate bodies from life-breath  
drain blood-vessels before breaking of day.  
His luck left him on that last slaughter-night—  
no more after sunrise would he murder and run.  
Wakeful and watching wonder in his mind  
Hygelac's nephew held to his bedrest  
anxious to measure that monster's strength.  
Nor did that thief think about waiting  
but searched with fire-eyes snared a doomed one  
in terminal rest tore frantically  
orunched bonelockings crammed blood-morsels  
gulped him with glee. Gloating with his luck  
he finished the first one his feet and his hands  
swallowed all of him. He stepped closer  
groped with claw-hands grabbed the next one—  
the watchful Geat grabbed back at him  
gripped with his fingers that great demon-hand  
tightened his grasp tugged steadily.  
Soon that fen-stalker found himself caught  
grasped and twisted by a greater handgrip  
than any he had known in earth's regions  
iron finger-clamps—into his mind  
fear cam nudging—nowhere could he move.  
His thoughts yearned away he wished for his mere-den  
devil's company—doubt pulled at him  
a new sensation slid into his mind.  
Then Hygelac's than held to his boasting  
mindful of his speech stood quickly then  
tightened his fist—fingers orackled  
Grendel pulled back Beowulf followed.  
That dark wanderer wished for more room  
to be on his way back to the moor-hills  
flee to the fens. He felt his knuckles  
crushed in that grip. A grim visitor  
that fate-marked fiend found in Heorot.  
The hall thundered—to hovering Danes  
safe hut-dwellers sounds of that battle  
clattered and roared. They raged together  
warrior and guest—the walls rumbled.  
With great wonder the wine-hall survived  
twin horn-gables trembling with combat  
towering high above—it held steadily  
inside and out with iron log-bonds  
forged by smith-hammers. The floor shuddered

strong mead-benches sailed to the walls  
gold-trimmed banquet-seats bounced and clattered.  
Hrothgar's wisemen hallowed counselors  
had never believed that a living creature  
might break Heorot bring down the walls—  
only fire's embrace flames' greediness  
could swallow that hall. Storm-sounds of death  
rocked the horn-gables hammered the roof—  
shivering Danefolk shook with hell-fear  
heard through the walls a wailing sorrow.  
God's demon-foe ground his blood-teeth  
howled to be gone home to the ice-streams  
far from that hall. Hygelac's thane  
strongest mortal mightiest of hand  
locked that hell-fiend hard within his grasp.  
He found no reason to free that monster  
spare him to flee far across the moors  
nor did he consider that sinful life  
useful to anyone. Anxious for their leader  
men of the Geats grabbed treasure-swords  
lifted them high to help their champion  
fight for his life with file-hardened edges.  
They were not prepared for this new hand-battling  
those hard-swinging swordsmen hewing with steel-bites  
slashing about them with shield-breaking cuts  
seeking that fiend-soul—they fought without knowing  
that the choicest of blades champions' war-weapons  
were helpless to harm that hell's messenger.  
He had cast his spell on keenest thane-weapons  
finest treasure-swords though his time was short—  
that final night-visit finished his hall-raids  
destiny struck his damned hell-soul  
banished it forever past boundaries of grace.  
Then that giant ravager rejected by God  
marked with murder measured by his sins  
finally conceived in his fiend's mindthoughts  
that his loathsome body would bear no more.  
Hygelac's thane held fast to him  
tightened his grip—Grendel yearned away  
his arm stretched thin thronging with pain—  
a great death-wound gaped in his shoulder  
sinew-bonds weakened snapped viciously  
bonelockings burst. To Beowulf there  
victory was granted. Grendel fled then  
sickened with death slouched under fen-slopes  
to his joyless home no hope for his life—  
he knew at last the number of his days.  
To the Danes' misery a dawning of mercy  
rose from that battle bright deliverance.  
Heorot was cleansed healed of thane-sorrow  
aching morning-grief emptied of murder  
by that tall visitor—victory was bright  
joy to his heart. He held to his promise,  
evening boastwords, banished from that hall  
dark sorrow-songs consoled the Danes  
for long torture-years terror in the night  
an empty meadhall from evening till dawn.  
He hailed the sunrise hoisted a signal  
a clear token-sign that terror was dead  
nailed Grendel's arm that great handgrip  
near the high gable-point of Heorot's roof.

