

31

Beowulf

Although *Beowulf* is the earliest long narrative poem in English, it is not about England or England's heroes. Its setting is what we now call Scandinavia, particularly Denmark and southern Sweden (the latter being known as Geatland in the poem), and its cast-list includes a selection of both historical and legendary figures from that period of the fourth to sixth centuries known as the 'age of migrations', when Germanic tribes spread across much of western Europe (some of them eventually reaching, and sacking, Rome). The settlement of Britain in the mid-fifth century by Angles, Saxons and other tribes – who would come to be known collectively as 'the English' – was itself part of this process. For them, therefore (and for the great number of later settlers, mainly Danes, who arrived during the ninth and tenth centuries), the world of *Beowulf* was, notionally at least, a familiar world, the world in which their ancestral identity had been created. It is within this world that the story of the young Geatish hero Beowulf unfolds: how he saved Denmark under King Hrothgar from the depredations of Grendel and Grendel's mother (in the first section of the poem), and how, in old age, he died defending his own kingdom from a dragon.

Our only copy of the 3182-line poem – known universally by the name of its principal character since it was first edited in 1815 – is on fols. 153r–155v of what today we simply call 'the *Beowulf*-manuscript' (but formerly the 'Nowell codex', after its sixteenth-century owner); this constitutes the second half of a composite British Library volume, Cotton Vitellius A. xv. The manuscript was written out between about 1000 and 1010, by two scribes, but the poem's origins have long been a matter of great controversy. Historical references within it (such as the raid on the Swedes by Hygelac, lines 2922–98, which we know took place c. 510, and his death c. 520) show that it could not have been composed, in the form in which we know it, much before the middle of the sixth century; but the poet's knowledge of the Bible, and his obvious confidence that his audience is Christian, pushes the earliest possible date further forward to the mid-seventh century, a generation or more after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.

During two hundred years of *Beowulf* scholarship, various dates of composition have been championed for the poem, ranging from the early eighth century up to about 1000. A recent analysis of the errors made by one scribe of the *Beowulf*-manuscript has shown that his repeated misreading of certain letters could be explained if he (or a predecessor) were copying from a version of the poem written

in a particular Anglo-Saxon script, whose confusing forms might have prompted such misreadings. As this script was only in use until about 750, we might thus suppose that the poem in its literary form had taken shape by then. Certainly, various linguistic, metrical and stylistic features of the poem support a dating in the first half of the eighth century. However, the poem will not have reached its early eleventh-century form without modification and addition. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that the true origins of the tales that make up the poem lie in generations of oral tradition (probably starting in the mid-sixth century), and that the version of it that we know represents merely a late stage.

The 'Christianity' of *Beowulf*, alluded to above, deserves a further note. Though set in a pagan world populated by pagan people, the poem as we know it is suffused by Christian reference (as the first and third of the extracts below show particularly strongly). It should not, however, surprise us that a poet composing for a Christian audience, and himself a Christian, should use his religion's resources creatively, as in deriving Grendel's evil nature from that Old Testament 'type' of wrongdoing, Cain. Poetic licence allows such anachronism. The attempts of earlier scholars to interpret the poem as Christian allegory (with Beowulf as Christ) have rightly been dismissed as unworkable, but a good case can be made for the *Beowulf*-poet's deliberate highlighting of the flaws of pagan heroic society, even as he celebrates its glories. Implicit in such an approach would be affirmation of the superior claims of the Christian dispensation, with its promise of a bright heavenly future for the deserving, rather than shadowy remembrance in the mouth of a minstrel. The Hildeburh episode (extract 31b, below) well illustrates this unexpressed questioning of the values of a feud-dominated society.

Much of the complexity of *Beowulf* results from the number of narrative levels on which the poem unfolds. Within and around the simple narrative past of the central story (the hero's fights against Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon) there operates a series of chronological dislocations (often, though inaccurately, described as 'digressions') which either take us back to a more remote past – historical, mythical, legendary or even biblical – or carry us forward to a future, known or unknown to the original audience. The Hildeburh episode is one such dislocation; another is the scene in extract 31a, when a mounted scop is prompted by Beowulf's exploits to tell of previous Germanic heroes (and villains).

The *Beowulf*-manuscript (which contains the poem *Judith* and several prose narratives also: see Texts 19 and 27) was one of the items damaged in a fire in Sir Robert Cotton's library in London in 1731. The bulk of the text remains intact but the edges of pages were charred, and then rather ineptly restored, and this has added to the number of problematical readings in the poem. Two transcripts made before the fire have as often as not compounded rather than solved the problems. Wherever possible, original manuscript readings are retained in the extracts below, but some emendations are made and the most important of these are discussed in the notes.

For ease of reference, the lines in each extract are numbered from 1, but the line numbering in relation to the whole poem is indicated also in square brackets.

