

Gestoh þin fæder fæthðe mæste,
 wearp hē Heapolāfe tō hand-bonan
 mid Wylfingum; ðā hine wāra cyn
 for here-brōgan habban ne mihte.
 Panon hē gesōhte Sūð-Dena folc
 ofer yða gewearc, Ār-Scyldinga;
 ðā ic furpum wēold folce Deniga
 ond on geogoðe hēold grimme-rīce,
 hord-buth haelþa; ðā was Heregār deað,
 mīn yldra mæg unliþgende,

bearn Healfdenes; sē was betera ðonne ic!
 Siððan þā fæthðe fēo þingode;
 sende ic Wylfingum ofer wæteres hrycg
 ealde mādmas; hē mē āþas swōr.
 Soth is mē tō secganne on sefan mīnum
 gumena fēngum, hwæt mē Grendel hafað
 hynðo on Heorote mid his hete-þancum,
 fæth-mīða gefremed; is mīn flet-werod,
 wīg-hēap gewanod; hīe wýrd forswēop
 on Grendles gryre. God ēaþe mæg
 þone dol-sceaðan dēða geiwefan!
 Ful oft geþeotedon bēore druncne
 ofer ealo-wæge ōret-mecgas,
 þæt hīe in bēor-sele bīðan woldon
 Grendles gýpe mid gryrum egea.
 Donne was þeos medo-heal on morgen-tīd,
 driht-sele dreor-fāh, þonne dæg līxte,
 eal beac-þelu blōde bestýmed,
 heall heorn-dreore; āhte ic holdra þý lās
 deorre dugude, þe þā deað fornam.

There was a feud one time, begun by your father.
 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 honour.
 I was then in the first flush of kingship,
 establishing my sway over all the rich strongholds
 of this heroic land. Heorogar,
 my older brother and the better man,
 also a son of Halfdene's, had died.

Finally I healed the feud by paying:

I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings
 and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance.

Start Hrothgar to Beowulf:

"It bothers me to have to burden anyone
 with all the grief Grendel has caused
 and the havoc he has wreaked upon us in Heorot,
 our humiliations. My household-guard
 are on the ware, fate sweeps them away
 into Grendel's clutches—

but God can easily
 halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

"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 whetted swords.
 But when dawn broke and day crept in
 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.

Site nū tō symle, ond on sēl meoto
 siġe hrēð-secga, swā þin sefa hwette!"
 Pā wæs Gēat-mæcgum geador ætsonne
 on bēor-sele beac ġerymed;
 þær swið-ferþe sittan ēodon,
 prýðum dealle; þegn nyte beþeold,
 sē þe on handa bær hroden ealo-wæge,
 scence scir-wered; scop hwīlum sang
 hādor on Heorote; þær wæs hæleða drēam,
 duguð unlytel Dena ond Wedera.

Unferð mabelode, Ecġlātes bearn,
 þe æt fōtum sæt frēan Scyldinga,
 onband beadu-rīne: wæs him Bēowulfes sið,
 mōðġes mere-faran, micel ærþunca,
 forþon þe hē ne ūpe, þæt ænig oðer man
 æfre mæra þon mā middan-ġeardes
 ġehēdde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa:
 "Fært þū sē Bēowulf, sē þe wið Breccan wunne,
 on siðne sē ymb sund flite,

ðær ġit for wlence wada cunneðon
 ond for dol-ġilpe on deop wæter
 aldrum neþdon? Nē inc ænig mon,
 nē leof nē lād, belēan mihte
 soth-fulle sið, þā ġit on sund rēon;
 þær ġit ēagor-strēam earnum þeiton,
 mæton mere-strāta, mundum brugdon,
 ġlidoð ofer ġār-secg. Ġeofoð yþum wēol,
 wintry s wylmum; ġit on wæteres æht
 seofon niht swuncon; hē þe æt sunde oferflāt,
 hæfde mære mægen; þā hine on morgen-ūd
 on Heapo-Rāmes holm up ærþær.

"Now take your place at the table, relish
 the triumph of heroes to your heart's content."

