

until the black¹ raven, blithe-hearted, announced
the joy of heaven. Then light came hurrying
[bright over shadows;] the soldiers hastened,
the noblemen were eager to travel
1805 back to their people; the bold-spirited visitor
wished to seek his far-off ship.

The hardy one ordered Hrunting to be borne
to the son of Ecgla², bid him take his sword,
lordly iron; he thanked him for the loan,
1810 and said that he regarded it as a good war-friend,
skillful in battle, and the sword's edges
he did not disparage; he was a noble man.
And when the warriors were eager for their way,
equipped in their war-gear, the nobleman went,
1815 the Danes' honor, to the high seat where the other was:
the hero, brave in battle, saluted Hrothgar.

26
Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:
"Now we seafarers, come from afar,
wish to say that we desire
1820 to seek Hygelac. Here we were honorably
entertained with delights; you have treated us well.
If ever on earth I can do any thing
to earn more of your affection,
than the battle-deeds I have done already,
1825 ruler of men, I will be ready at once.
If ever I hear over the sea's expanse
that your neighbors threaten you with terror,
as your enemies used to do,
I will bring you a thousand thanes,
1830 heroes to help you. I have faith in Hygelac—
the lord of the Geats, though he be young,
shepherd of his people, will support me
with words and deeds, that I might honor you well
and bring to your side a forest of spears,
1835 the support of my might, whenever you need men.
If ever Hrethric decides, son of a prince,
to come to the Geatish court, he will find
many friends there; far-off lands

¹ *black* Either OE *blac* "shining" or *blac* "black"; the translation prefers the irony of the image of the black raven, not otherwise known as a harbinger of joy, announcing the surprising good news of a dawn without slaughter.

² *Son of Ecgla^f* I.e., Unferth.

are better sought by one who is himself good."

1840 Hrothgar spoke in answer to him:
"The wise Lord has sent those words
into your heart; I have never heard
a shrewder speech from such a young man.
You are strong in might and sound in mind,
1845 prudent in speech! I expect it is likely
that if it should ever happen that the spear
or the horrors of war take Hrethel's son,³
or sickness or sword strike the shepherd of his people,
your lord, and you still live,
1850 that the sea-Geats could not select
a better choice anywhere for king,
hoard-guard of heroes, if you will hold
the realm of your kinsmen. Your character pleases me
better and better, beloved Beowulf.
1855 You have brought it about that between our peoples,
the Geatish nation and the spear-Danes,
there shall be peace, and strife shall rest;
the malicious deeds that they endured before,
as long as I shall rule this wide realm,
1860 and treasures together; many shall greet
another with gifts across the gannet's bath;⁴
the ring-necked ship shall bring over the sea
tribute and tokens of love. I know these nations
will be made fast against friend and foe,
1865 blameless in everything, in the old way."

The protector of heroes, kinsman of Healfdene,
gave him twelve great treasures in the hall;
bid him seek his own dear people in safety
with those gifts, and quickly come again.
1870 Then the good king, of noble kin, kissed
that best of thanes and embraced his neck,
the Scylding prince; tears were shed
by that gray-haired man. He was of two minds—
but in his old wisdom knew it was more likely
1875 that never again would they see one another,
brave in their meeting-place. The man was so dear to him
that he could not hold back the flood in his breast,
but in his heart, fast in the bonds of his thought,
a deep-felt longing for the dear man
1880 burned in his blood. Beowulf from thence,
gold-proud warrior, trod the grassy lawn,

³ *Hrethel's son* I.e., Hygelac.

⁴ *gannet's bath* I.e., the sea.

exulting in treasure; the sea-goer awaited
its lord and owner, where it rode at anchor.
As they were going, the gift of Hrothgar
was often praised; that king was peerless;
1885 blameless in everything; until old age took from him
—it has injured so many—the joy of his strength.

Those men of high courage then came to the sea,
that troop of young retainers, bore their ring-mail,
1890 locked shirts of armor. The coast-guard observed
the return of those earls, as he had once before;
he did not greet those guests with insults
on the cliff-top, but he rode towards them,
said that the warriors in their shining armor
1895 would be welcome in their ships to the people of the
Weders.

The sea-curved prow, the ring-necked ship,
as it lay on the sand was laden with war-gear,
with horses and treasures; the mast towered high
over Hrothgar's hoard-gifts.
1900 To the ship's guardian he gave a sword,
bound with gold, so that on the mead-benches
he was afterwards more honored by that heirloom,
that old treasure. Onward they went, the ship
sliced through deep water, gave up the Danish coast.
1905 The sail by the mast was rigged fast with ropes,
a great sea-cloth; the timbers creaked,
the wind over the sea did not hinder at all
the wave-floater on its way; the sea-goer sped on,
floated foamy-necked, forth upon the waves,
1910 the bound prow over the briny streams,
until they could make out the cliffs of Geatland,
familiar capes; the keel drove forward
thrust by the wind, and came to rest on land.
Right away the harbor-guard was ready at the shore,
1915 who for a long time had gazed far
over the currents, eager for the beloved men;
he moored the broad-beamed ship on the beach
fast with anchor-ropes, lest the force of the waves
should drive away the handsome wooden vessel.
1920 He bade that the nobleman's wealth be borne ashore,
armor and plated gold; they had not far to go

to seek their dispenser of treasure,
Hygelac son of Hrethel, where he dwelt at home
with his companions, near the sea-wall.

1925 The building was splendid, the king quite bold,
high in his hall, Hygd² very young,
wise, well-mannered, though few winters
had the daughter of Hæreth passed within
the palace walls—yet not poor for that,
1930 nor stingy of gifts to the Geatish people,
of great treasures. She considered Thryth's pride,³
famous folk-queen, and her terrible crimes;
no man so bold among her own retainers
dared to approach her, except as her prince,⁴
1935 or dared to look into her eyes by day;
for he knew that deadly bonds, braided by hand,
were waiting for him—first the hand-grip,
and quickly after a blade appointed,
so that a patterned sword had to settle things,
1940 proclaim the execution. That is no queenly custom
for a lady to perform—no matter how lovely—
that a peace-weaver⁵ should deprive of life
a friendly man after a pretended affront.
The kinsman of Hemming⁶ put a halt to that;
1945 then ale-drinkers told another tale,
said she caused less calamity to the people,
less malicious evil, after she was
given gold-adorned to the young champion,
fair to that nobleman, when to Offa's floor
1950 she sought a journey over the fallow sea
at her father's wish, where she afterwards

² *Hygd* Hygelac's queen.

³ These lines are difficult. Some editions and translations read the name as "Modthryth"; the reading adopted here smooths out a transition that is otherwise abrupt even by the standards of this poem. This "digression" on the character of a queen, with some elements of a folktale, is the counterpoint to the story of Heremod in earlier sections.

⁴ *her prince* I.e., as her husband or her father.

⁵ *peace-weaver* This epithet reflects the common practice, whose sometimes-tragic consequences are explored at length elsewhere in the poem, of settling intertribal feuds with a marriage between the daughter of one lord and the son of another.

⁶ *kinsman of Hemming* Offa I, fourth-century king of the continental Angles, not Offa II, the eighth-century king of Mercia. The elaborate praise offered to Offa I has been taken to suggest that the poem may have been written or circulated in the court of Offa II, but there is otherwise no evidence for this.

on the throne, famous for good things,
used well her life while she had it,
held high love with that chief of heroes,
of all mankind, as men have told me,
the best between the two seas
of all the races of men; therefore Offa,
in gifts and battle, spear-bold man,
was widely honored, and held in wisdom
his own homeland. From him arose Eomer
as a help to heroes, kinsman of Hemming,
grandson of Garmund, skilled in violence.

28

The hardy man¹ with his hand-picked troop
went across the sand, trod the sea-plain,
the wide shore. The world's candle shone,
hastening from the south. They had survived their journey,
went boldly to where they knew
the protector of earls, slayer of Ongentheow,²
good young battle-king, gave out rings
in his fortress. To Hygelac
the arrival of Beowulf was quickly reported,
that to the enclosures his battle-companion,
protector of warriors, came walking alive
back to his court, safe from his battle-play.
Quickly, as the powerful one commanded,
the hall was cleared out inside for the foot-guests.

He sat down with him, who had survived the fight,
kinsmen together, after he greeted
his friend and liege-lord with a formal speech,
with courteous words and cups of mead.
The daughter of Hæreth³ passed through the hall;
cared for the people, bore the cup
to the hand of the hero.⁴ Hygelac began
to question his companion courteously
in the high hall—curiosity pressed him
to know how the sea-Geats' adventures were:

"How did you fare, beloved Beowulf,

¹ *The hardy man* I.e., Beowulf.

² *slayer of Ongentheow* Hygelac. The death of the Swedish king Ongentheow (at the hands of Wulf and Eofor, retainers of Hygelac) is told below, section 40.

³ *daughter of Hæreth* I.e., Hygd.

⁴ *to the hand of the hero*—The manuscript reads "to the hands of heathens," which makes sense, but is usually emended.

in your journey, when you suddenly resolved
to seek a far-off strife over the salt sea,
a battle in Heorot? Did you better at all
the well-known woe of Hrothgar,
the famous prince? For that I seethed
with heart-care and distress, mistrusted the adventure
of my beloved man; long I implored
that you not seek that slaughter-spirit at all,
let the south-Danes themselves make
war against Grendel. I say thanks to God
that I might see you again safe and sound."

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:

"It is no mystery to many men,
my lord Hygelac—the great meeting,
what a time of great struggle Grendel and I
had in that place where he made so many
sorrow for the victory-Scyldings,
life-long misery—I avenged them all,
so that none of Grendel's tribe needs to boast
anywhere on earth of that uproar at dawn,
whoever lives longest of that loathsome kind,
enveloped in foul evil. First I came there

to the ring-hall to greet Hrothgar;
quickly the famous kinsman of Healfdene,
once he knew of my intentions,
assigned me a seat with his own sons.
That troop was in delight; never in my life
have I seen among hall-sitters, under heaven's vault,
a more joyous feast. At times the famous queen,
bond of peace to nations, passed through the hall,
urged on her young sons; often she gave
twisted rings before she took her seat.

