

Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum
þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,
hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceapena þrēatum,
monegum mægþum meodo-setla oftēah;
egsode Eorle, syððan ærest wearð
fēasceaft funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād:
wēox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þāh,
oðþæt him æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra
ofer hron-rāde hýran scolde,
gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!
10 Ðām eafera wæs æfter cenned
geong in geardum, þone God sende
folce tō frōfre; fyrēn-ðearfe ongeat,
þæt hīe ær drugon aldor-lēase
lange hwīle; him þæs Līf-frēa,
wuldres Wealdend, worold-āre forgeaf;
Bēowulf wæs brēme —blæd wīde sprang—
Scyldes eafera, Scede-landum in.
20 Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,
fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearne,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen

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

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

orphans
Mortals
like
sent by
God
Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,
the long times and troubles they'd come through
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.
Shield had fathered a famous son:
Beow's name was known through the north.
20 And a young prince must be prudent like that,
giving freely while his father lives
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts

The Danes have legends about their warrior kings. The most famous was Shield Sheafson, who founded the ruling house

solidifies mostly didactic element

A sign of crucial decline? Cannot afford practical construct

moral homily
contractual concept of lordship

wil-gesīpas, þonne wīg cume,
lēode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal
in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.

Him ðā Scyld gewāt tō gescæp-hwīle,
fela-hrōr, fēran on Frēan wære.

Hi hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,
swæse gesīpas, swā hē selfa bæd,
þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga,
lēof land-fruma lange āhte.

Þær æt hýðe stōð hringed-stefna,
īsig ond ūt-fūs, æþelinges fær;
ālēdon þā lēofne þeoden,

bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,
mārne be mæste; þær wæs mādma fela
of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelæded.

Ne hýrde ic cýmlīcor cēol gegyrwan
hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,
billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg
mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon
on flōdes æht feor gewītan.

Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,
þeod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,
þe hine æt frumsceaftē forð onsendon
æne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.

Þā gýt hī him āsetton segend, gyldenre
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,
gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs geōmor sefa,

murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon
secgan tō sōðe, sele-rædende,
hæleð under heofenum, hwā þām hlæste onfēng.
Ðā wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,

steadfast companions will stand by him
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired
is the path to power among people everywhere.

Shield was still thriving when his time came
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.
His warrior band did what he bade them
when he laid down the law among the Danes:
they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.

A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,
laid out by the mast, amidships,
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures
were piled upon him, and precious gear.
I never heard before of a ship so well furbished
with battle tackle, bladed weapons

and coats of mail. The massed treasure
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far
on out into the ocean's sway.

They decked his body no less bountifully
with offerings than those first ones did
who cast him away when he was a child
and launched him alone out over the waves.

And they set a gold standard up
high above his head and let him drift
to wind and tide, bewailing him
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran
knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.

law-giver
order is
best
leader
No Appeal
to Superior
natural
authority

death comes
at your
height even for great
things
Shield's funeral

uncertainty

A B E O W U L F

lēof lēod-cyning, longe þrāge
folcum gefrāge; fæder ellor hwearf,
aldor of earde. Oþþæt him eft onwōc
hēah Healfdene; hēold, þenden lifde,
gamol ond gūð-rēow, glæde Scyldingas.
Ðām fēower bearn forð-gerīmed
60 in worold wōcun: weoroda rāsuan,
Heorogār, ond Hrōðgār ond Hālga til;
hýrde ic þæt wæs Onelan cwēn,
Heaðo-Scilfingas heals-gebedda.