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,
 strong and stalwart. An attendant stood by
 with a decorated pitcher, pouring bright
 helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,
 filling Heorot with his head-clearing voice,
 gladdening that great rally of Geats and Danes.

From where he crouched at the king's feet,
 Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke
 contrary words. Beowulf's coming,
 his sea-braving, made him sick with envy:
 he could not brook or abide the fact
 that anyone else alive under heaven
 might enjoy greater regard than he did:

"Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca
 in a swimming match on the open sea,
 risking the water just to prove that you could win?
 It was sheer vanity made you venture out
 on the main deep. And no matter who tried,
 friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,
 neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed you.
 You waded in, embracing water,
 taking its measure, mastering currents,
 riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,
 winter went wild in the waves, but you vied
 for seven nights; and then he outswam you,
 came ashore the stronger contender:
 He was cast up safe and sound one morning

A feast in Heorot

*Unferth strikes a
 discordant note*

*Unferth's version of
 a swimming contest*

Donon hē gesōhte swāzne ēðel,
leof his leodum, lond Brondinga,
freoðo-burh fægere, þær hē folc āhte,
buth ond beagas. Bēot eal wið þē
sunu Bēanstānes sōðe gelæste.

Donne wēne ic tō þē wyrssan gepingea,
ðēah þū heaðo-ræsa gehwær dohte,
grimme gūðe, gif þū Grendles dearest
niht-longne fyrst nēan biðan."

Bēowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþēowes:
"Hwæt þū worn feala, wine mīn Unferð,
bēore druncen ymb Breca spræce,
sægðest from his siðel! Sōð ic talige
þæt ic mere-strengo māran āhte,
earfeþo on yþum, ðonne ænig oþer man.

Wit þæt gecwædon cniht-wesende
ond gebēotedon — wæron bēgen þā gīt
on geogoð-feore — þæt wit on gāt-secg ūt
aldrum nēōdon; ond þæt gearfdon swā
Hæfdon swurd nacod, þā wit on sund rēon,
heard on handa; wit unc wið hron-fixas
werian þōhton; nō hē wihit fram mē
flōd-yþum feor flēotan meahle,
huzpor on holme, nō ic fram him wolde.

Ðā wit ætsonne on sǣ wæron
fif nihta fyrst, oþþæt unc flōd tōdtrāf,
wado weallende, wedera cealdost,
nūpende niht, ond norþan-wind
heaðo-grim onduwearf. Hfēo wæron yþa,
wæs mere-fixa mōd onhtrēd.
Þær mē wið lǣðum hēc-syrce mīn,
heard, hond-locen, helpe gefremede,

among the Heathoreams, then made his way
to where he belonged in Bronding country,
home again, sure of his ground
in strongroom and bawn. So Breca made good
his boast upon you and was proved right.
No matter, therefore, how you may have fared
in every bout and battle until now,
this time you'll be worsted; no one has ever
outlasted an entire night against Grendel."

Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:
"Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say
about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer
that was doing the talking. The truth is this:
when the going was heavy in those high waves,
I was the strongest swimmer of all.

We'd been children together and we grew up
daring ourselves to outdo each other,
boasting and urging each other to risk
our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.
Each of us swam holding a sword,
a naked, hard-proofed blade for protection
against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never
move out farther or faster from me
than I could manage to move from him.
Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on
for five nights, until the long flow
and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,
night falling and winds from the north
drove us apart. The deep boiled up
and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.
My armour helped me to hold out;
my hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,

beado-hrægl brōden on brēostum læg
 gold egegyrwed. Mē tū grunde tēah
 fah fēond-scaða, fæste hæfde
 grim on grāpe; hwæpre mē gyfepe wearð,
 þæt ic āglæccan orde gerāhte,
 hilde-bille; heapo-rās fornam
 mihitig mere-dēor purh mīne hand.