At times before the hall-thanes the daughter of Hrothgar
bore the ale-cup to the earls in the back—
Freawaru, I heard the men in the hall
call her, when the studded treasure-cup
was passed among them. She is promised,
young, gold-adorned, to the gracious son of Froda,⁵
the ruler of the Scyldings has arranged this,
the kingdom's shepherd, and approves the counsel
that he should settle his share of feud and slaughter

⁵ *the gracious son of Froda* Ingeld, prince of the Heathobards. His attack on the Danes, alluded to earlier in the poem (80–5), was apparently unsuccessful; another Old English poem, *Widsith*, reports that "Hrothulf and Hrothgar . . . humbled Ingeld's battle-array."

with this young woman. But seldom anywhere
after the death of a prince does the deadly spear rest
for even a brief while, though the bride be good!

"It may, perhaps, displease the Heathobards' prince,
and every retainer among his tribe,
when across the floor, following that woman, goes
a noble son of the Danes, received with honors;
on him glitters an ancestral heirloom,
hard, ring-adorned, once a Heathobard treasure
as long as they were able to wield their weapons."

29

"And then in that deadly shield-play they undid
their beloved comrades and their own lives:
Then an old spear-bearer¹ speaks over his beer,
who sees that ring-hilt and remembers all
the spear-deaths of men—his spirit is grim—
begins, sad-minded, to test the mettle
of a young thane with his innermost thoughts,
to awaken war, and says these words:

"Can you, my friend, recognize that sword,
which your father bore into battle
in his final adventure beneath the helmet,
that dear iron, when the Danes struck him,
ruled the field of slaughter after the rout of heroes,
when Withergyld² fell—those valiant Scyldings?
Now here some son or other of his slayer
walks across this floor, struts in his finery,
brags of the murder and bears that treasure
which ought, by right, to belong to you."

He urges and reminds him on every occasion
with cruel words, until the time comes
that Freawaru's thane, for his father's deeds,
sleeps; bloodstained from the bite of a sword,
forfeits his life; from there the other
escapes alive, for he knows the land well.
Then on both sides the sworn oaths of earls
will be broken, once bitter violent hate
wells up in Ingeld, and his wife-love

¹ *an old spear-bearer* Of the Heathobards, outraged by the presence of his former enemies, the Danes. In heroic poetry when a warrior falls, his killer is often awarded his armor; the sword is a vivid reminder of the fate of its former owner and the duty of revenge which is passed on to the next generation.

² *Withergyld* Apparently a famous Heathobard warrior.

grows cooler after his surging cares.
Thus I expect that the Heathobards' part
in the Danish alliance is not without deceit,
nor their friendship fast.

I will speak further
concerning Grendel, so that you might certainly know,
giver of treasure, how it turned out,
the heroic wrestling-match. When heaven's gem
slipped under the ground, the angry spirit came,
horrible, evening-grim, sought us out
where, unharmed, we guarded the hall.
The attack came first against Hondscio³ there,
deadly to that doomed man—he fell first,
a girded champion; Grendel was
that famous young retainer's devourer,
gobbled up the body of that beloved man.
None the sooner did that slayer, blood in his teeth,
mindful of misery, mean to leave
that gold-hall empty-handed,
but in his mighty strength he tested me,
grabbed with a ready hand: A glove⁴ hung
huge, grotesque, fast with cunning clasps;
it was all embroidered with evil skill,
with the devil's craft and dragons' skins.
Inside there, though I was innocent,
that proud evil-doer wanted to put me,
one of many, but it was not to be,
once I angrily stood upright:

"It is too long to tell how I handed back payment
to the people's enemy for all his evils—
there, my prince, I did honor to your people
with my actions. He escaped away,
enjoyed his life a little while longer;
yet behind him, guarding his path, was his right

³ *Hondscio* We finally learn the name of the retainer killed in section 11. The name, as in modern German (*Handschuh*), means "glove."

⁴ *glove* It is not clear what this is; apparently a pouch of some kind. It is characteristic of a troll in Norse legend. In any case it does not figure in the narrator's own description of Grendel's attack, and is but one of several discrepancies between the two tellings of the story.

The placement of this section is conjectural; the sectional divisions of the manuscript are confused at this point.

hand in Heorot, and wretched, he went hence,
sad at heart, and sank to the sea-floor.

For that bloody onslaught the friend of the Scyldings
repaid me greatly with plated gold,
many treasures, when morning came,

and we had gathered together to the feast again.

There was song and joy; the aged Scylding,
widely learned, told of far-off times;

at times the brave warrior touched the song-wood,
delight of the harp, at times made lays
both true and sad, at times strange stories

he recounted rightly. That great-hearted king,
gray-bearded old warrior wrapped in his years,

at times began to speak of his youth again,
his battle-strength; his heart surged within him

when, old in winters, he remembered so much.

And so there inside we took our ease
all day long, until night descended

again upon men. There, quickly ready
with revenge for her griefs, Grendel's mother

journeyed sorrowful; death took her son,
the war-hate of the Weders. That monstrous woman

avenged her son, killed a soldier
boldly at once—there the life of Æschere,

wise old counselor, came to its end.

And when morning came the men of the Danes
were not able to burn his body, death-weary,

with flames, nor place him on a funeral pyre,
beloved man; she bore away his corpse

in her evil embrace under the upland streams.

That, to Hrothgar, was the most wrenching distress
of all those that had befallen that folk-leader.

Then the prince—by your life—implored me,
his mind wracked, that in the roaring waves

I should do a noble deed, put my life in danger,
perform glorious things—he promised me reward.

In the waves I found, as is widely known,
a grim, horrible guardian of the abyss.

There, for a while, we fought hand-to-hand;
the sea foamed with blood, and I severed the head

of Grendel's mother with a mighty sword

2140 in that [battle-]hall;² I barely managed
to get away with my life—I wasn't doomed yet—
and the protector of earls once again gave me
many treasures, that kinsman of Healfdene.

“So that nation's king followed good customs;
in no wise have I lost those rewards,

the prize for my strength, but the son of Healfdene
offered me treasures at my own choice,

which I wish to bring to you, o war-king,
to show good will. Still all my joys

are fixed on you alone; I have few
close kinsmen, my Hygelac, except for you.”

He ordered to be borne in the boar standard,
the helmet towering in battle, the gray byrnie,

the decorated sword, and told this story:

2155 “Hrothgar gave me this battle-gear,
wise prince, and commanded particularly
that first I should tell you the story of his gift—
he said that Heorogar the king³ first had it,

lord of the Scyldings, for a long while;

2160 none the sooner would he give to his own son,
the valiant Heoroward—loyal though he was—
that breast-armor. Use all well!”

Then, as I've heard, four swift horses,
fallow as apples, well-matched, followed

2165 that war-gear; he gave him as a gift
the horses and harness—as kinsman should behave,
never knitting a net of malice for another
with secret plots, preparing death

for his hand-picked comrades. Hygelac's nephew
2170 was loyal to him; hardy in the fight,
and each man to the other mindful of benefits.—
I heard that he gave the necklace to Hygd,
the wondrous ornamented treasure which Wealhtheow

had given him,
to that lord's daughter, along with three horses

2175 graceful and saddle-bright; her breast was adorned
the more graciously after that ring-giving.

So the son of Ecgtheow showed himself brave,

¹ the aged Scylding It is not clear whether this is Hrothgar or not, or how many storytellers and singers are at this banquet.

² [battle-]hall A word is missing; other editors and translators supply different words, such as *grund* or “earth.”

³ Heorogar the king Eldest brother of Hrothgar.

renowned for battles and noble deeds,
pursued honor, by no means slew, drunken,

2180 his hearth-companions; he had no savage heart,
but the great gift which God had given him,
the greatest might of all mankind, he held,
brave in battle. He had been long despised,

as the sons of the Geats considered him no good,
nor did the lord of the Weders wish to bestow
his many good things upon him on the meadbenches,
for they assumed that he was slothful,

2185 a cowardly nobleman. Reversal came
to the glorious man for all his griefs:
The protector of earls, battle-proud king,
ordered the heirloom of Hrethel¹ brought in,
adorned with gold; among the Geats there was

2190 no finer treasure in the form of a sword.
He laid the sword in Beowulf's lap,
and gave him seven thousand hides of land,
a hall and a princely throne. Both of them held

2195 no inherited land in that nation, a home
and native rights, but the wider rule
was reserved to the one who was higher in rank.

2200 Then it came to pass amid the crash of battle
in later days, after Hygelac lay dead,
and for Heardred² the swords of battle held
deadly slaughter under the shield-wall,

2205 when the Battle-Scyldings sought him out,
those hardy soldiers, and savagely struck down
the nephew of Hereric⁴ in his victorious nation—
then came the broad kingdom

into Beowulf's hands; he held it well
for fifty winters—he was then a wise king,
old guardian of his homeland—until

2210 in the dark nights a dragon began his reign,
who guarded his hoard in the high heaths
and the steep stone barrows; the path below
lay unknown to men. Some sort of man

2215 went inside there, found his way to

¹ Hrethel Father of Hygelac.

² hides Units of land, originally the amount of land which could support a peasant and his family; its actual size varied from one region to another. Seven thousand hides is by any measure a very generous area.

³ Heardred Son of Hygelac.

⁴ nephew of Hereric I.e., Heardred.

the heathen hoard—his hand
inlaid with jewels. He⁶ got no profit there,

though he had been trapped in his sleep
by a thief's trickery: the whole nation knew,
2220 and all the people around them, that he was enraged.

Not for his own sake did he who sorely harmed him
break into that worm-hoard,⁷ or by his own will,
but in sad desperation some sort of [slave]⁸
of a warrior's son fled the savage lash,

2225 the servitude of a house, and slipped in there,
a man beset by sins. Soon he gazed around
and felt the terror from that evil spirit;
yet ...