# Beowulf vs. Grendel

## The Mead-Hall Smack-Down

Translated by E. T. Donaldson

Then from the moor under the mist-hills Grendel came walking, wearing God's anger. The foul ravager thought to catch some one of mankind there in the high hall. Under the clouds he moved until he could see most clearly the wine-hall, treasure-house of men, shining with gold. That was not the first time that he had sought Hrothgar's home. Never before or since in his life-days did he find harder luck, hardier hall-thanes. The creature deprived of joy came walking to the hall. Quickly the door gave way, fattened with fire-forged bands, when he touched it with his hands. Driven by evil desire, swollen with rage, he tore it open, the hall's mouth. After that the foe at once stepped onto the shining floor, advanced angrily. From his eyes came a light not fair, most like a flame. He saw many men in the hall, a band of kinsmen all asleep together, a company of war-men. Then his heart laughed: dreadful monster, he thought that before the day came he would divide the life from the body of every one of them, for there had come to him a hope of full-feasting. It was not his fate that when that night was over he should feast on more of mankind.

The kinsman of Hygelac, mighty man, watched how the evil-doer would make his quick onslaught. Nor did the monster mean to delay it, but, starting his work, he suddenly seized a sleeping man, tore at him ravenously, bit into his bone-locks, drank the blood from his veins, swallowed huge morsels; quickly he had eaten all of the lifeless one, feet and hands. He stepped closer, then felt with his arm for the brave-hearted man on the bed, reached out towards him, the foe with his hand; at once in fierce response Beowulf seized it and sat up, leaning on his own arm. Straightway the fosterer of crimes knew that he had not encountered on middle-earth, anywhere in this world, a harder hand-grip from another man. In mind he became frightened, in his spirit: not for that might he escape the sooner. His heart was eager to get away, he would flee to his hiding-place, seek his rabble of devils. What he met there was not such as he had ever before met in the days of his life. Then the kinsman of Hygelac, the good man, thought of his evening's speech, stood upright and laid firm hold on him: his fingers cracked. The giant was pulling away, the earl stepped forward. The notorious one thought to move farther away, wherever he could, and flee his way from there to his fen-retreat; he knew his fingers' power to be in a hateful grip. That was a painful journey that the loathsome despoiler had made to Heorot. The retainers' hall rang with the noise—terrible drink for all the Danes, the house-dwellers, every brave man, the earls. Both were enraged, fury-filled, the two who meant to control the hall. The building resounded. Then was it much wonder that the wine-hall withstood them joined in fierce fight, that it did not fall to the ground, the fair earth-dwelling; but it was so firmly made fast with iron bands, both inside and outside, joined by skillful smith-craft. There started from the floor—as I have heard say—many a mead-bench, gold-adorned, when the furious ones fought. No wise men of the Scyldings ever before thought that nay men in any manner might break it down, splendid with bright horns, have skill to destroy it, unless flame should embrace it, swallow it in fire. Noise rose up, sound strange enough. Horrible fear came upon the North-Danes, upon every one of those who heard the weeping from the wall, God's enemy sing his terrible song, song without triumph—the hell-slave bewail his pain. There held him fast he who of men was strongest of might in the days of his life.

Not for anything would the protector of warriors let the murderous guest go off alive: he did not consider his life-days of use to any of the nations. There more than enough of Beowulf's earls drew swords, old heirlooms, wished to protect the life of their dear lord, famous prince, however they might. They did not know when they entered the fight, hardy-spirited warriors, and when they thought to hew him on every side, to seek his soul, that not any of the best of irons on earth, no war-sword, would touch the evil-doer; for with a charm he had made victory-weapons useless, every sword-edge. His departure to death from the time of this life was to be wretched; and the alien spirit was to travel far off into the power of fiends. Then he who before had brought trouble of heart to mankind, committed many crimes—he was at war with God—found that his body would do him no good, for the great-hearted kinsman of Hygelac had him by the hand. Each was hateful to the other alive. The awful monster had lived to feel pain in his body, a huge wound in his shoulder was exposed, his sinews sprang apart, his bone-locks broke. Glory in battle was given to Beowulf. Grendel must flee from there, mortally sick, seek his joyless home in the fen-slopes. He knew the more surely that his life's end had come, the full number of his days. For all the Danes was their wish fulfilled after the bloody fight. Thus he who had lately come from far off, wise and stout-hearted, had purged Heorot, saved Hrothgar's house from affliction. He rejoiced in his night's work, a deed to make famous his courage. The man of the Geats had fulfilled his boast to the East-Danes; so too he had remedied all the grief, the malice-caused sorrow that they had endured before, and had had to suffer from harsh necessity, no small distress. That was clearly proved when the battle-brave man set the hand up under the curved roof—the arm and the shoulder: there all together was Grendel's grasp.