The issue of the linguistic character of the *Beowulf*-text as we know it is complex. Two scribes, with differing spelling habits, were responsible for our copy, and the one who wrote out lines 1–1939, thus including all the extracts below, appears to have made a greater effort than the second to bring spellings into line with the conventions of written WS at the start of the eleventh century. Late use of *y* instead of *i* is seen, for example, in *scypon* (b/92 – where *-on* is a levelled spelling of *-um*), *syn-* (b/73), *-wyrgegne* (c/27) and *fȳf-* (c/91), but is by no means universal. For the third-person plural pronoun, the late spelling *hig* is used (b/23), but also *hīe* (a/5, b/24, etc). There are many forms which might be thought to be of dialectal significance – often Anglian or sometimes, more specifically, Mercian; examples are *ēdrum* (a/41, not *ǣdrum*), *cwōme* (a/30, but cf. *cōm* a/1, etc), *friodū-* (b/34, not *friðu*) and *gescær* (c/35, not *gescear*). *Mehte* rather than *meahte* (b/20, c/5 and 24) could be an Anglian relic, yet the form occurs also in both Alfredian (i.e. early WS) and later WS texts. Such is the overall mix of forms in the poem that, on linguistic grounds alone, nothing can be reliably concluded about its origins.

Further reading

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 P. Cavill, 'Christianity and Theology in *Beowulf*', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. P. Cavill (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 15–39
 J. Hines, 'Beowulf and Archaeology – Revisited', in *'Aedificia nova': Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. C. E. Karkov and H. Damico (Kalamazoo, MI, 2008), pp. 89–115
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31a Grendel's Last Attack (*Beowulf*, lines 702–924)

For twelve years Grendel has regularly attacked Heorot, the magnificent hall of the Danes, with impunity. Now, in one of the most memorable episodes of the poem, this man-shaped monster turns up again. What he does not yet know is that the young Geatish hero Beowulf and his followers have answered the call of the despairing Danish king, Hrothgar, and sailed to Denmark to help. They have been welcomed warmly (by and large) and, after Beowulf has vowed to deal with Grendel or die in the attempt, everyone has settled down to sleep for the night. Everyone, that is, except Beowulf, who is awake and ready to match the attacker with his own tenacious hostility.

The extract opens with Grendel's approach to Heorot, which is presented dramatically in three incremental stages, as Grendel first emerges out of the night, then draws closer under the mist, and finally reaches the door of the hall, which he smashes. Each stage is introduced with the simple 'formula' *cōm* ('came') plus a series of infinitive verbs – *scrīðan*, *gongan* and *sīðian* ('came slinking', 'came strutting' and 'came tramping') – which stress the relentlessness of Grendel's aggression. We are several times reminded of Grendel's association with Cain (see main headnote): he bears God's anger (10) and is later called 'God's adversary' (85). Yet the poet has already signalled, with typical understatement, that things are going to be different this time (15–18).

Grendel wastes no time in grabbing and completely devouring a sleeping warrior, but then he encounters Beowulf. Monster though he is, Grendel has human characteristics, too; he realises that he has met his equal and wants desperately to get away. Conversely, Beowulf himself seems to summon up almost monstrous abilities, a merging of identities which becomes more apparent when we look at the poem as a whole and see how often hero and monster are described with the same vocabulary (see the notes to lines 22 and 31). The physical encounter of the two enemies is recounted step-by-step, and soon Grendel is wailing hideously in anguish. When eventually he limps away and heads for the deep mere of monsters where he lives, he has lost an arm (which Beowulf promptly pins up in the hall) and is mortally wounded, dripping blood.

Next morning, Hrothgar's men gleefully follow Grendel's bloody track to the mere on horseback, and one of their number improvises a song about Beowulf's exploit (166b–214). It is characteristic of the *Beowulf*-poet to allude within his

narrative to his own art, by highlighting the performance of poem or song; here we learn about the composition process as well. We are told that the mounted scop remembers old tales and has a talent for creating new ones. The techniques of OE verse, such as the binding together of words with alliteration and the use of variation, are described, in an account which itself shows off those skills. It is a fascinating snapshot of improvisation by an oral poet, though we should take it as a nostalgic look back to traditional storytelling, not necessarily a description of how things still were in our poet's time.

We are not given the song itself, only a summary of its content, which interweaves Beowulf's actions with references to a Germanic hero of the past, the dragon-slaying Sigemund (see the notes to lines 173–96), with whom Beowulf himself is thus implicitly compared. As a contrast, allusion is also made to a past Danish king, the cruel and avaricious king Heremod, who is clearly a model for heroes to avoid. Indeed, the poet tells us that Beowulf turned out differently. He is, after all, 'Hygelac's kinsman' (*mæg Higelāces*), as the poet reminds us four times (36, 57, 112 and 213) – i.e. nephew to the respected king of Geatland.

As the day wears on, the men make their way back to Heorot to gaze at Grendel's torn-off arm hanging there. Denmark is now free from threat (or so it seems) and our extract ends with the arrival of Hrothgar and his queen, ready for a celebration. This will include the performance of a lay, as recounted in extract 31b.