... made ...

2230 ... when the terror seized him
he snatched a jeweled cup.⁹

There were many such
antique riches in that earth-hall,

for in ancient days an unknown man
had thought to hide them carefully there,

2235 the rich legacy of a noble race,
precious treasures. In earlier times
death had seized them all, and he who still survived
alone from that nation's army lingered there,

a mournful sentry, expected the same,
2240 that he might enjoy those ancient treasures
for just a little while. A waiting barrow
stood in an open field near the ocean waves,
new on the cape, safe with crafty narrow entrances;

he bore within the noble wealth,
2245 the plated gold, that guardian of rings,
a share worthy of a hoard, and spoke few words:
“Hold now, o thou earth, for heroes cannot,

⁵ The manuscript is damaged here and some text is unreadable. Among many conjectural restorations one thing is clear—a cup is taken from the dragon's hoard.

⁶ He The thief; “he” in the following line refers to the dragon. These lines are nearly illegible and other readings have been proposed.

⁷ worm-hoard Dragon's treasure.

⁸ slave The word is illegible in the manuscript; the translation follows most editions.

⁹ yet ... cup The manuscript is unreadable at this point.

the wealth of men—lo, from you long ago
those good ones first obtained it! Death in war
and awful deadly harm have swept away
all of my people who have passed from life,
and left the joyful hall. Now have I none
to bear the sword or burnish the bright cup,
the precious vessel—all that host has fled.
Now must the hardened helm of hammered gold
be stripped of all its trim; the stewards sleep
who should have tended to this battle-mask.
So too this warrior's coat, which waited once
the bite of iron over the crack of boards,
molders like its owner. The coat of mail
cannot travel widely with the war-chief,
beside the heroes. Harp-joy have I none,
no happy song; nor does the well-schooled hawk
soar high throughout the hall, nor the swift horse
stamp in the courtyards. Savage butchery
has sent forth many of the race of men!"

So, grieving, he mourned his sorrow,
alone after all. Unhappy sped
both days and nights, until the flood of death
broke upon his heart. An old beast of the dawn
found that shining hoard standing open—
he who, burning, seeks the barrows,
a fierce and naked dragon, who flies by night
in a pillar of fire; people on earth
fear him greatly. It is his nature to find
a hoard in the earth, where, ancient and proud,
he guards heathen gold, though it does him no good.¹

Three hundred winters that threat to the people
held in the ground his great treasury,
wondrously powerful, until one man
made him boil with fury; he² bore to his liege-lord
the plated cup, begged for peace
from his lord. Then the hoard was looted,
the hoard of rings fewer, a favor was granted
the forlorn man; for the first time
his lord looked on that ancient work of men.

When the dragon stirred, strife was renewed;
he slithered along the stones, stark-hearted he found
his enemy's footprint—he had stepped too far

¹ The association of dragons and hoarded treasure is ancient and proverbial.

² *he* I.e., the thief.

in his stealthy skill, too close to the serpent's head:
Thus can an undoomed man easily survive
wrack and ruin, if he holds to the Ruler's
grace and protection!³ The hoard-guardian
searched along the ground; greedy to find
the man who had sorely harmed him while he slept;
hot, half-mad; he kept circling his cave
all around the outside, but no one was there
in that wilderness to welcome his warfare
and the business of battle. Soon he returned to his barrow,
sought his treasure; he soon discovered
that some man had disturbed his gold,
his great wealth. The hoard-guardian waited
impatiently until evening came;
the barrow's shepherd was swollen with rage;
the loathsome foe would repay with fire
his precious drinking-cup. Then day was departed
to the delight of that worm; he did not linger
on the barrow wall, but took off burning
in a burst of flames. The beginning was terror
to the people on land, and to their ring-giving lord:
the ending soon would be sore indeed.

Then that strange visitor began to spew flames
and burn the bright courts; his burning gleams
struck horror in men. That hostile flier
would leave nothing alive.
The worm's warfare was widely seen,
his ferocious hostility, near and far,
how the destroyer hated and harmed
the Geatish people, then hastened to his hoard,
his dark and hidden hall, before the break of day.
He had surrounded the people of that region with fire,
flames and cinders; he took shelter in his barrow,
his walls and warfare—but that trust failed him.

To Beowulf the news was quickly brought
of that horror—that his own home,
best of buildings, had burned in waves of fire;
the gift-throne of the Geats. To the good man that was
painful in spirit, greatest of sorrows;
the wise one believed he had bitterly offended
the Ruler of all, the eternal Lord,

³ This is the narrator's version of Beowulf's comment at lines 572-73.

against the old law; his breast within groaned
with dark thoughts—that was not his custom.
The fire-dragon had found the stronghold of that folk,
that fortress, and had razed it with flames
entirely and from without; for that the war-king,
prince of the Weders, devised revenge.
Then the lord of men bade them make,
protector of warriors, a wondrous war-shield,
all covered with iron; he understood well
that wood from the forest would not help him,
linden against flames. The long-good nobleman
had to endure the end of his loaned days,
this world's life—and so did the worm,
though he had held for so long his hoarded wealth.

Then that prince of rings scorned to seek out
the far-flung flier with his full force of men;
a large army; he did not dread that attack,
nor did he worry much about the dragon's warfare,
his strength or valor, because he had survived
many battles, barely escaping alive
in the crash of war, after he had cleansed,
triumphant hero, the hall of Hrothgar,
and at battle crushed Grendel and his kin,
that loathsome race.

It was not the least
of hand-to-hand combats when Hygelac was slain,
when the king of the Geats, in the chaos of battle,
the lord of his people, in the land of the Frisians,
the son of Hrethel, died sword-drunk,
beaten by blades. Beowulf escaped from there
through his own strength, took a long swim;
he had in his arms the battle-armor
of thirty men, when he climbed to the cliffs.
By no means did the Hetware⁴ need to exult
in that fight, when they marched on foot to him,
bore their linden shields; few came back
from that brave soldier to seek their homes.
The son of Ecgtheow crossed the vast sea,
wretched, solitary, returned to his people,
where Hygd offered him the hoard and kingdom,
rings and royal throne; she did not trust
that her son could hold the ancestral seat
against foreign hosts, now that Hygelac was dead.
But despite their misery, by no means

⁴ *Hetware* A Frankish tribe apparently on the side of the Frisians.

could they prevail upon that prince at all
that he should become lord over Heardred,
or choose to rule the kingdom.
Yet he upheld him⁵ in the folk with friendly counsel,
good will and honors, until he was older,
and ruled the Weder-Geats.
Wretched exiles,
the sons of Ohthere,⁶ sought him out across the seas;
they had rebelled against the Scylfings' ruler,
the best of all the sea-kings
who dispensed treasure in the Swedish lands,
a famous king. That cost him⁷ his life:
for his hospitality he took a mortal hurt
with the stroke of a sword, that son of Hygelac;
and the son of Ongentheow afterwards went
to seek out his home, once Heardred lay dead,
and let Beowulf hold the high throne
and rule the Geats—that was a good king.

In later days he⁶ did not forget
that prince's fall, and befriended Eadgils
the wretched exile; across the open sea
he gave support to the son of Ohthere
with warriors and weapons. He⁷ wreaked his revenge
with cold sad journeys, and took the king's life.

And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived
every struggle, every terrible onslaught,
with brave deeds, until that one day
when he had to take his stand against the serpent.

² *upheld him* Beowulf upheld Heardred, as champion and in effect a kind of regent.

³ *sons of Ohthere*—I.e., Eanmund and Eadgils.

⁴ *Scylfing's ruler* Onela, son of Ongentheow. Ohthere had succeeded his father Ongentheow, but after his death his brother Onela apparently seized the throne and drove the two young men Eanmund and Eadgils into exile. They take refuge at the Geatish court, for which Heardred is attacked and killed by Onela. Later Eanmund is killed by Weohstan (see section 36 below) but Eadgils, with the help of Beowulf, becomes king (section 34).

⁵ *him* I.e., Heardred.

⁶ *he* I.e., Beowulf, whose revenge for the death of his lord Heardred takes a curiously indirect form—he supports Eadgils' return to Sweden, where Onela is killed.

⁷ *He* I.e., Eadgils.

Grim and enraged, the lord of the Geats took a dozen men¹ to seek out the dragon; he had found out by then how the feud arose, the baleful violence; the precious vessel had come to him through the thief's hands. He was the thirteenth man among that troop, who had brought about the beginning of that strife, a sad-minded captive—wretched and despised he led the way to that plain. He went against his will to where he alone knew the earth-hall stood, an underground cave near the crashing waves, the surging sea; inside it was full of gems and metal bands. A monstrous guardian, eager for combat, kept his gold treasures ancient under the ground; getting them was no easy bargain for any man.

The battle-hardened king sat down on the cape, then wished good health to his hearth-companions, the gold-friend of the Geats. His heart was grieving, restless and ripe for death—the doom was

immeasurably near that was coming to meet that old man, seek his soul's treasure, split asunder his life and his body; not for long was the spirit of that noble king enclosed in its flesh.

Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow: "In my youth I survived many storms of battle, times of strife—I still remember them all. I was seven years old when the prince of treasures, friend to his people, took me from my father;² Hrethel the king held me and kept me, gave me gems and feasts, remembered our kinship. I was no more hated to him while he lived — a man in his stronghold—than any of his sons, Herebeald and Hæthcyn and my own Hygelac.

For the eldest,³ undeservedly, a death-bed was made by the deeds of a kinsman, after Hæthcyn with his horn bow struck down his own dear lord with an arrow—he missed his mark and murdered his kinsman,

¹ a dozen men Literally "one of twelve"—Beowulf, Wiglaf, and ten others. The thief who leads the way is the thirteenth man.

² took me ... father Beowulf was brought up as a noble foster-child in the royal court.

³ eldest I.e., Herebeald.

