

Beowulf Presents His Resume

Translated by Charles W. Kennedy

“Hail! King Hrothgar! I am Hygelac’s thane,
Hygelac’s kinsman. Many a deed
Of honor and daring I’ve done in my youth.
This business of Grendel was brought to my ears
On my native soil. The seafarers say
This best of buildings, this boasted hall,
Stands dark and deserted when sun is set,
When darkening shadows gather with dusk.
The best of my people, prudent and brave,
Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
They had in remembrance my courage and might.
Many had seen me come safe from the conflict,
Bloody from battle; five foes I bound
Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.
Hard-driven in danger and darkness of night
I slew the nicors that swam the sea,
Avenge the woe they had caused the Weders,
And ended their evil—they needed the lesson!
And now with Grendel, the fearful fiend,
Single-handed I’ll settle the strife!
Prince of the Danes, protector of Scyldings,
Lord of nations, and leader of men,
I beg one favor—refuse me not,
Since I come thus faring from far-off lands—
That I may alone with my loyal earls,
With this hardy company, cleanse Hart-Hall.
I have heard that the demon in proud disdain
Spurns all weapons; and I too scorn—
May Hygelac’s heart have joy of the deed—
To bear my sword, or sheltering shield,
Or yellow buckler, to battle the fiend.
With hand-grip only I’ll grapple with Grendel;
Foe against foe I’ll fight to the death,
And the one who is taken must trust to God’s grace! . . .
If death shall call me, he’ll carry away
My gory flesh to his fen-retreat
To gorge at leisure and gulp me down,
Soiling the marshes with stains of blood.
There’ll be little need longer to care for my body!
If the battle slays me, to Hygelac send
This best of corselets that covers my breast,

Finest of byrnies. Fate goes as Fate must!”

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Translated by Ian Serrailier

'O noble Hrothgar, giver of treasure,
Lord of the rousing war-song, we bring you greeting.
Because we grieve deep for your desolation,
Over the long paths of the ocean have we laboured,
I and my warriors, to rid you of the brute
That nightly robs you of rest. I am no weakling.
With my trusty blade I have slain a monster brood
And blindly at night many a foul sea-beast
That writhed and twisted in the bounding wave.
I beg you to grant my wish. I shall not fail.'

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Translated by Frederick Rebsamen

"Hail to you, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's thane
nephew-kin and friend. I have known much peril
grim death-dangers. Grendel's ravages
came to my ears in my own homeland.
Sailors have said that this strong meadhall
with high gold-gables this Hall of the Hart
stands empty and idle when evening-light fades
when the dark sky lowers and light thins to gray.
My people have urged me, elders and youth
best of Weather-Geats brothers of my heart,
to cross the gulfway come straight to you
offer you my strength stand by your side.
They saw for themselves as I surfaced from ambush
broke through the waves to the winds of sunrise
how I crushed water-sprites cracked their blood-teeth
shoved them deathwards down by the sea-floor
fought them by night in narrow-dark waters
on the sandy ground. Grendel is next—
I will settle alone this sorrowful feud
this baleful business. I beg of you now
lord of the Ring-Danes royal man-leader
a small favor-gift from sovereign to friend—
do not refuse me now that I'm here
come from afar to cancel your problem—
I and my men no more than this war-band
will cleanse your Heorot close out this evil.
I also have hear that this hellish monster
with careless strength carries no weapons.
I will therefore swear in honor of Hygelac—
to keep my protector proud in his heart—
I'll bear no swordblade no shield to that fight
no boar-head helmet—with my handgrip only
I will fight this fiend find his life-core
man against monster. Tomorrow you will find
at rising of light the Ruler's judgment.
If this demon wins no doubt he will banquet
on bodies of Geats gorge with all of us
swill and swallow snatch our lives away
munch on our bones. Do not mourn for me
or search for my head in shadows of defeat
if he cracks my bones bends me deathwards
hauls me away hoping to taste me
slash me to morsels with murder in his heart
staining the moors. Do not sorrow for long
for my lifeless body lost and devoured.
But send to Hygelac if struggle takes me
this best of battle-shrouds breast-protector
greatest of corselets good Hrethel's gift
Weland's hand-smithing. Wyrd is determined!"

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Translated by Seamus Heaney

“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,
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.
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 boltered in the blood
of enemies
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).
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 defence, my one
request
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;
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
fight with the fiend. Whichever one
death fells
must deem it a just judgement 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
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;
he will run gloating with my raw
corpse
and feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy,
fouling his moor-nest. No need then
to lament for long or lay out my body:
if the battle takes me, send back
this breast-webbing that Weland
fashioned
and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.
Fate goes ever as fate must.”

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Translated by E. T. Donaldson

"Hail Hrothgar! I am kinsman and thane of Hygelac. In my youth I have set about many brave deeds. The affair of Grendel was made known to me on my native soil: sea-travelers say that this hall, best of buildings, stands empty and useless to all warriors after the evening-light becomes hidden beneath the cover of the sky. Therefore my people, the best wise earls, advised me thus, lord Hrothgar, that I should seek you because they know what my strength can accomplish. They themselves looked on when, bloody from my foes, I came from the fight where I had bound five, destroyed a family of giants, and at night in the waves slain water-monsters, suffered great pain, avenged an affliction of the Weather-Geats on those who had asked for trouble—ground enemies to bits. And now alone I shall settle affairs with Grendel, the monster, the demon. Therefore, lord of the bright-Danes, protector of the Scyldings, I will make a request of you, refuge of warriors, fair friend of nations, that you refuse me not, now that I have come so far, that alone with my company of earls, this band of hardy men, I may cleanse Heorot. I have also heard say that the monster in his recklessness cares not for weapons. Therefore, so that my liege lord Hygelac may be glad of me in his heart, I scorn to bear sword or broad shield, yellow wood, to the battle, but with my grasp I shall grapple with the enemy and fight for life, foe against foe. The one whom death takes can trust the Lord's judgment. I think that if he may accomplish it, unafraid he will feed on the folk of the Geats in the war-hall as he has often done on the flower of men. You will not need to hide my head if death takes me, for he will have me blood-smear'd; he will bear away my bloody flesh meaning to savor it, he will eat ruthlessly, the walker alone, will stain his retreat in the moor, no longer will you need trouble yourself to take care of my body. If battle takes me, send to Hygelac the best of war-clothes that protects my breast, finest of mail-shirts. It is a legacy of Hrethel, the work of Weland. Fate always goes as it must."