Further reading

- R. Cramp, 'The Hall in *Beowulf* and in Archaeology', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. H. Damico and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI, 1993), pp. 331–46
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- L. Lockett, 'The Role of Grendel's Arm in Feud, Law, and the Narrative Strategy of *Beowulf*', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols., ed. K. O'B. O'Keefe and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2005), I, pp. 368–88

GRENDEL'S LAST ATTACK

 'Cōm on° wanre° niht° in black night
scriðan° sceadugenga°. 'Scēotend° swāfon°, shadow-walker slept

- 1–2 **Cōm** . . . **scriðan** Infinitives after vbs. of movement are best trans. with the pres. part.: 'Came . . . slinking'. The formula is used again in 9–10 (*cōm gongan*) and 19 (*cōm sīðian*).
2 **Scēotend** 'shooters', i.e. 'warriors', perhaps referring to bowmen.

pā° þæt° 'hornreced' healdan° scoldon°, those guard ought
ealle būton° ānum°. Þæt° wæs yldum° cūþ° except +d one to men known
5 þæt° hīe ne mōste, þā° metod° nolde°, when ordainer did not want
se scynscaþa° under sceaðu° bregdan°; fiendish ravager shadows
ac hē° wæccende° 'wrāþum on andan' he [Beowulf] watching
bād° bolgenmōd° beadwa° geþinges°. awaited +g enraged of battles outcome
[710] Ðā cōm of mōre° under misthleoþum° moor mist-banks
10 Grendel gongan°, Godes yrre° bær°. strutting anger bore
Mynte° se mānscaða° 'manna cynnes Intended wicked ravager
sumne° besyrwan° in sele° þām hēan°. ensnare hall high
Wōd° under wolcnum° 'tō þæs þe' hē wīnreced°, Passed clouds wine-hall
goldsele° gumena°, gearwost° wisse°, gold-hall of men most clearly discerned
15 'fættum fāhne'. Ne wæs þæt forma° sīð° first time
þæt hē Hrōþgāres hām° gesōhte°; home visited
nāfre hē on° aldordagum° ær° ne siþðan° in days of (his) life before after
'heardran hāle, healðegnas fand'.
[720] Cōm þā tō recede° 'rinc' sīðian°, hall tramping
20 drēamum° bedæled°. Duru° sōna onarn°, from joys cut off Door gave way
fyrbendum° fæst°, 'syþðan hē hire folmum æthrān'. by forged bands secured
Onbræd° þā 'bealohyðig, ðā hē gebolgen wæs', Burst open

3 **hornreced** 'horn-hall'; probably 'horn' refers to the shape of the building's gables, so 'horn-gabled hall' may be appropriate; cf. 32/4, where *hornas* seems also to refer to 'gables' on a hall, and 19/222, where *hornbogas* describes 'curved bows'.

5–6 **hīe ne mōste** . . . **bregdan hīe** is the obj. of the vb. (whose subj. is *se scynscaþa*), though it comes first: 'could not drag them'. *Metod* is a typical reference to the ordaining Christian God.

7 **wrāþum on andan** The adj. *wrāþ* is used as a noun (dat. sg.): 'to (the) hostile (one) in anger', i.e. 'in anger towards the enemy'.

11–12 **manna cynnes sumne** 'one of the race of men' (*sumne* is acc. sg. masc.).

13 **tō þæs þe** 'to the point where'

15 **fættum fāhne** Though *fæt* can signify 'gold plate', real gold seems unlikely; the reference may be to plates of some other metal or perhaps to painted shingles on the roof. Perhaps, 'decorated with gleaming plates'.

18 **heardran hāle, healðegnas fand** If *heardran hāle* is taken to be an adv. phr. in the dat. (though other interpretations are possible), we have a typical example of understated anticipation: never had Grendel 'with harsher fortune met with (*fand*) hall-thaner'.

19 **rinc** 'man' or 'warrior', though neither seems appropriate for Grendel (but *rinc* does usefully alliterate); there may be intentional irony.

21 **syþðan hē hire folmum æthrān** 'when [or as soon as] he touched it with (his) hands'. The vb. governs the gen. or dat., hence *hire*, 'her', referring to fem. *duru*.

22 **bealohyðig** adj. used as noun: '(the one) intending evil'. **ðā hē gebolgen wæs** 'now that he was swollen (with rage)'. Exactly the same words are used of Beowulf, when he fights both Grendel's mother (see 31c/48) and, late in the poem, his last foe, a dragon (2550); this dragon is also itself described twice as *gebolgen* and Beowulf once more.