2440 one brother to the other with a bloody shaft; That was a fight beyond settling, a sinful crime, shattering the heart; yet it had to be that a nobleman lost his life unavenged.

"So it is sad for an old man to live to see his young son ride on the gallows⁴—then let him recount a story, I a sorry song, when his son hangs of comfort only to the ravens, and he cannot, though old and wise, offer him any help.

2450 Each and every morning calls to mind his son's passing away; he will not care to wait for any other heir or offspring in his fortress, when the first one has tasted evil deeds and fell death.

2455 He looks sorrowfully on his son's dwelling, the deserted wine-hall, the windswept home, bereft of joy—the riders sleep, heroes in their graves; there is no harp-music, no laughter in the court, as there had been long before.

2460 "He takes to his couch and keens a lament all alone for his lost one; all too vast to him seem the fields and townships.

So the protector of the Weders⁵ bore surging in his breast heartfelt sorrows for Herebeald. He could not in any way make amends for the feud with his murderer, but neither could he hate that warrior for his hostile deeds, though he was not dear to him. Then with the sorrow which befell him too sorely, he gave up man's joys, chose God's light;⁶ he left to his children his land and strongholds — as a blessed man does—when he departed this life.

2470

⁴ It is usually suggested that this is a kind of epic simile, comparing Hrethel's grief over his son's death—a death beyond the scope of vengeance—to the grief of a criminal's father, who cannot claim compensation for the execution of his son. Mitchell and Robinson suggest that this is rather a reference to a pagan practice, part of the cult of Odin (also known as "Woden"), in which the body of a man who did not die in battle was ritually hanged on a gallows. If this interpretation is correct, the "old man" is Hrethel himself.

⁵ the protector of ... Weders I.e., Hrethel.

⁶ God's light I.e., he died.

Then there was strife between Swedes and Geats, a quarrel in common across the wide water, hard hostility after Hrethel died, until the sons of Ongentheow⁷

2475 were bold and warlike, wanted no peace over the sea, but around the Hill of Sorrows⁸ they carried out a terrible and devious campaign. My friends and kinsmen got revenge for those feuds and evils⁹—as it is said—

2480 although one of them paid for it with his own life; a hard bargain; that battle was fatal for Hæthcyn, king of the Geats. Then, I've heard, the next morning, one kinsman avenged the other with the sword's edge,¹⁰ when Ongentheow attacked Eofor;

2485 his battle-helm slipped, the old Scylfing staggered, corpse-pale; Eofor's hand recalled his fill of feuds, and did not withhold the fatal blow.

2490 "I have paid in battle for the precious treasures he gave me, as was granted to me, with a gleaming sword; he gave me land, a joyous home. He had no need to have to go seeking among the Gifthas or the Spear-Danes or the Swedes

2495 for a worse warrior, or buy one with his wealth; always on foot I would go before him, alone in the front line—and all my life

2500 I will wage war, while this sword endures, which before and since has served me well, since I slew Dæghrefn, champion of the Hugas, with my bare hands in front of the whole army. He could not carry off to the Frisian king

⁷ strife ... Geats. This refers to a time a generation before the conflicts of Heardred, Eanmund and Eadgils; the Swedish-Geatish feud is longstanding.

⁸ sons of Ongentheow I.e., Ohtere and Onela.

⁹ Hill of Sorrows A hill in Geatland, in OE *Hreosnabeorh*.

¹⁰ The scene of this revenge is apparently Sweden, in a place called "Ravenswood"; this battle is described again in sections 40 and 41.

¹¹ one kinsman ... sword's edge Hygelac avenged the death of Hæthcyn on his slayer Ongentheow—not directly but through his man Eofor.

¹² he I.e., Hygelac.

¹³ Hugas Frankish tribes allied to the Frisians; the battle in question may be the same as Hygelac's fatal raid.

2505 that battle-armor and that breast-adornment, but there in the field the standard-bearer fell, a nobleman in his strength; no blade was his slayer, but my warlike grip broke his beating heart, cracked his bone-house. Now the blade's edge, hand and hard sword, shall fight for the hoard."

2510 Beowulf spoke, said boasting words for the very last time: "I have survived many battles in my youth; I will yet seek out, an old folk-guardian, a feud and do a glorious deed, if only that evildoer

2515 will come out to me from his earth-hall." Then for the last time he saluted each of the soldiers, his own dear comrades, brave in their helmets: "I would not bear a sword or weapon to this serpent, if I knew any other way.

2520 I could grapple with this great beast after my boast, as I once did with Grendel; but I expect the heat of battle-flames there, steam and venom; therefore shield and byrnie will I have on me. From the hoard's warden

2525 I will not flee a single foot, but for us it shall be at the wall as *wyrd* decrees, the Ruler of every man. My mind is firm; I will forgo boasting against this flying foe.

2530 Wait on the barrow, protected in your byrnies, men in war-gear, to see which of the two of us after the bloody onslaught can better bear his wounds. It is not your way, nor proper for any man except me alone, that he should march his strength against this monster,

2535 do heroic deeds. With daring I shall get that gold—or grim death and fatal battle will bear away your lord!"

2540 Then that brave challenger stood up by his shield, stern under his helmet, bore his battle-shirt under the stone-cliffs, trusted the strength of a single man—such is not the coward's way.

2545 He saw then by the wall—he who had survived a great many conflicts, good in manly virtues, the crash of battles when footsoldiers clashed—stone arches standing, and a stream.

¹⁴ breast-adornment Possibly the same as the necklace described in 1195–1214.

¹⁵ great beast The OE word *agleacan* is here used of the dragon.

shooting forth from the barrow; its surge
 was hot with deadly flames, and near the hoard
 he could not survive for very long
 unburnt, for the dragon's flaming breath.
 2550 Enraged, the ruler of the Weder-Geats
 let a word burst forth from his breast,
 shouted starkly; the sound entered
 and resounded battle-clear under the gray stone.
 Hate was stirred up—the hoard-warden recognized
 2555 the voice of a man; there was no more time
 to sue for peace. First there issued
 the steam of that great creature out of the stone,
 hot battle-sweat; the earth bellowed.
 The warrior in the barrow turned his shield-board
 2560 against the grisly stranger, lord of the Geats,
 when the writhing beast's heart was roused
 to seek combat. The good war-king
 had drawn his sword, its edges undulled,
 an ancient heirloom; each of the two
 2565 hostile ones was horrified by the other.
 He stood stouthearted behind his steep shield,
 that friend and commander, when the worm coiled itself
 swiftly together—he waited in his war-gear.
 Then coiled, burning, slithering he came,
 2570 rushing to his fate. The shield defended well
 the life and limb of the famous lord
 for less time than he might have liked;
 there on that day for the first time
 he faced the outcome,¹ and *wyrd* did not
 2575 grant victory in battle. The lord of the Geats
 raised his hand, struck that mottled horror
 with his ancient sword, so that that edge failed
 bright against the bony scales, but less strongly
 than the king of that nation needed it to do,
 2580 hard-pressed in battle. Then the barrow-warden
 was more savage after that battle-stroke,
 and spit out gruesome fire; wide sprang
 the battle-flames. The gold-friend of the Geats
 did not boast of his glorious victories; his bare sword
 2585 failed at need, as it should never have done,
 that ancient good iron. It was no easy journey
 for the famous son of Ecgtheow to agree
 to give up his ground in that place;

¹ for the first time ... outcome Or "if he could have controlled the outcome for the first time."

he was forced, against his will, to find
 2590 a place of rest elsewhere—just as every one of us
 must give up these loaned days.
 It was not long
 until those two great creatures² came together again.
 The hoard-guard took heart, his breast swelled with breath
 once again; he³ suffered anguish,
 2595 trapped by flames, he who had once ruled his folk.
 His comrades, hand-chosen, sons of noblemen,
 did not take their stand in a troop around him,
 with warlike valor—they fled to the woods
 and saved their lives. The spirit rose up in sorrow
 2600 in the heart of one of them; nothing can overrule
 kinship at all, in one who thinks well.
 He was called Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
 a worthy shield-warrior, a prince of the Scylfings,⁴
 kinsman of Ælfhere: He saw his liege-lord
 2605 suffer heat under his war-helmet;
 he recalled the honors he had received from him,
 the wealthy homestead of the Wægmundings,
 every folk-right that his father had possessed;
 he could not hold back—his hand seized
 2610 the pale linden shield, and he drew his old sword.
 It was known among men as the heirloom of Eanmund,
 son of Ohthere; that friendless exile
 was slain in battle with the edge of a sword
 by Weohstan, who brought to his kinsman
 2615 the burnished helmet, the ringed byrnie,
 the old giant-work sword; Onela gave to him
 the war-equipment of his young kinsman,
 the shining armor—he never spoke of a feud,
 though he had slain his brother's son.⁵

² creatures OE *aglecan* again, here referring to Beowulf and the dragon together.

³ he I.e., Beowulf.

⁴ a prince of the Scylfings Wiglaf's nationality is in question—he is both a Swede and a Wægmunding (like Beowulf; see lines 2813–14). His father fought on the Swedish side in their feuds with the Geats. Tribal allegiance is more fluid than modern nationality.

⁵ he never ... brother's son Onela never spoke of a feud, though Weohstan had killed Onela's brother's son, for he wished him dead. As elsewhere in the poem, a sword is the reminder of both victory and vengeance.