# Beowulf vs. Grendel

## The Mead-Hall Smack-Down

Translated by Charles W. Kennedy

From the stretching moors, from the misty hollows,  
Grendel came creeping, accursed of God,  
A murderous ravager minded to snare  
Spoil of heroes in high-built hall.  
Under clouded heavens he held his way  
Till there rose before him the high-roofed house,  
Wine-hall of warriors gleaming with gold.  
Nor was it the first of his fierce assaults  
On the home of Hrothgar; but never before  
Had he found worse fate or harder hall-thaner!  
Storming the building he burst the portal,  
Though fastened of iron, with fiendish strength;  
Forced open the entrance in savage fury  
And rushed in rage o'er the shining floor.  
A baleful glare from his eyes was gleaming  
Most like to a flame. He found in the hall  
Many a warrior sealed in slumber,  
A host of kinsmen. His heart rejoiced;  
The savage monster was minded to sever  
Lives from bodies ere break of day,  
To feast his fill of the flesh of men.  
But he was not fated to glut his greed  
With more of mankind when the night was ended!

The hardy kinsman of Hygelac waited  
To see how the monster would make his attack.  
The demon delayed not, but quickly clutched  
A sleeping thane in his swift assault,  
Tore him in pieces, bit through the bones,  
Gulped the blood, and gobbled the flesh,  
Greedily gorged on the lifeless corpse,  
The hands and the feet. Then the fiend stepped nearer,  
Sprang on the Sea-Geat lying outstretched,  
Clasping him close with his monstrous claw.  
But Beowulf grappled and gripped him hard,  
Struggled up on his elbow; the shepherd of sins  
Soon found that never before had he felt  
In any man other in all the earth  
A mightier hand-grip; his mood was humbled,  
His courage fled; but he found no escape!  
He was fain to be gone; he would flee to the darkness,  
The fellowship of devils. Far different his fate  
From that which befell him in former days!  
The hardy hero, Hygelac's kinsman,  
Remembered the boast he had made at the banquet;  
He sprang to his feet, clutched Grendel fast,  
Though fingers were cracking, the fiend pulling free.  
The earl pressed after; the monster was minded  
To win his freedom and flee to the fens.  
He knew that his fingers were fast in the grip  
Of a savage foe. Sorry the venture,  
The raid that the ravager made on the hall.

There was din in Heorot. For all the Danes,  
The city-dwellers, the stalwart Scyldings,  
That was a bitter spilling of beer!  
The walls resounded, the fight was fierce,  
Savage the strife as the warriors struggled.  
The wonder was that the lofty wine-hall  
Withstood the struggle, nor crashed to earth,

The house so fair; it was firmly fastened  
Within and without with iron bands  
Cunningly smithied; though men have said  
That many a mead-bench gleaming with gold  
Sprang from its sill as the warrior strove.  
The Scylding wise men had never weened  
That any ravage could wreck the building,  
Firmly fashioned and finished with bone,  
Or any cunning compass its fall,  
Till the time when the swelter and surge of fire  
Should swallow it up in a swirl of flame.

Continuous tumult filled the hall;  
A terror fell on the Danish folk  
As they heard through the wall the horrible wailing,  
The groans of Grendel, the foe of God  
Howling his hideous hymn of pain,  
The hell-thane shrieking in sore defeat.  
He was fast in the grip of the man who was greatest  
Of mortal men in the strength of his might,  
Who would never rest while the wretch was living,  
Counting his life-days a menace to man.

Many an earl of Beowulf brandished  
His ancient iron to guard his lord,  
To shelter safely the peerless prince.  
They had no knowledge, those daring thanes,  
When they drew their weapons to hack and hew,  
To thrust to the heart, that the sharpest sword,  
The choicest iron in all the world,  
Could work no harm to the hideous foe.  
On every sword he had laid a spell,  
On every blade; but a bitter death  
Was to be his fate; far was the journey  
The monster made to the home of fiends.