- recedes mūpan°. Raþe° æfter þon° entrance as Quickly that
 on fagne° flōr fēond° treddode°, decorated enemy stepped
 25 ēode° yrremōd°. Him of ēagum stōd' went angry at heart
 ligge° gelīcost° lēoht° unfæger°. to flame most like light horrible
 Geseah° hē in recede rinca manige°, Saw many +gp
 'swefan sibbegedriht samod ætgædere',
 [730] magorinca° hēap°. Þā his mōd° ahlōg°; of young warriors troop heart exulted
 30 mynte þæt hē gedælde°, 'ær þon' dæg cwōme°, would part came
 atol° 'āglæca, ānra gehwylces' hideous
 lif wið° līce°, þā° him° ālumpen° wæs from body now for him turned up
 wistfille° wēn°. 'Ne wæs þæt wyrd þā gēn' fill of feasting gr expectation (of)
 þæt hē mā° mōste° manna cynnes more (of) would be able
 35 ðicgean° ofer° þā niht. Þrýðswýð° behēold° to take after Mighty watched
 mæg° Higelāces, hū° se mānscaða kinsman how
 under° færgripum° gefaran° wolde. with sudden attacks proceed
 Nē þæt se āglæca yldan° þōhte°, to delay intended
 [740] ac hē gefēng° hraðe° forman° sīðe° seized quickly (at) first opportunity
 40 slæpendne rinc, slāt° unwearnum°, tore unhindered
 bāt° bānlocan°, blōd ēdrum° dranc, bit muscles from veins
 'synsnædum' swealh°; sōna hæfde swallowed
 unlyfigendes° eal° gefeormod°, lifeless (man) the whole of consumed
 'fēt ond folma'. Forð nēar° ætstōp°, nearer stepped
 45 nam° þā mid handa higeþihtigne° took stouthearted
 rinc on ræste°, ræhte° ongēan° bed reached towards (him)

25 **Him of ēagum stōd** The sense of *standan* here is 'stand out' or 'issue'; *him* is poss. dat. [§D4b]: 'from his eyes issued'.

28 **swefan sibbegedriht** The noun is another obj. of *geseah* (27) and is part of an acc. and inf. construction [§G6d.i.3]: 'the band of kinsmen sleeping'. **samod ætgædere** 'at the same time together' (used also in 31b/1); perhaps here 'all together'.

30 **ær þon** conj. phr.: 'before'.

31 **āglæca** Often rendered as 'monster', the word is in fact used not only here (and in 115) for Grendel but elsewhere in the poem for Grendel's mother, the dragon, the dragon and Beowulf together, and Sigemund the dragon-slayer; see also 31c/21n. The basic sense seems to be 'awe-inspiring (or formidable) person (or creature)'; thus perhaps here 'awesome adversary'. **ānra gehwylces** 'of each one'; this is the complement of *lif* in 32.

33 **Ne wæs þæt wyrd þā gēn** lit. 'It was not then destiny again', i.e. 'It was no longer destiny (or destined)'.

35 **Þrýðswýð** The adj. describes *mæg Higelāces* in 36, which is also the subj. of *behēold*.

42 **synsnædum** Either 'huge morsels' (taking *syn-* as *sin-*, 'perpetual' or 'huge') or 'sinful morsels' (taking *syn-* as *syn(n)*, 'sin'); deliberate ambiguity, perhaps. The verb *swelgan* takes a dat. obj.

44 **fēt ond folma** The sense is 'even (or including) the feet and hands'.

- fēond° mid folme: 'hē° onfēng° hraþe' enemy ns he [Beowulf] received (him)
 inwitþancum° ond 'wið earm gesæt'. with hostile intentions
 [750] Sōna þæt onfunde° fyrena° hyrde° discovered of crimes keeper
 50 þæt hē ne mētte° 'middangeardes, had met
 eorþan scēata', on° elran° men° in another man ds
 mundgripe° māran°. Hē 'on mōde° wearð° hand-grip greater heart became
 forht° on ferhðe°; 'nō þý ær fram meahte'. fearful spirit
 'Hyge wæs him hinfūs', wolde on heolster° flēon°, darkness flee
 55 sēcan dēofla° gedræg°; ne wæs his drohtoð° þær of devils company plight
 swylce° hē on ealderdagum° ær gemētte°. such as days of life (had) encountered
 Gemunde° þā se gōða°, mæg Higelāces, Remembered good man
 'æfenspræce°', uplang° āstōd° (his) evening speech upright stood
 [760] ond him fæste° wiðfēng°; fingras burston°. firmly grasped burst open
 60 Eoten° wæs ütweard°; eorl° 'furþur' stōp°. Ogre heading out warrior stepped
 Mynte se mæra°, hwær° hē meahte° swā°, infamous (creature) where could so
 'wīdre gewindan' ond 'on weg' þanon° from there
 flēon on° fenhopu°; 'wiste his fingra geweald to fen-retreat
 on grames grāpum'. Þæt wæs gēocor° sīð° bitter journey
 65 þæt se hearmscaþa° tō Heorute ātēah°. evil ravager took
 Dryhtsele° dynede°; 'Denum eallum wearð°, Lordly hall resounded was
 ceasterbūendum°, cēnra° gehwylcum°, fortress-dwellers of brave (men) each

47 **hē onfēng hraþe** The narrative becomes elliptical. Grendel ('the enemy') has grabbed at Beowulf, but the latter is ready to defend himself by parrying the attack.