2620 He¹ kept that war-gear for a great many years,
 the blade and byrnie, until his boy could
 perform brave deeds like his father before him; but
 he gave him among the Geats that battle-gear,
 every piece of it, when, old, he departed this life
 2625 and went forth. That was the first time
 that the young warrior had to weather
 the storm of battle beside his noble lord.
 His courage did not melt, nor did his kinsman's legacy
 weaken in war; the worm discovered that
 2630 when they began to meet together.
 Wiglaf spoke, said to his companions
 many true words—he was mournful at heart—
 "I remember the time that we took mead together,
 when we made promises to our prince
 2635 in the beer-hall—he gave us these rings—
 that we would pay him back for this battle-gear,
 these helmets and hard swords, if such a need
 as this ever befell him. For this he chose us from the army
 for this adventure by his own will,
 2640 thought us worthy of glory, and gave me these treasures—
 for this he considered us good spear-warriors,
 proud helmet-wearers, even though our prince,
 shepherd of his people, intended to perform
 2645 this act of courage all alone—
 reckless heroic deeds. Now the day has come
 that our noble lord has need of the support
 of good warriors; let us go to it,
 help our warlord, despite the heat,
 2650 grim fire-terror. God knows for my part
 that I would much prefer that the flames should enfold
 my body alongside my gold-giving lord.
 It seems wrong to me that we should bear shields
 back to our land, unless we first might
 2655 finish off this foe, defend the life
 of the prince of the Weders: I know full well
 that he does not deserve to suffer
 this torment all alone among the Geatish troop,
 or fall in the struggle; now sword and helmet,
 2660 byrnie and battle-dress, shall be ours together!"

He hurried through the deadly fumes; bore his
 helmet
 to the aid of his lord, spoke little:

¹ he I.e., Weohstan.

"Dear Beowulf, do all well,
 as in your youth you said you would,
 2665 that you would never let in your whole life
 your fame decline; now firm in deeds,
 single-minded nobleman, with all your strength,
 you must protect your life—I will support you."
 After these words the worm came angrily,
 2670 terrible vicious creature, a second time,
 scorched with surging flames, seeking out his enemies,
 the hated men. The hot flames rolled in waves,
 burned the shield to its rim; the byrnie was not
 of any use to the young soldier,
 2675 but he showed his courage under his kinsman's shield,
 the young warrior, when his own was
 charred to cinders. Still the battle-king
 remembered his glory, and with his mighty strength
 swung his warblade with savage force,
 2680 so that it stuck in the skull. Nægling shattered—
 the sword of Beowulf, weakened at battle,
 ancient and gray. It was not granted to him
 that iron-edged weapons might ever
 help him in battle; his hand was too strong,
 2685 he who, I am told, overtaxed every blade
 with his mighty blows, when he bore to battle
 a wound-hardened² weapon—it was no help to him at all.
 Then that threat to the people for a third time,
 fierce fire-dragon, remembering his feud,
 2690 rushed on the brave man, hot and bloodthirsty,
 when he saw the chance, seized him by the neck
 in his bitter jaws; he was bloodied
 by his mortal wounds—blood gushed in waves.

Then, I have heard, in his king's hour of need,
 2695 the earl³ beside him showed his bravery,
 the noble skill which was his nature.
 He did not heed that head when he helped his kinsman;
 that brave man's hand was burned, so that
 he struck that savage foe a little lower down,
 2700 the soldier in armor, so that his sword plunged in
 bejeweled and bloody, so that the fire began
 to subside afterwards. The king himself

² wound-hardened. Or "wondrously hard"; the OE text is unclear.

³ earl I.e., Wiglaf.

still had his wits, drew the war-dagger,
 bitter and battle-sharp, that he wore in his byrnie;
 2705 the protector of the Weders carved through the
 worm's midsection.
 They felled their foe—their force took his life—
 and they both together had brought him down,
 the two noble kinsmen; a thane at need,
 as a man should be! But that, for the prince, was
 2710 his last work of victory, by his own will,
 of worldly adventures.
 When the wound
 which the earth-dragon had worked on him
 began to burn and swell, he soon realized
 that in his breast, with an evil force,
 2715 a poison welled; then the nobleman went,
 still wise in thought, so that he sat
 on a seat by the wall. On that work of giants he gazed,
 saw how stone arches and sturdy pillars
 held up the inside of that ancient earth-hall.
 2720 Then with his hands the thane, immeasurably good,
 bathed with water his beloved lord,
 the great prince, spattered with gore,
 sated with battle, and unstrapped his helmet.
 Beowulf spoke—despite his wound,
 2725 that deadly cut; he knew clearly
 that his allotted life had run out,
 and his joys in the earth; all gone
 was his portion of days, death immeasurably near.
 "Now I should wish to give my war-gear
 2730 to my son, if there had been such,
 flesh of my flesh, if fate had granted me
 any heir. I held this people
 fifty winters; there was no folk-king,
 not any of the neighboring tribes,
 2735 who dared to face me with hostile forces
 or threaten fear. The decrees of fate
 I awaited on earth, held well what was mine;
 I sought no intrigues, nor swore many
 false or wrongful oaths. For all that I may
 2740 have joy, though sick with mortal wounds,
 because the Ruler of men need not reproach me
 with the murder of kinsmen, when my life
 quits my body. Now go quickly
 to look at the hoard under the hoary stone,
 2745 dear Wiglaf, now that the worm lies dead,

sleeps with his wounds, stripped of his treasure.
 Hurry, so I might witness that ancient wealth,
 those golden goods, might eagerly gaze on
 the bright precious gems, and I might more gently,
 2750 for that great wealth, give up my
 life and lordship, which I have held so long."
 Then swiftly, I have heard, the son of Weohstan
 after these words obeyed his lord,
 sick with wounds, wore his ring-net,
 2755 the woven battle-shirt, under the barrow's roof.
 As he went by the seat he saw there, triumphant,
 the brave young warrior, many bright jewels,
 glittering gold scattered on the ground,
 wonders on the walls, and the lair of that worm,
 2760 the old dawn-flier—flagons standing,
 ancient serving-vessels without a steward,
 their trappings all moldered; there was many a helmet
 old and rusty, a number of arm-bands
 with twisted ornaments.—Treasure may easily
 2765 gold in the ground, give the slip
 to any one of us: let him hide it who will!
 Likewise he saw an ensign, all golden,
 hanging high over the hoard; greatest hand-work,
 linked together with skill; light gleamed from it
 2770 so that he could see the cave's floor,
 survey those strange artifacts. There was no sign
 of the serpent there—a sword had finished him off.
 Then the hoard in that barrow, as I've heard, was looted,
 ancient work of giants, by one man alone;
 2775 he piled in his arms cups and plates,
 whatever he wanted; he took the ensign too,
 brightest of beacons. His aged lord's blade
 —its edge was iron—had earlier harmed
 the one who was protector of those treasures
 2780 for such a long time, who bore his fiery terror
 flaming before the hoard, seething fiercely
 in the darkest night, until he died a bloody death.
 The messenger rushed out, eager to return,
 burdened with treasures; he was burning to know

¹ give the slip ... who will Or "can get the better of any man—heed [these words] who will!" The OE is uncertain; the translation follows Mitchell and Robinson.

whether, stout-hearted, he would find still alive,
 the prince of the Weders, weakened by wounds,
 in the place where he had left him on that plain.
 Then with the treasures he found the famous prince,
 his own lord, his life at an end,
 2790 all bloody; he began once more
 to sprinkle water on him, until the point of a word
 escaped from his breast. [. . .]
 Old, full of grief, he looked on the gold:
 "For all these treasures, I offer thanks
 2795 with these words to the eternal Lord,
 King of Glory, for what I gaze upon here,
 that I was able to acquire such wealth
 for my people before my death-day.
 Now that I have sold my old lifespan
 2800 for this hoard of treasures, they will attend
 to the needs of the people; I can stay no longer.
 The brave in battle will bid a tomb be built
 shining over my pyre on the cliffs by the sea;
 it will be as a monument to my people
 2805 and tower high on Whale's Head,
 so that seafarers afterwards shall call it
 'Beowulf's Barrow,' when their broad ships
 drive from afar over the darkness of the flood."
 The boldminded nobleman took from his neck
 2810 a golden circlet, and gave it to the thane,
 the young spear-carrier, and the gold-covered helmet,
 ring and byrnie, bid him use them well.
 "You are the last survivor of our lineage,
 the Wægmundings; fate has swept away
 2815 all of my kinsmen, earls in their courage,
 to their final destiny; I must follow them."
 That was the last word of the old warrior,
 his final thought before he chose the fire,
 the hot surging flames—from his breast flew
 2820 his soul to seek the judgment of the righteous.

² Half a line (or more?) is missing from the manuscript at this point.
³ they will attend—Usually translated "you [Wiglaf] will attend"; the OE verb may be indicative or imperative, but it is unambiguously plural, and the imperative plural is not used elsewhere in the poem to address a single person.
⁴ the judgment of the righteous. Literally "the *dom* (fame) of the truth-fast," an ambiguous pronouncement. It is not clear whether this means that Beowulf's soul will receive the sort of judgment that a righteous soul ought to receive (and so go to Heaven), or that it will be judged by those "fast in truth" (and so go to Hell as an

Then it came to pass with piercing sorrow
 that the young warrior had to watch
 his most precious lord fare so pitifully,
 his life at an end. Likewise his slayer lay dead,
 2825 the awesome earth-dragon deprived of his life,
 overcome by force. The coiled serpent
 could no longer rule his hoard of rings—
 edges of iron did away with him,
 the hard, battle-scarred shards of the smithy,
 2830 so that the wide-flier, stilled by his wounds,
 toppled to the ground near his treasure-house.
 No more soaring about in the skies
 at midnight, preening in his precious treasures,
 showing his face—he fell to earth
 2835 through that war-commander's handiwork.
 Indeed, few men on earth, no matter how strong,
 could succeed at that, as I have heard tell,
 though he were daring in every deed,
 could rush against the reek of that venomous foe,
 2840 or rifle through that ring-hall with his hands,
 if he should find a waking warden
 waiting in that barrow. Beowulf's share
 of that royal treasure was repaid by his death—
 each of them had journeyed to the end
 2845 of this loaned life.
 It was not long before
 the men late for battle left the woods,
 ten of those weak traitors all together
 who had not dared to hoist their spears
 when their lord of men needed them most;
 2850 now shamefaced, they carried their shields
 and bartledress to where the old man lay dead,
 to stare at Wiglaf. He sat exhausted,
 a foot-soldier at his lord's shoulder,
 tried to rouse him with water—but it was no use.
 2855 He could not, no matter how much he wanted,
 keep the life in the body of his captain,
 nor change any bit of the Ruler's decree;
 the judgment of God would guide the deeds
 of every man, as it still does today.
 2860 Then it was easy to get a grim answer
 from that youth to those who gave up courage,
 unbaptized pagan).

Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan,
looked, sad-hearted, on those unloved:

2865 "He can say—o yes—who would speak the truth
that the liege-lord who gave you those gifts of treasures,
the military gear that you stand in there,
when on the ale-benches he often handed out
helmets and byrnies to the hall-sitters,
a lord to his followers, whatever he could find
2870 finest anywhere, far or near—
that all that battle-dress he absolutely
and entirely threw away, when war beset him.
Our nation's king had no need to boast
of his comrades-in-arms! But the Ruler of victories
2875 allowed that he, alone with his blade,
might avenge himself when he needed your valor.
Only a little life-protection could I offer
him in battle, but began nevertheless
to support my kinsman beyond my own strength;
2880 ever the worse was the deadly enemy
when I struck with my sword, a fire less severe
surging from his head. Too few supporters
thronged around our prince in his great peril.
Now the getting of treasure, the giving of swords,
2885 and all the happy joys of your homeland
shall end for your race; empty-handed
will go every man among your tribe,
deprived of his land-rights, when noblemen learn
far and wide of your flight,
2890 your inglorious deed. Death is better
for any earl than a life of dishonor!"

40

He bade that the battle-work be announced to
the camp
up by the cliff's edge, where that troop of earls,
shield-bearers, sat sad-minded
2895 all the long morning, expecting either
the final day of their dear lord
or his homecoming. He who rode up to the cape
was not at all silent with his new tidings;
but he spoke truly in the hearing of all:

2900 "Now is the joy-giver of the Geatish people,
the lord of the Weders, laid on his deathbed,
holding a place of slaughter by the serpent's deeds;
beside him lies his life-enemy,

sick with knife-slashes; he could not with his sword
2905 make in the monstrous beast
any kind of wound. Wiglaf sits,
Weohstan's offspring, over Beowulf,
one earl over the other, now dead;
he holds with desperate heart the watch
2910 over friend and foe.

Now this folk may expect
a time of trouble, when this is manifest
to the Franks and Frisians, and the fall of our king
becomes widespread news. The strife was begun
hard with the Hugas, after Hygelac came
2915 travelling with his ships to the shores of Frisia,
where the Hetware attacked him in war,
advanced with valor and a vaster force,
so that the warrior in his byrnie had to bow down,
and fell amid the infantry; not at all did that lord
2920 give treasure to his troops. Ever after that
the Merovingians have not shown mercy to us.

"Nor do I expect any peace or truce
from the Swedish nation, but it has been well-known
that Ongentheow ended the life
2925 of Hæthcyn, son of Hrethel, in Ravenswood,
when in their arrogant pride the Geatish people
first sought out the Battle-Scylfings.
Immediately the ancient father of Othere,
old and terrifying, returned the attack—
2930 the old warrior cut down the sea-captain,¹
rescued his wife, bereft of her gold,
Onela's mother and Othere's;
and then hunted down his deadly enemies
until they escaped, with some difficulty,
2935 bereft of their lord, into Ravenswood.

With his standing army he besieged those sword-leavings,
weary, wounded; he kept threatening woe
to that wretched troop the whole night through—
in the morning, he said, with the edge of his sword
2940 he would gut them, and leave some on the gallows-tree
as sport for birds. But for those sad-hearted men
solace came along with the sunrise,
after they heard Hygelac's horn and trumpet
sounding the charge, when the good man came
2945 following the trail of that people's troop.

¹ *old warrior . . . sea-captain* Ongentheow killed Hæthcyn. Hygelac is not present at this battle, but arrives later.

41

"The bloody swath of the Swedes and Geats,
the slaughter of men, was easily seen,
how the folk had stirred up feud between them.
That good man² then departed, old, desperate,
2950 with a small band of kinsmen, sought his stronghold,
the earl Ongentheow turned farther away;
he had heard of proud Hygelac's prowess in battle,
his war-skill; he did not trust the resistance
he might muster against the seafarers' might
2955 to defend from the wave-borne warriors his treasure,
his women and children; he ran away from there,
old, into his fortress. Then the pursuit was offered
to the Swedish people, the standard of Hygelac
overran the place of refuge;
2960 after the Hrethlings thronged the enclosure.
There with the edge of a sword was Ongentheow,
old graybeard, brought to bay,
so that the king of that nation had to yield
to Eofor's will. Angrily he struck;
2965 Wulf the son of Wonred lashed at him with his weapon,
so that with his blow the blood sprang in streams
from under his hair. Yet the ancient Scylfing
was undaunted, and dealt back quickly
a worse exchange for that savage stroke,
2970 once the ruler of that people turned around.
The ready son of Wonred could not
give a stroke in return to the old soldier,
for he had cut through the helmet right on his head
so that he collapsed; covered in blood,
2975 fell to the ground—he was not yet fated to die,
but he recovered, though the cut hurt him.
The hardy thane of Hygelac³ then let
his broad blade, as his brother lay there,
his ancient giant-made sword, shatter that gigantic helmet
2980 over the shield-wall; then the king stumbled,
shepherd of his people, mortally stricken.

There were many there who bandaged his⁴
kinsman,
quickly raised him up, when a way was clear for them,
so that they had control of that killing field.

² *good man* i.e., Ongentheow.

³ *thane of Hygelac* i.e., Eofor, Wulf's brother.

⁴ *his* i.e., Eofor's.

2985 Then one warrior plundered another,⁴
took from Ongentheow the iron byrnie,
his hard hilted sword and his helmet too,
and carried the old man's armor to Hygelac.
He⁵ took that war-gear and promised him gifts
2990 among his people—and he kept that promise;
the king of the Geats repaid that carnage,
the offspring of Hrethel, when he made it home,
gave to Eofor and Wulf extravagant treasures,
gave them each lands and locked rings,
2995 worth a hundred thousand. Not a man in this world
could
reproach those rewards, since they had won them
with their deeds;
and to Eofor he gave his only daughter,
the pride of his home, as a pledge of his friendship.
"That is the feud and the fierce enmity,
3000 savage hatred among men, that I expect now,
when the Swedish people seek us out
after they have learned that our lord
has perished, who had once protected
his hoard and kingdom against all hostility;
3005 after the fall of heroes, the valiant Scyldings,⁶
worked for the people's good, and what is more,
performed noble deeds. Now we must hurry
and look upon our people's king,
and go with him who gave us rings
3010 on the way to the pyre. No small part
of the hoard shall burn with that brave man,
but countless gold-treasures, grimly purchased,
and rings, here at last with his own life
paid for; then the flames shall devour
3015 the fire enfold—let no warrior wear
treasures for remembrance, nor no fair maiden
have a ring-ornament around her neck,
but sad in mind, stripped of gold, she must
walk a foreign path, not once but often,
3020 now that leader of our troop has laid aside laughter,

⁴ *one . . . another* Eofor plundered Ongentheow.

⁵ *He* i.e., Hygelac.

⁶ *Scyldings* The manuscript reading ("Scyldings" is a further object of "protected") is often emended to *Scylfingas*, i.e., Swedes, or *scildwigan*, "shield-warriors"; the present reading is that of Mitchell and Robinson. As it stands in the manuscript the Geatish herald is referring to Beowulf's earlier adventures against Grendel and his mother.

his mirth and joy. Thus many a cold morning
shall the spear be grasped in frozen fingers,
hefted by hands, nor shall the sound of the harp
rouse the warriors, but the dark raven,
greedy for carrion, shall speak a great deal,
ask the eagle how he fared at his feast
when he plundered corpses with the wolf.¹

Thus that brave speaker was speaking
a most unlovely truth; he did not lie much
in words or facts. The troop of warriors arose;
they went, unhappy, to the Cape of Eagles,
with welling tears to look at that wonder.
There on the sand they found the soulless body
of the one who gave them rings in earlier times
laid out to rest; the last day
had come for the good man, when the war-king,
prince of the Weders, died a wondrous death.
But first they saw an even stranger creature,
a loathsome serpent lying on the plain
directly across from him; grim with his colors,
the fire-dragon was, and scorched with his flames.
He was fifty feet long, lying there
stretched out; once he had joy in the air
in the dark night, and then down he would go
to seek his den, but now he was fast in death;
he had come to the end of his cave-dwelling.
Cups and vessels stood beside him,
plates lay there and precious swords,
eaten through with rust, as if in the bosom of the earth
they had lain for a thousand winters;
all that inheritance was deeply enchanted,
the gold of the ancients was gripped in a spell
so that no man in the world would be able to touch
that ring-hall, unless God himself,
the true King of Victories, Protector of men,
granted to whomever He wished to open the hoard,
to whatever person seemed proper to Him.²

¹ *the dark raven ... the wolf* The eagle, wolf, and raven, the "beasts of battle," are a recurring motif in Old English poetry.

² *unless God himself ... proper to him* The power of the pagan spell can be overruled by the will of the true God.

Then it was plain that the journey did not profit
the one³ who had wrongfully hidden under a wall
that great treasure. The guardian had slain
that one and few others;⁴ then that feud was
swiftly avenged. It is a wonder to say
where a valiant earl should meet the end
of his span of life, when he may no longer
dwell in the meadhall, a man with his kinsmen.