Þā wæs Hrōðgāre here-spēd gyfen,
wīges weorð-mynd, þæt him his wine-māgas
georne hýrdon, oððþæt sēo geogoð gewēox
mago-driht micel. Him on mōd be-arn
þæt heal-reced hātan wolde,
70 medo-ærn micel men gewyrcean,
þonne ylde bearn æfre gefrūnon,
ond þær on innan eall gedælan
geongum ond ealdum, swylc him God sealde,
būton folc-scare ond feorum gumena.
Ðā ic wīde gefrægn weorc gebannan
manigre mægþe geond þisne middan-geard,
folc-stede frætwan. Him on fyrste gelomp,
ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wearð eal-gearo,
heal-ærna mæst; scōp him Heort naman,
80 sē þe his wordes geweald wīde hæfde.
Hē bēot ne ālēh, bēagas dæalde,
sinc æt symle. Sele hlīfade
hēah ond horn-gēap, heaðo-wylma bād,
lāðan līges; ne wæs hit lenge þā gēn,
þæt se ecg-hete āþum-swerian
æfter wæl-nīðe wæcnan scolde.

He was well regarded and ruled the Danes
for a long time after his father took leave
of his life on earth. And then his heir,
the great Halfdane, held sway
for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.
He was four times a father, this fighter prince:
60 one by one they entered the world,
Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga
and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,
a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.

The fortunes of war favoured Hrothgar.
Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,
young followers, a force that grew
to be a mighty army. So his mind turned
to hall-building; he handed down orders
for men to work on a great mead-hall
70 meant to be a wonder of the world forever;
it would be his throne-room and there he would dispense
his God-given goods to young and old—
but not the common land or people's lives.
Far and wide through the world, I have heard,
orders for work to adorn that wallstead
were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,
finished and ready, in full view,
the hall of halls. Heorot was the name
he had settled on it, whose utterance was law. cf. 29
80 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings
and torques at the table. The hall towered,
its gables wide and high and awaiting
a barbarous burning. That doom abided,
but in time it would come: the killer instinct
unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.

Shield's heirs: his
son Beow succeeded
by Halfdane,
Halfdane by
Hrothgar

King Hrothgar
builds Heorot Hall

BEOWULF

BEOWULF

Ða se ellen-gæst earfoðlice
 þræge geþolode, sē þe in þystrum bād,
 þæt hē dōgora gehwām drēam gehyrde
 hlūdne in healle; þær wæs hearpan swēg,
 90 swutol sang scopes. Sægde sē þe cūpe
 frumsceaft fīra feorran reccan,
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,
 wlite-beorhtne wang, swā wæter bebūgeð.
 gesette sige-hrēþig sunnan ond mōnan
 lēoman tō lēohte land-būendum,
 ond gefræt Wade foldan scēatas
 leomum ond lēafum; lif ēac gesceōp
 cynna gehwylcum, þāra ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.
 Swā ðā driht-guman drēamum lifdon,
 100 ēadiglice, oððæt ān ongan
 fyrene fremman fēond on helle.
 Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel hāten,
 mære mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
 fen ond fæsten; fīfel-cynnes eard
 won-sæli wer weardode hwīle,
 siþðan him Scyppend forscifen hæfde
 in Caines cynne— þone cwealm gewræc
 ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Ābel slōg.
 Ne gefeah hē þære fāhðe, ac hē hine feor forwræc,
 110 Metod for þy mæne, man-cynne fram.
 Þanon untydras ealle onwōcon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnēas,
 swylce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon
 lange þræge; hē him ðæs lēan forgeald.
 Gewāt ðā nēosian, syþðan niht becōm,
 hēan hūses, hū hit Hring-Dene

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

Heorot is threaten

civilization; anger his

*Religious says
(out of place)*

So times were pleasant for the people there
 until finally one, a fiend out of hell,
 100 began to work his evil in the world.
 Grendel was the name of this grim demon
haunting the marches, marauding round the heath
 and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
 in misery among the banished monsters,
 Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
 and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
 the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
 Cain got no good from committing that murder
 110 because the Almighty made him anathema
 and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
 ogres and elves and evil phantoms
 and the giants too who strove with God
 time and again until He gave them their reward.

*Grendel, a monster,
descended from
"Cain's clan,"
begins to prowl*

*like Cain,
clans*

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
 for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes

*Grendel attacks
Heorot*