48 **wið earm gesæt** It seems that Beowulf 'sat up (leaning) against (his) arm', or perhaps more simply, 'leant on his arm'. Another interpretation is that 'he (Beowulf) sat up against (Grendel's) arm'.

50–1 **middangeardes, eorþan scēata** Two vars. using the gen. of location [§D3c]: 'in the world, in the regions of the earth'.

52–3 **on mōde . . . on ferhðe** The two parallel adv. phrases both complement *wearð forht*; 'in heart and in spirit' (with the two nouns more or less interchangeable).

53 **nō þý ær fram meahte** A vb. of motion is om. after the auxil. vb. [§G2d]: 'none the sooner could he (get) away [*fram*]'.
 54 **Hyge wæs him hinfūs** 'his mind [poss. dat. *him*] was hence-eager'; thus, 'in his mind he was eager to get away'.

58 **æfenspræce** This refers to the vow Beowulf had uttered the night before (632–8) that he would get rid of Grendel or die in the attempt.

60 **furþur** 'further (forward)' or 'closer'.

62 **wīdre gewindan** 'reach a wider [i.e. more remote] place'. **on weg** 'away'.

63–4 **wiste his fingra geweald on grames grāpum** Probably, '(he [Grendel]) knew the power of his fingers to be in the enemy's grips', with the adj. *gram* treated as a noun; but an alternative, with Beowulf as the subj., has been suggested: 'he [Beowulf] knew (he had) control over his (own) fingers (when) in the enemy's grips'.

66–8 **Denum eallum . . . ceasterbūendum . . . cēnra gehwylcum . . . eorlum** The four indir. objs. constitute a series of parallel vars.: 'For all the Danes, for the fortress-dwellers,' etc.

- eorlum° 'ealuscerwen'. Yrre° wæron bēgen°, warriors Angry both
 [770] rēþe° renweardas°. Reced° hlynsode°. fierce hall-guardians Hall rumbled
 70 þā wæs wundor micel° þæt se wīnsele° great wine-hall
 wiðhæfde° 'heapodēorum', þæt hē on hrūsan° ne fēol°, withstood +d ground fell
 fæger° foldbold°; ac hē þæs° fæste° wæs beautiful building so firmly
 innan ond ūtan irenbendum° with iron bands
 75 searþoncum° besmīþod°. Þær fram sylle° ābēag° artfully forged base came away
 medubenc° monig, 'mine gefræge', mead-bench
 golde geregnad°, þær þā graman° wunnon°. adorned with +d adversaries battled
 'Þæs' ne wēndon° ær witan° Scyldinga° thought wise men of the Scyldings
 þæt 'hit' ā° 'mid gemete' manna ænig, ever
 [780] betlic° ond 'bānfāg', tōbreca° meahte°, splendid wreck could
 80 listum° tōlūcan°, nymþe° līges° fæþm° subtly destroy unless fire's embrace
 swulge° on° swaþule°. Swēg° up āstag° swallow in flame Sound rose
 nīwe° geneahhe°; Norð-Denum stōd° new repeatedly arose in +d
 atelīc° egesa°, 'ānra gehwylcum terrible fear
 þāra þe of° wealle° 'wōþ° gehyrdon°, from wall wailing heard
 85 gryrelēoð° galan° Godes ondsacan°, terrible song sing adversary
 sigelēasne sang, sār° wānigean° wound bewail

68 **ealuscerwen** A problematical word, unique here. The sense must be that there was 'terror' or 'dire distress' for all the Danes *et al.* Taking *ealu* as 'ale' and *scerwen* as 'distribution', the compound seems to mean 'the serving or dispensing of ale' and could be an ironic metaphor for the encounter of Beowulf and Grendel or perhaps an allusion to anticipated disaster, figured as the serving of a bitter drink. The use of the similar word *meoduscerwen* ('mede distribution') in the OE poem *Andreas* (1526) may be compared.

71 **heapodēorum** The adj. ('battle-fierce') is used as a noun, in the dat. after *wiðhæfde*: 'fierce combatants'.

75 **mīne gefræge** 'from my information' or 'as I have heard'. This stock poet's phr. (in the instr. case) is repeated in 136.

77 **Þæs** 'it'; *wēnan* takes a gen. obj.

78 **hit** The referent of 'it' is the 'beautiful building' of 73, i.e. the hall; the adjs. in 79a and the phr. in 80a refer to it also. **mid gemete** 'by (any) means' or 'by ordinary means'.

79 **bānfāg** 'bone-adorned'. In a richly appointed hall, this may mean adornments made of ivory, derived from walrus tusks or whale teeth; perhaps, 'adorned with ivory'.