So it was with Beowulf, when he sought the barrow's
guardian
and a hostile fight; even he did not know
how his parting from life should come to pass,
since until doomsday mighty princes had deeply
pronounced, when they placed it there,
that the man who plundered that place would be
harried by hostile demons, fast in hellish bonds,
grievously tortured, guilty of sins,
unless the Owner's grace had earlier
more readily favored the one eager for gold.⁵

Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan:
"Often many earls must suffer misery
through the will of one man, as we have now seen.
We could not persuade our dear prince,
shepherd of a kingdom, with any counsel,
that he should not greet that gold-guardian,
let him lie there where he long had been,
inhabit the dwellings until the end of the world:
he held to his high destiny. The hoard is opened,
grimly gotten; that fate was too great
which impelled the king of our people thither.
I was in there, and looked over it all,
the hall's ornaments, when a way was open to me;
by no means gently was a journey allowed
in under that earth-wall. In eager haste I seized
in my hands a great mighty burden

³ *the one* I.e., the dragon.

⁴ *that one and few others* Or "that one of a few," i.e., "a unique man" or "a man of rare greatness."

⁵ *favored the one eager for gold* The OE text is corrupt and the precise meaning of this passage is not certain; the present translation tries to incorporate several suggested interpretations. The general sense seems to be clear enough—the gold was cursed, and only God's special grace would enable anyone to remove it. What this implies about Beowulf's failure, and his moral status, is less clear.

of hoard-treasure, and bore it out hither
to my king. He was still conscious then,
thoughtful and alert; he spoke of many things,
an old man in his sorrow, and ordered that I greet you;
he asked that you build a great high barrow
for your prince's deeds, in the place of his pyre,
mighty and glorious, since he was of men
the most worthy warrior throughout the wide world,
while he could enjoy the wealth of a hall.
Let us now make haste for one more time
to see and seek out that store of cunning gems,
the wonder under the wall; I will direct you
so that you can inspect them up close,
abundant rings and broad gold. Let the bier be ready,
quickly prepared, when we come out,
then let us bear our beloved lord,
that dear man, to where he must long
rest in the keeping of the Ruler."

Then the son of Weohstan, brave battle-warrior,
let it be made known to many heroes
and householders that they should bring from afar
the wood for the pyre to that good one;¹
the leader of his folk: "Now the flames must devour,
the black blaze rise over the ruler of warriors,
who often awaited the showers of iron
when the storm of arrows hurled from bow-strings
shot over the wall, the shafts did their duty
swift on feather-wings, sent on the arrow-heads."

Lo, then the wise son of Weohstan
summoned from that host some of the best
of the king's thanes, seven altogether;
he went, one of eight, under that evil roof;
one of the brave warriors bore in his hands
a flaming torch, and went before them.
It was not chosen by lots who should loot that hoard,²
once the men saw it sitting in the hall,
every part of it unprotected,
lying there wasting; there was little lament
that they should have to hurry out with
the precious treasures. They also pushed the dragon,
the worm, over the cliff-wall, let the waves take him,
the flood embrace the guard of that finery;

¹ *that good one* I.e., the dead Beowulf.

² *It was not chosen ... hoard* I.e., everybody had a share; there was enough for all.

then the twisted gold, an uncountable treasure,
was loaded in a wagon, and the noble one was carried,
the gray-haired warrior, to the Cape of Whales.

The people of the Geats then prepared for him,
a splendid pyre upon the earth,
hung with battle-shields and helmets
and bright byrnie, as he had bidden;
there in the middle they laid the mighty prince,
the heroes lamenting their dear lord.
Then the warriors kindled there on the cliff
the greatest of funeral pyres; dark over the flames
the woodsmoke rose, the roaring fire
mingled with weeping—the wind lay still—
until it had broken that bone-house
hot at the heart. With heavy spirits
they mourned their despair, the death of their lord;
and a sorrowful song sang the Geatish woman,³
with hair bound up, for Beowulf the king,
with sad cares; earnestly said
that she dreaded the hard days ahead,
the times of slaughter, the host's terror,
harm and captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then the Weder people wrought for him
a barrow on the headland; it was high and broad,
visible from afar to sea-voyagers,
and in ten days they built the beacon
of that battle-brave one; the ashes of the flames
they enclosed with a wall, as worthily
as the most clever of men could devise it.
In the barrow they placed rings and bright jewels,
all the trappings that those reckless men
had seized from the hoard before,
let the earth hold the treasures of earls,
gold in the ground, where it yet remains,
just as useless to men as it was before.

Then round the mound rode the battle-brave men,
offspring of noblemen, twelve in all;
they wished to voice their cares and mourn their king,

³ *Geatish woman* The manuscript is damaged throughout this section and the readings in this passage are conjectural; it is not clear who the "Geatish woman" is, though her advanced age is indicated by her bound-up hair. Typically, in Germanic poetry, it is women (and poets) who mourn.

utter sad songs and speak of that man;
 they praised his lordship and his proud deeds,
 judged well his prowess. As it is proper
 that one should praise his lord with words,
 should love him in his heart when the fatal hour comes,
 when he must from his body be led forth,
 so the men of the Geats lamented

the fall of their prince, those hearth-companions;
 they said that he was of all the kings of the world
 the mildest of men and the most gentle,
 the kindest to his folk and the most eager for fame.

IN CONTEXT

Glossary of Proper Names

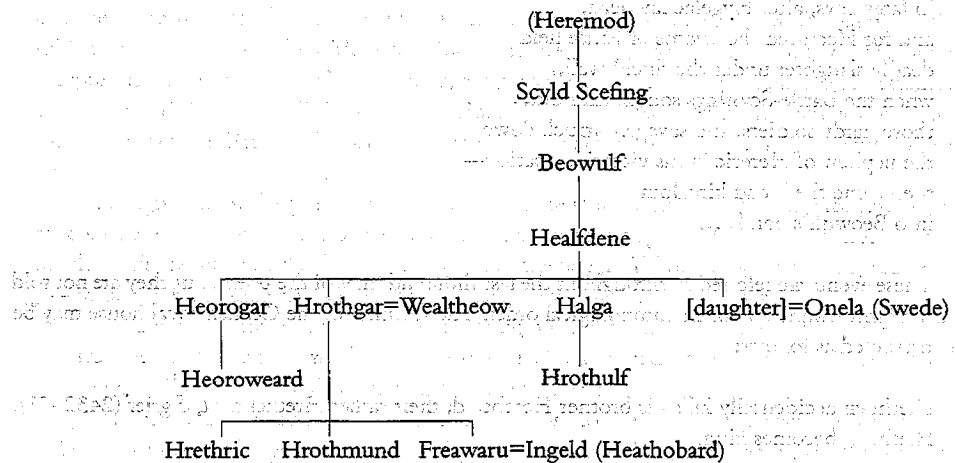
- Abel slain by his brother Cain; the story is told in Genesis 4.1-16
- Ælfhere kinsman of Wiglaf
- Æschere a prominent Dane, advisor to Hrothgar; slain by Grendel's mother
- Battle-Scyldings see Scyldings
- Battle-Scylfings see Scylfings
- Beanstan father of Breca
- Beowulf (prologue) Danish king, son of Scyld
- Breca engaged in a youthful swimming contest with Beowulf
- Bright-Danes see Danes
- Brondings the people of Breca
- Brosinga makers of the magical necklace of Freya in Norse myth, to which a necklace in the story is compared
- Cain slayer of Abel in Genesis 4.1-16; father of the race of monsters
- Dæghrefn a warrior of the Hugas slain by Beowulf in hand-to-hand combat during Hygelac's ill-fated raid on Frisia
- Danes Hrothgar's people; the Scyldings; also called Bright-, Half-, Ring-, Spear-, East-, West-, North-, and South-Danes
- Eadgils son of Ohthere, brother of Eanmund
- Eanmund son of Ohthere, brother of Eadgils; slain by Weohstan
- East-Danes see Danes
- Egclaf father of Unferth
- Ecgtheow father of Beowulf
- Egwala a Danish king; the "sons of Egwala" are the Danes
- Eofof a warrior of the Geats; brother of Wulf; slayer of Ongentheow
- Eomer son of Offa
- Eormanric king of the Ostrogoths
- Eotens unclear; perhaps the Jutes, perhaps the Frisians, perhaps "giants" (the literal meaning of the word) as a nickname for one group or the other
- Finn king of the Frisians, husband of Hildeburh; killed by Hengest
- Finns the people of Finland; the Lapps
- Fitela legendary companion, nephew (and son) of Sigemund
- Folcwalda father of Finn
- Franks a Germanic tribe; see Hetware, Hugas, Merovingians

- Freawaru daughter of Hrothgar, betrothed to Ingeld
- Frisians a Germanic tribe; Finn's people
- Froda chief of the Heathobards, father of Ingeld
- Garmund father of Offa
- Geats Hygelac's people and Beowulf's; a Germanic tribe; also called War-Geats, Hrethmen, Hrethlings, Weders
- Gifthas an East-Germanic tribe
- Grendel descendent of Cain; monstrous marauder of the Danes
- Guthlaf a Danish warrior; companion of Hengest
- Hæreth father of Hygd
- Hæthcyn Geatish prince, second son of Hrethel
- Half-Danes see Danes
- Halga Danish prince, younger brother of Hrothgar
- Hama legendary Goth; stole Brosinga necklace
- Healfdene king of the Danes, father of Hrothgar
- Heardred king of the Geats, son of Hygelac
- Heathobards Ingeld's people; a Germanic tribe
- Heatholaf a Wylfing slain by Ecgtheow
- Heathoream a Scandinavian tribe; Norwegians; more or less the family of Wealhtheow
- Helmings the family of Wealhtheow
- Hemming kinsman of Offa and Eomer
- Hengest leader of the Danes; killed Finn in Frisia
- Heorogar Dane, eldest brother of Hrothgar
- Heorot the great hall of Hrothgar
- Heorowearð Dane; son of Heorogar
- Herebeald Geatish prince, eldest son of Hrethel; killed by his brother Hæthcyn
- Heremod king of the Danes in the poem's distant past, before the Scylding dynasty
- Hereric brother of Hygd, uncle of Heardred
- Hetware a Frankish tribe; allied with the Frisians; fought against Hygelac
- Hildeburh sister of the Danish Hnæf, wife of the Frisian Finn
- Hnæf chief of the Half-Danes, brother of Hildeburh; killed by Finn
- Hoc Dane, father of Hildeburh and Hnæf
- Hondscio Geatish warrior, comrade of Beowulf; slain by Grendel
- Honor-Scyldings see Scyldings
- Hrethel king of the Geats, father of Hygelac; grandfather of Beowulf
- Hrethlings sons of Hrethel, i.e., the Geats
- Hrethmen the Geats
- Hrethric Dane, son of Hrothgar
- Hrothgar aged king of the Danes beset by Grendel; helped by Beowulf
- Hrothmund Dane, son of Hrothgar
- Hrothulf Dane, son of Halga, nephew of Hrothgar; not to be trusted
- Hrunting the sword of Unferth
- Hugas the Franks, allies of the Frisians
- Hunlaf father of one of the warriors in Hengest's troop
- Hygd queen of the Geats, wife of Hygelac, daughter of Hæreth
- Hygelac king of the Geats, uncle of Beowulf
- Ingeld prince of the Heathobards, son of Froda, betrothed to Freawaru; after the events narrated in the poem he burns down the great hall of Heorot