“Swā mec gelōme lāðo-gefeonan
 prēatedon pearle; ic him pēnode
 dēoran sweorde, swā hit gedēfe wæs.
 Næs hie ðære fyлле gefēan hæfdon,
 mǣn-forðæddan, þæt hie mē pēgon,
 symbel ymbsæton sǣ-grunde nēah;
 ac on merenne mēcum wunde
 be yð-lāfe uppe lǣgon,
 sweordum āswefede, þæt syððan nā
 ymb brohtne forð brim-līðende
 lāde ne letton. Lēoht ēastan cōm,
 beoht bēacen Godes; brim swapredon
 þæt ic sǣ-nāssas gesēon milte,
 windige weallas. Wyrð oft nered
 unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah.
 Hwæpere mē gesǣde, þæt ic mid sweorde ofsiðh
 niceras nigene. Nō ic on niht gefrægn
 under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan,
 nē on ēg-strēamum earmran mannon.
 Hwæpere ic fāra feng fēore gedfge,
 sipes wērig. Ðā mec sǣ opbear,
 flōd æfter faroðe on Finna land,
 wadu weallendu. Nō ic wilt fram þe
 swylcra searo-nīða secgan hýrde,

a fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,
 kept me safe when some ocean creature
 pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast
 and swathed in its grip, I was granted one
 final chance: my sword plunged
 and the ordeal was over. Through my own hands,
 the fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

*Becoming tails of his
 ordeal in the sea*

“Time and again, foul things attacked me,
 lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,
 gave as good as I got with my sword.
 My flesh was not for feasting on,
 there would be no monsters gnawing and gloating
 over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.
 Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping
 the sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated
 like the ocean’s leavings. From now on
 sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids
 were over for good. Light came from the east,
 bright guarantee of God, and the waves
 went quiet; I could see headlands
 and buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,
 fate spares the man it has not already marked.
 However it occurred, my sword had killed
 nine sea-monsters. Such night-dangers
 and hard ordeals I have never heard of
 nor of a man more desolate in surging waves.
 But worn out as I was, I survived,
 came through with my life. The ocean lifted
 and laid me ashore, I landed safe
 on the coast of Finland.
 Now I cannot recall
 any fight you entered, Unferth,

billa brōgan. Breca næfre gīt
 æt heaðo-lāce, nē gehwæper incer,
 swā deorlice dæd gefremede
 fāgun sweordum — nō ic þæs fela gylpe—
 þeah ðu þīnum brōðrum tō banan wurde,
 hēafod-mægum; þæs þū in helle scealt
 werðo dreogan, þeah þīn wīl dūge.
 Secge ic þē tō sōðe, sumu Ecglāfes,
 þæt næfre Grendel swā fela gryra gefremede,
 atol æglæca ealdre þīnum,
 hýnðo on Heorote, gif þīn hige wære,
 sefa swā searo-gim, swā þū self talast;
 ac hē hafað onfunden, þæt hē þā fæhðe ne pearf,
 atole ecg-þrace ēower lēode
 swiðe onsittan, Sige-Seoyldinga.
 Nymed nýð-bāde, nānegum ārað
 lēode Demiga, ac hē lust wigeð,
 swefed on sendep, secce ne wēneþ
 tō Gār-Denum. Ac ic him Gēata sceal
 eafoð ond ellen ungeāra nū,
 gūpe gebēodan. Gæp eft sē þe mōt
 tō medo mōdig, siþpan morgen-lēoh
 ofer ylða bearn opres dōgores,
 sumne swegl-wered siþpan scīneð!”
 Þā wæs on sālum sinces brytta,
 gamol-feax ond gūð-rōf, gēoce gelyfde
 brego Beorht-Dena, gehýrde on Bēowulfe
 folces hyrde fæst-rædne gepōht.
 Ðær was hælepa hleahor, hlyn swynsode,
 word wæron wynsumne. Eode Wealhþeow forð,
 cwæn Hroðgāres, cynna gemynyndig;
 grētte gold-hroden guman on healle,

that bears comparison. I don't boast when I say
 that neither you nor Breca were ever much
 celebrated for swordsmanship
 or for facing danger on the field of battle.
 You killed your own kin and kin,
 so for all your cleverness and quick tongue,
 you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell.
 The fact is, Unferth, if you were truly
 as keen or courageous as you claim to be
 Grendel would never have got away with
 such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,
 havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere.
 But he knows he need never be in dread
 of your blade making a mizzle of his blood
 or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter—
 from the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear.
 He knows he can trample down you Danes
 to his heart's content, humiliate and murder
 without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.
 I will show him how Geats shape to kill
 in the heat of battle. Then whoever wants to
 may go bravely to mead, when morning light,
 scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south
 and brings another daybreak to the world.”