83-4 **ānra gehwylcum þāra þe** The pron. *gehwylcum* is dat. in parallel with *North-Denum* in 82: 'in each one of those who'. **of wealle** Probably the Danes hear the sounds coming from (or through) the walls of Heorot. It is less likely that the location of the listening Danes is being indicated, i.e. that they are standing on a wall or rampart.

84-7 **wōþ gehyrdon . . . helle hæfton** In this extended aural image of Grendel's agony, what the North-Danes 'heard' has three elements (with each noun in the acc.): 'wailing', 'God's adversary singing . . .' and 'hell's captive bewailing . . .'. *Galan* and *wānigean* are infs., translated as pres. parts., with objs. *gryrelēoð* and *sār*. **sigelēasne sang** 'victory-lacking song (or cry)', a variation on *gryrelēoð*, perhaps, 'cry of victory lost'.

- helle° hæfton°. Hēold° hine fæste hell's captive Held
 sē° þe° manna wæs mægene° strengest he who in power
 [790] 'on þām dæge þysses lifes'.
 90 Nolde° eorla hlēo° 'ænige þinga' Did not want protector
 þone cwealmcuman° cwicne° forlætan°, deadly visitor alive let go
 nē his lifdagas° lēoda° ænigum° days of life of the people to any
 nytte° tealde°. Þær genehost° brægd° of use reckoned repeatedly drew
 eorl° Bēowulfes 'ealde lāfe', a warrior
 95 wolde frēadrihtnes° feorh° ealgian°, lord's life protect
 'māres° þeodnes°', ðær° hīe meahton° swā. renowned prince wherever could
 'Hīe þæt ne wiston°', þā hīe gewin° drugon°, know struggle engaged in
 heardhigende° hildemeccgas°, brave-minded warriors
 [800] ond on healfa° gehwone° hēawan° þohton°, side every hack intended
 100 sāwle° sēcan°: 'þone synscaðan (his) life seek out
 ænig ofer eorþan irenna cyst,
 gūðbilla nān, grētan nolde',
 'ac hē sigewæpnum° forsworen hæfde', victory-weapons
 ecga° gehwylcre°. 'Scolde his aldorgedāl blade every +gp
 105 on ðām dæge þysses lifes
 earmlic° wurðan°, ond se ellorgāst° miserable be alien spirit
 on fēonda° geweald° fēor° sīðian°. of devils power far journey

89 **on þām dæge þysses lifes** 'on that day (or at that time) in this life'; the stock half-line is repeated in 105.

90 **ænige þinga** 'in any way'; *ænige* is in the instr. case.

94 **ealde lāfe** lit. 'ancient remnant', i.e. the 'ancestral sword' which each warrior carries.

96 **māres þeodnes** This a variation on *frēadrihtnes* in 95, and thus also in the gen. sing.

97 **Hīe þæt ne wiston** Just *what* Beowulf's men did not know is explained in 100b-104.

100-2 **þone synscaðan . . . grētan nolde** The obj. comes first, the verb last, and the subj. has two variations: 'not any iron weapon [*irenna*] on earth, (even) the best [*cyst*], no battle-sword, would touch [*grētan*] the evil ravager [*synscaðan*]'.

103 **ac hē . . . forsworen hæfde** Many editors have assumed for *forsworen* an unattested meaning 'put a curse or spell on' (with dat. obj.), for it suits the logic of the narrative – i.e. no sword could touch Grendel 'because [taking *ac* in a causative sense] he [Grendel] had put a curse on victory-weapons'. But it is better to take the verb in its usual sense, 'foreswear', and make Beowulf the subj. It is a sort of parenthetical reminder for us: 'but he [Beowulf] had forsworn (or renounced) victory-weapons' – and indeed he has deliberately come unarmed to face Grendel, as we know from an earlier part of the poem (677-87).

104 **Scolde** 'must', here best trans. 'was to . . .'; it is paired with both *wurðan* in 106 and *sīðian* in 107. **his aldorgedāl** 'his life-separation'; perhaps, 'his leaving this life'.