Then he who had wrought such wrong to men,  
With grim delight as he warred with God;  
Soon found that his strength was feeble and failing  
In the crushing hold of Hygelac's thane.  
Each loathed the other while life should last!  
There Grendel suffered a grievous hurt,  
A wound in the shoulder, gaping and wide;  
Sinews snapped and bone-joints broke,  
And Beowulf gained the glory of battle.  
Grendel, fated, fled to the fens,  
To his joyless dwelling, sick unto death.  
He knew in his heart that his hours were numbered.  
His days at an end. For all the Danes  
Their wish was fulfilled in the fall of Grendel.  
The stranger from far, the stalwart and strong,  
Had purged of evil the hall of Hrothgar,  
And cleansed of crime; the heart of the hero  
Joyed in the deed his daring had done.  
The lord of the Geats made good to the East-Danes  
The boast he had uttered; he ended their ill,  
And all the sorrow they suffered long  
And needs must suffer—a foul offense,  
The token was clear when the bold in battle  
Laid down the shoulder and dripping claw—  
Grendel's arm—in the gabled hall!

## Beowulf vs. Grendel The Mead-Hall Smack-Down

Translated by Ian Serraillier

Over the misty moor  
From the dark and dripping caves of his grim lair,  
Grendel with fierce ravenous stride came stepping.  
A shadow under the pale moon he moved,  
That fiend from hell, foul enemy of God  
Toward Heorot. He beheld it from afar, the gleaming roof  
Towering high to heaven. His tremendous hands  
Struck the studded door, wrenched it from the hinges  
Till the wood splintered and the bolts burst apart.  
Angrily he prowled over the polished floor,  
A terrible light in his eyes—a torch flaming!  
As he scanned the warriors, deep-drugged in sleep,  
Loud loud he laughed, and pouncing on the nearest  
Tore him limb from limb and swallowed him whole,  
Sucking the blood in streams, crunching the bones.  
Half-gorged, his gross appetite still unslaked,  
Greedy he reached his hand for the next—little reckoning  
For Beowulf. The youth clutched it and firmly grappled.

Such torture as this the fiend had never known.  
In mortal fear, he was minded to flee to his lair,  
But Beowulf prisoned him fast. Spilling the benches,  
They tugged and heaved, from wall to wall they hurtled.  
And the roof rang to their shouting, the huge hall  
Rocked, the strong foundations groaned and trembled.  
Then Grendel wailed from his wound, his shriek of pain  
Roused the Danes in their hiding and shivered to the stars.  
The warriors in the hall spun reeling from their couches,  
In dull stupor they fumbled for their swords, forgetting  
No man-made weapon might avail. Alone, Beowulf  
Tore Grendel's arm from his shoulder asunder,  
Wrenched it from the root while the tough sinews cracked.  
And the monster roared in anguish, well knowing  
That deadly was the wound and his mortal days ended.  
Wildly lamenting, away into the darkness he limped,  
Over the misty moor to his gloomy home.  
But the hero rejoiced in his triumph and wildly waved  
In the air his blood-stained trophy.

# Beowulf vs. Grendel

## The Mead-Hall Smack-Down

Translated by Seamus Heaney

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 towards it  
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.  
Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead  
and arrived at the bawn. 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,  
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  
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 ravening  
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;  
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  
utterly lifeless, eaten up  
hand and foot. Venturing closer,  
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  
in a handgrip harder than any man  
he had ever encountered in anything  
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  
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,  
the monster back-tracking, the man overpowering.  
The dread of the land was desperate to escape,  
to take a roundabout road and flee  
to the lair in the fens. The latching power  
in his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip  
the terror-monger had taken to Heorot.  
And now the timbers trembled and sang,  
a hall-session that harrowed every Dane  
inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,  
the two contenders crashed through the building.  
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  
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  
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,  
a God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,  
a 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.

But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined  
to allow his caller to depart alive:  
he did not consider that life of much account  
to anyone anywhere. Time and again,  
Beowulf's warriors worked to defend  
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  
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. But his going away  
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  
and had given offence 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  
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,  
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,  
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,  
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  
shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.