Then the grey-haired treasure-giver was glad;
 far-famed in battle, the prince of Bright-Danes
 and keeper of his people counted on Beowulf,
 on the warrior's steadfastness and his word.
 So the laughter started, the din got louder
 and the crowd was happy. Wealhtheow came in,
 Hrothgar's queen, observing the courtesies.
 Adorned in her gold, she graciously saluted

*Unferth rebuked.
 Beowulf reaffirms his
 determination to
 defeat Grendel*

*Wealhtheow,
 Hrothgar's queen,
 greets the banquet*

ond pā frēolic wīf ful gesealde
 ærest Æast-Dena eþel-wearde;
 bæd hine blīðne æt pære bēor-bege,
 lēodum lēofne; hē on lūst geþeah
 symbel ond sele-ful, sige-rōf kyning.
 Ymb-ēode pā ides Helminga
 dugube ond geogobe dā æghwylcne,
 sinc-fato sealde, oþþæt sæl ālamp,
 þæt hīo Bēowulf, beag-broden cwēn
 mōde gepungen, medo-ful ætþær.
 Grētte Gēata lēod, gode pancode
 wīs-fast wordum, þæs ðe hire se willa gelamp,
 þæt hēo on ænigne eorl gelyfde
 fyrena frōfre. Hē þæt ful geþeah,
 wæl-rēow wiga, æt Wealpbēon,
 ond pā gyddode gūþe gefýsde;
 Bēowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgþeowes:
 "Ic þæt hogode, pā ic on holm gestāh,
 sǣ-bāt gesæt mid mīnra secga gedriht,
 þæt ic ānunga ēowra lēoda
 willan geworhte, oþðe on wæl crunge,
 frēond-grāpum fast. Ic gefremman sceal
 eorlic ellen, oþðe ende-dæg
 on þisse meodu-healle mīnne gebīdan."
 Ðām wīfe pā word wēl hcodon,
 gilp-cwide Gēates; ēode gold-broden
 frēolicu folc-cwēn, tō hire frēan sitan.
 Pā was eft swā æt inne on healle
 þrýð-word sprecen, ðeod on sǣlum,
 sige-folca swég, oþþæt senninga

the men in hall, then handed the cup
 first to Hrothgar, their homeland's guardian,
 urging him to drink deep and enjoy it
 because he was dear to them. And he drank it down
 like the warlord he was, with festive cheer.
 So the Helming woman went on her rounds,
 queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,
 offering the goblet to all ranks,
 treating the household and the assembled troop
 until it was Beowulf's turn to take it from her hand.
 With measured words she welcomed the Geat
 and thanked God for granting her wish
 that a deliverer she could believe in would arrive
 to ease their afflictions. He accepted the cup,
 a daunting man, dangerous in action
 and eager for it always. He addressed Wealhtheow,
 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said:

"I had a fixed purpose when I put to sea.
 As I sat in the boat with my band of men,
 I meant to perform to the uttermost
 what your people wanted or perish in the attempt,
 in the fiend's clutches. And I shall fulfil that purpose,
 prove myself with a proud deed
 or meet my death here in the mead-hall."

This formal boast by Beowulf the Geat
 pleased the lady well and she went to sit
 by Hrothgar, regal and arrayed with gold.