	Ðā° 'þæt' onfunde°, 'sē þe fela æror	Then discovered
[810]	mōdes myrðe manna cynne,	
110	fyrene gefremede° (hē wæs fæg° wið° God),	hostile against
	þæt him se līchoma° læstan° nolde°,	body serve +d would not
	ac hine° se mōdega° mæg Hygelāces	him brave
	hæfde be honda. Wæs gehwæper° oðrum°	each to the other
	lifigende° lād°. Līcsār° gebād°	living hateful Body-wound (had) suffered
115	atol æglæca; 'him on eaxle' wearð	
	syndolh° sweotol°, seonowe° onsprungon°, huge wound plain sinews sprang out	
	burston° bānlocan°. Bēowulfe wearð	burst muscles
	gūðhrēð° gyfeþe°; scolde Grendel þonan°	battle-glory granted +d from there
[820]	feorhsēoc° flēon under fenhleoðu°,	life-sick fen-slopes
120	sēcean wynlēas° wīc°; wiste þē° geornor°	joyless dwelling the more surely
	þæt his aldres° wæs° ende gegongen°,	of life had been reached
	'dōgera dægriṃ'. Denum eallum wearð	
	æfter þām wælræse° willa° gelumpen°.	deadly attack desire come to pass
	Hæfde þā 'gefælsod°' sē þe ær feorran° cōm,	cleansed from afar
125	snotor° ond swyðferhð°, sele° Hrōðgāres,	wise stout-hearted hall as
	genered° wið° nīðe°; 'nihtweorce gefeh,	saved from malice
	ellenmærpum'. Hæfde 'East-Denum'	
	Gēatmecga° lēod° gilp° gelæsted°,	of men of Geats chief boast fulfilled
[830]	swylce° oncýþðe° ealle gebētte°,	also distress as healed
130	inwidsorge°, þē hīe ær drugon°	sorrow as (had) endured
	ond for° þrēanýdum° þolian° scoldon,	because of dire need suffer
	torn° unlytel°. Þæt wæs tācen° sweotol°,	affliction no little proof clear
	syþðan hildedēor° hond ālegde°,	battle-brave (man) placed
	earm ond eaxle° – þær wæs 'eal' geador°	shoulder together
135	Grendles grāpe°– under gēapne° hrōf.	grip wide

108 **þæt** The pron. is correlative with *þæt* in 111 and is best left untrans.

108–10 **sē þe fela . . . gefremede** These five half-lines define the subj. of *onfunde*: 'he who formerly [*æror*] had perpetrated [*gefremede*] many afflictions of the heart [*mōdes myrðe*], wicked deeds [*fyrene*] on mankind'. Both *myrðe* and *fyrene* are assumed to be gen. pl. forms, after *fela*, 'many'.

115 **him on eaxle** poss. dat.: 'on his shoulder'.

122 **dōgera dægriṃ** The element *dæg* in *dæg-riṃ*, 'day-number' or 'day-reckoning', is redundant in this phr., because *dogor*, here gen. pl., also means 'day'; thus, 'the tally of his days'.

124 **gefælsod** Earlier in the poem, Beowulf, in full heroic mode, has begged Hrothgar not to refuse to allow him *Heorot fælsian*, 'to cleanse Heorot' (432). Now he has done so.

126–7 **nihtweorce gefeh, ellenmærpum** The verb has two parallel dat. objs.: 'he rejoiced in (the) night's work (and) in (his) courageous exploits'.

127 **East-Denum** dat. pl. governed by *gilp*: 'to the East-Danes'.

134 **eal** This goes with *grape* (135), which is gen. sing.: 'all Grendel's grip'.

	Ðā wæs on morgen mīne gefræge	
	ymp° þā gifhealle° gūðrinc° monig;	around gift-hall warrior
	fērdon° folctogan° feorran° ond nēan	journeyed people's leaders from far
[840]	geond° wīdwegas° wundor scēawian°,	through distant regions look at
140	lāþes° lāstas°. Nō his līfgedāl°	of enemy tracks life-parting
	sārlic° þūhte° secga° ænegum	painful seemed of the men
	þāra þe tirlēases° trode° scēawode,	glory-less one's tracks
	hū hē wērigmod° on weg þanon°,	disheartened from there
	'nīða' ofer cumen, on nicera° mere°	water monsters' mere
145	fæge° ond geflymed° 'feorhlāstas bæṛ'.	doomed put to flight
	Ðær wæs on° blōde° brim° weallende°,	with blood water welling
	atol yða° geswing° eal gemenged°	of waves swirl mixed (with)
	hāton° heolfre°, heorodrēore wēol.	hot gore with blood of battle welled
[850]	Dēaðfæge° 'dēog', siððan drēama° lēas°	Doomed to death of joys deprived
150	in fenfreoðu° feorh° ālegde°,	fen-refuge life laid down
	hæþene° sāwle°. Þær him hel onfēng°.	heathen soul received (+d)
	þanon eft° gewiton° ealdgesiðas°,	back went old companions
	swylce° geong manig, of° gomenwāþe°	likewise from joyous journey
	fram mere mōdge° mēarum° rīdan°,	high-spirited on horses riding (<i>inf</i>)
155	beornas° on blancum°. Ðær wæs Bēowulfes	warriors (white) horses
	mærðo° mæned°; monig oft gecwæð°	glory related said
	þætte sūð ne norð 'be sām twēonum'	
	ofer eormengrund° oþer nænig	spacious earth
[860]	under swegles° begong° sēlra° 'nære'	sky's expanse better (man)
160	rondhæbbendra°, rīces° wyrðra°. (among) shield-bearers of rule worthier	
	Nē hīe hūru° winedrihten° wiht° ne lōgon°,	indeed friend-lord at all blamed
	glædne° Hrōðgār, 'ac' þæt wæs gōd cyning.	gracious
	Hwīlum° heaþorōfe° hlēapan° lēton°,	At times battle-brave (men) gallop let

144 **nīða** gen. of respect [§D3d]: 'in the hostilities'.