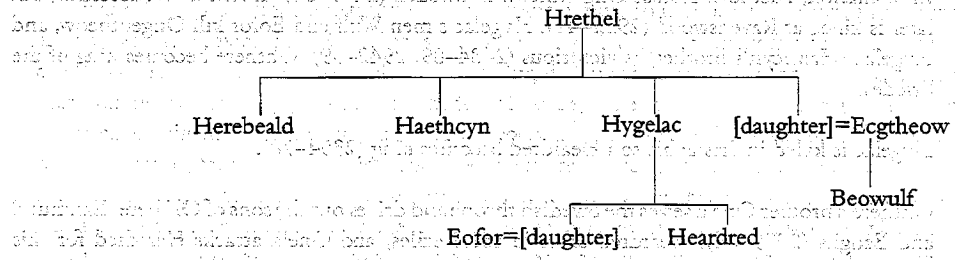
- Ingwines the "friends of Ing"; the Danes
- Jutes allies of the Frisians; see Eotens
- Merovingians the Franks
- Nægling Beowulf's sword
- North-Danes see Danes
- Offa king of the Angles, husband of Thryth
- Ohthere Swede, son of Ongentheow
- Onela Swede, son of Ongentheow; usurped throne
- Ongentheow Swedish king; killed by Wulf and Eofor
- Oslaf a Danish warrior, companion of Hengest
- Ring-Danes see Danes
- Scyld Scefing legendary founder of the Danish royal family
- Scyldings the Danes; also called Battle, Honor, Victory, Scyldings
- Scylfings the Swedes
- Sigemund legendary Germanic hero, son of Wæls
- South-Danes see Danes
- Spear-Danes see Danes
- Swerting uncle of Hygelac
- Thryth (often construed as Modthryth) wife of Offa
- Unferth Danish spokesman ("thyle") and courier of Hrothgar
- Victory-Scyldings see Scyldings
- Volsung another name for Sigemund; son of Wæls
- Wægmundings the family of Weohstan, Wiglaf, and Beowulf
- Wæls father of Sigemund
- War-Geats see Geats
- Wealththeow Danish queen, wife of Hrothgar
- Weders the Geats
- Weland legendary Germanic smith
- Wendels a Germanic tribe; perhaps the Vandals, perhaps not
- Weohstan father of Wiglaf; killed Eanmund
- West-Danes see Danes
- Wiglaf son of Weohstan, young retainer of Beowulf
- Withergyld a dead Heathobard
- Wonred a Geat, father of Wulf and Eofor
- Wulf a warrior of the Geats, brother of Eofor; assisted in killing Ongentheow
- Wulfgar a warrior of the Danes; herald at the court of Hrothgar
- Wylfings a Germanic tribe of which Heatholaf was a member, until Ecgtheow killed him
- Yrmenlaf a Dane, younger brother of Æschere

Genealogies

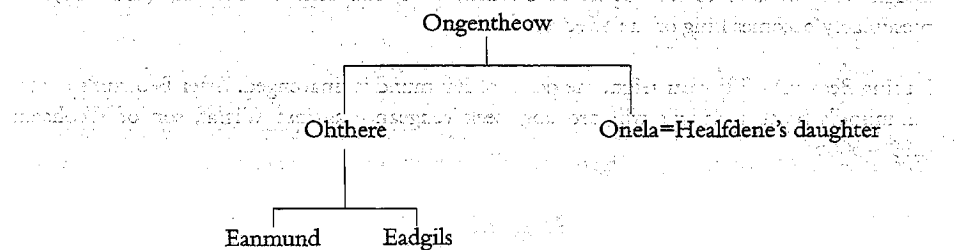
1. The Danes (Scyldings)



2. The Geats



3. The Swedes (Scylfings)



The Geatish-Swedish Wars

When the story of Beowulf's fight with the dragon begins, the narrator leaps over fifty years in one brief passage. It is a tumultuous condensation of a complex chain of events (2200–08):

Then it came to pass amid the crash of battle
in later days, after Hygelac lay dead,
and for Heardred the swords of battle held
deadly slaughter under the shield-wall,
when the Battle-Scylfings sought him out,
those hardy soldiers, and savagely struck down
the nephew of Hereric in his victorious nation—
then came the broad kingdom
into Beowulf's hands ...

These events are referred to throughout the last thousand lines of the poem, but they are not told in a straightforward way or in chronological order. The fortunes of the Geatish royal house may be reconstructed as follows:

1. Hæthcyn accidentally kills his brother Herebeald; their father Hrethel dies of grief (2432–71). Hæthcyn becomes king.
2. After the death of Hrethel, Ohthere and Onela, the sons of the Swedish king Ongentheow, attack the Geats (2472–78).
3. In retaliation, Hæthcyn attacks Ongentheow in Sweden (2479–84); at first he is successful, but later is killed at Ravenswood (2922–41). Hygelac's men Wulf and Eofor kill Ongentheow, and Hygelac (Hæthcyn's brother) is victorious (2484–89, 2942–99). Ohthere becomes king of the Swedes.
4. Hygelac is killed in Frisia; his son Heardred becomes king (2354–78).
5. Ohthere's brother Onela seizes the Swedish throne and drives out the sons of Ohthere, Eanmund and Eadgils (2379–84). Heardred takes in these exiles, and Onela attacks Heardred for this hospitality and kills him. Onela allows Beowulf to rule the Geats (2385–90).
6. Around this time Weohstan, father of Wiglaf, kills Eanmund on behalf of Onela (2611–19).
7. Eadgils escapes later to kill Onela in Sweden, with help sent by Beowulf (2391–96); he presumably becomes king of the Swedes.
8. During Beowulf's fifty-year reign, the death of Eanmund is unavenged. After Beowulf's death, Eanmund's brother Eadgils will probably seek vengeance against Wiglaf, son of Weohstan (2999–3005).

JUDITH

This Old English poem survives in the manuscript that also contains the poem *Beowulf* (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv). As with most Old English poems, its author is unknown, and the poem is untitled in the manuscript. It is commonly referred to as *Judith* because it takes its subject from the Book of Judith, a text found in the Greek and Latin versions of the Bible and accepted as canonical in Catholic traditions, but placed among the Apocrypha in the Protestant Bible. The book and the poem tell the story of a pious Hebrew widow, Judith, who rescues the people of the besieged city of Bethulia by beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes as he attempts to seduce her.

The beginning of the poem has been lost, and the story begins in mid-sentence just before the raucous banquet in which Holofernes orders Judith to be brought to his tent. It is not known how much is missing prior to the first surviving line of the poem. Although the first numbered section is X—implying that nine previous sections (perhaps some thousand lines) have been lost—some have suggested that this is misleading, and the surviving poem is nearly complete. Like other Old English Biblical poems, they argue, *Judith* is a heroic ode that focuses on the most crucial episode of the story, the slaying of Holofernes and the rout of the Assyrian army.

Judith is metrically unusual, especially in contrast to the metrical precision of its manuscript neighbor *Beowulf*. The poem abounds in hypermetric lines (lines with more than the four stresses normally found in lines of Old English poetry), in irregular alliteration, and in rhyme, a very-rare feature in Old English poetry. This relatively unusual meter has suggested to some scholars that the poem was composed fairly late in the Anglo-Saxon period, but the relationship between metrical strictness and date of composition has not been established with any certainty.

Poetically *Judith* blurs the distinctions between ancient and contemporary, Biblical and Germanic, a characteristic of many other Old English poems such as *Exodus*—Hebrew warriors rage into battle clad in helmets and byrnie (coats of mail), carrying linden shield and ancient swords, while around them circle the traditional Germanic "beasts of battle," the wolf, raven and eagle. Accuracy of historical details mattered less to Anglo-Saxon poets than fidelity to the spirit of the story and the dramatic deployment of their traditional poetic motifs. In contrast to *Exodus*, however, the poem focuses on heroic action rather than complex allegorical interpretation. The choice of a female character as the subject of a heroic poem indicates the relatively high status of women within Anglo-Saxon nobility prior to the Norman invasion of 1066; the poem subtly alters its source to stress the heroine's wisdom and courage rather than the allure of her beauty or the cunning of her plot to seduce Holofernes. Judith is portrayed as a woman of power, and may have been seen by audiences not only as a figure from the Biblical past, but also as a contemporary hero: the homilist Ælfric, who wrote his own prose paraphrase of the Biblical Book of Judith, sees a connection between her time and his own. At the time Ælfric was writing, the Danes were carrying out frequent raids along the English coast; in Ælfric's retelling Judith is not only a Hebrew fighting against the Assyrians but also a saintly Christian queen defending her homeland against pagan invaders. We should therefore not be surprised that, although the poem is set in pre-Christian Israel, Judith prays to the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to give her strength to assassinate Holofernes, nor that many of the poem's most dramatic moments seem drawn as much from Christian hagiography as from Old Testament history.