Then it was like old times in the echoing hall,
 proud talk and the people happy,
 loud and excited; until soon enough

*Beowulf's formal
boast*

*Hrothgar lazes
Heort in Beowulf's
keeping*

sum Healfdenes sēcean wolde
 æfen-ræste. Wiste þæn ahlācan
 tō þām heah-sele hilde geþinged,
 siððan hīe sunnan lēoht gesēon meahon,
 oþ ðe nūpende niht ofer ealle,
 scadu-helma gesceapu scrīðan cwōman
 wan under wolcnum. Wēroð eall ārās.
 Gegeṛte þā guma ōþerne,
 Hrōðgār Beowulf, ond him hæl aþeād,
 wīn-ætnes gewæld, ond þæt word ācwæð:
 "Næfre ic ænegum men ār ālyfde,
 siððan ic hond ond rond hebban mihte,
 ðrȳp-æm Dena būton þē nū ða.
 Hafa nū ond geheald husa selest:
 gemyne mæþp, mægen-ellen cȳð,
 waca wið wṛapum! Nē bið þē wīna gād
 gif þū þæt ellen-weorc aldre gedigest."

Ðā him Hrōðgār gewāt mid his hælepa gedryht,
 eodur Scyldinga tū of healle;
 wolde wāg-fruma Wealhþeo sēcan,
 cwēn tō gebeddan. Hæfde kyning-wuldor
 Grendle tōgēanes, swā guman gefrungon,
 sele-weard āseted; sundor-nytte behēold
 ymb aldor Dena, eoton-weard' ābēad.
 Hīum Gēata lēoð geomre truwoðe
 mōðgan mægnas, Metodas hylðo.
 Ðā hē him of dyde isem-byrnan,
 helm of hafelan, sealde his hysted sword,
 irena cyst ombiht-pegne,
 ond gehealdan hēt hilde-geatwe.
 Gespræc þā se gōða gylp-worda sum,
 Beowulf Gēata, ār hē on bed stige:

Haldane's heir had to be away
 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
 and stealthy night-shapes came stealing forth
 under the cloud-munk. 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:
 "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,
 beware of the enemy. There's nothing you wish for
 that won't be yours if you win through alive."

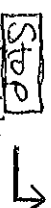
Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.
 The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,
 left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,
 his queen and bedmate. The King of Glory
 (as people learned) had posted a lookout
 who was a match for Grendel, a guard against monsters,
 special protection to the Danish prince.
 And the Geat placed complete trust
 in his strength of limb and the Lord's favour.
 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.
 And before he bedded down, Beowulf,
 that prince of goodness, proudly asserted:

"Nō ic mē an here-wæsmun inūgran talige
 gūþ-geweorca þonne Grendel hine;
 forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle,
 aldre benēotan, þēah ic eal mæge.
 Nāt hē þāra gōða, þæt hē mē ongēan slēa,
 rand gehāwe, þēah ðe hē rōf sīe
 nīþ-geweorca: ac wīl on nīht sculon
 secge ofersittan, gif hē gesēcean dear
 wīg ofer wāpen: ond sibðan wīng God
 on swā hwæpere hond, hālīg Dryhten,
 mæro dēme, swā him gemet pīnce."
 Hyrde hine þā heaþo-dēor, hlēor-bolster onfēng
 eorles andwītan, ond hine ymb monig
 snellīc sārīnc sele-reste gebēah.
 Nēnig heora þōhte, þæt hē þanon scolde
 eft eard-lufan æfre gesēcan,
 folc oððe frēo-burh, þær hē æfēded was;
 ac hīe hæfdon gefrūmen, þæt hīe ār tō fela micles
 in þām wīn-sele wæl-dēað fornam,
 Denigea lēode. Ac him Dryhten forgeaf
 wīg-spēda gewiofu, Wēdera lēodum,
 frōfor ond fulum, þæt hīe fēond heora
 ðurh ānes cræft ealle ofercōmon,
 selves mīhtum. Sōð is gecyðed,
 þæt mīhtīg God manna cymnes
 weold wīde-fehð. Cōm on waerne nīht
 scrīðan sceadu-genga; scēotend swæfon,
 þā þæt horn-reced healdan scoldon,
 ealle būton ānum. Þæt was yldum cūþ,
 þæt hīe ne mōste, þā Meod nolde,
 se syn-scapa under sceadu bregdan,

"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
 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
 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
 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,
 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
 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,
 all except one; it was widely understood
 that as long as God disallowed it,
 the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.