145 **feorhlāstas bæṛ** The compound *feorh-lāstas* is 'life- (or soul-) tracks', with perhaps the sense 'tracks stained by one's life-blood'; but the verb *bær*, 'bore' or 'carried', invites the possibility that Grendel 'carried away' what was left of his life, i.e. 'his vanishing life'.

149 **dēog** An otherwise unknown vb. Here it is taken to be part of a conjectured *dēagan*, 'hide oneself' (cf. *dīgol*, 'secret'), and thus 'he hid himself'. Other conjectures have yielded other meanings, including 'died' or 'dived'.

157 **be sām twēonum** 'between the seas' or 'coast to coast'. The phr. is used also in *Exodus*; see 18/117n.

159 **nære** This is the contracted form of *ne wære*, with the vb. in the sbj., 3rd pers. sing.: 'there was not'.

162 **ac** The sense seems to be concessory, i.e. Beowulf's feats do not cause the thanes to reproach their own lord, 'because' he (Hrothgar) was a good king.

	on geflit° faran° 'fealwe' mēaras°	competition run horses
165	ðær him foldwegas° fægere° þuhton°, cystum° cūðe°. Hwīlum cyninges þegn, guma° 'gilphlæden', gidða° gemyndig°, sē ðe ealfela° ealdgesegena°	paths favourable seemed for (their) merits known a man legends mindful of a great many ancient tales
[870]	'worn' gemunde°, 'word oþer fand	a multitude recalled
170	sōðe gebunden'; secg° eft° ongān° sīð° Bēowulfes snyttrum° styrian° ond 'on spēd' wrecan° spel° gerāde°, wordum° wrixlan°. Welhwylc° gecwæð þæt hē 'fram Sigemundes secgan hýrde° 175 ellendædum', uncūþes° fela°, 'Wælsinges' gewin°, wīde° sīðas°, 'þāra þe gumena bearn' gearwe° ne wiston°, fāhðe° ond fyrena°, 'būton Fitela mid hine',	the man again proceeded to exploit cleverly evoke recite tale apt with (his) words vary Everything (had) heard (of the) unfamiliar much struggle extensive travels fully knew feuds crimes
[880]	þonne° hē swulces° hwæt° secgan wolde, 180 'ēam his nefan', swā° hīe ā° wæron° æt nīða gehwām° nýdgesteallan°;	when of such something as always had been every comrades in need

164 *fealwe* Colour-words in OE can be hard to pin down. *Fealu* probably indicates a basically yellow colour, with tints of red or brown; 'dun-coloured' describes a yellowish-brown or sandy horse today and may be a suitable trans. But the poet certainly chose *fealu* for its alliteration, not its historical accuracy. See also 215.

167 *gilphlæden* The verbal element is the past part. of *hladan*, 'load', giving 'laden'; the first element, *gylp*, is 'boasting' or 'pride'. Thus the adj. could be interpreted as 'boastful'. But most editors elicit a more figurative meaning: the mobile scop is one laden with the words needed to describe boast-worthy deeds (as he is indeed about to do); one suggestion, therefore, is 'well furnished with words of praise'.

169 *worn* A var. on *ealfela* in 168.

169–70 *word oþer fand* ... *sōðe gebunden* Verse-making is portrayed as an almost autonomous process; the last phrase refers to alliteration: '(one) word found another, rightly linked'.

172 *on spēd* 'with success' or 'with skill'.

174–5 *fram Sigemundes* ... *ellendædum* 'about the brave deeds of Sigemund'. This is the Sigmundr who features in the Old Norse *Vǫlsunga saga*

176 *Wælsinges* Wælsing, taken by the poet to mean 'son of Wæls', is a name for Sigemund. Wæls corresponds to the figure of *Vǫlsungr* in the Old Norse *Vǫlsunga saga*, in which he has a son *Sinfjǫtli* (Fitela in this poem) by his sister, though he doesn't know about his fatherhood until the last adventure together of father and son. The *Beowulf*-poet identifies Fitela as Sigemund's nephew, which is correct, though only half the story.

177 *þāra þe* 'of which'. *gumena bearn* 'the children of men', a stock poetical allusion to people in general.

178 *būton Fitela mid hine* 'except for Fitela (who was) with him'. It will be noted that here *mid* takes the acc. pron. (*hine*), but in 188 the dat. (*him* ... *mid*), with the same meaning.

180 *ēam his nefan* 'the uncle to his nephew'. It is not clear whether or not the poet knew that Fitela was indeed Sigemund's nephew but also his son, by his sister.

	hæfdon ealfela eotena° cynnes°	of giants of the race
	sweordum gesæged°. 'Sigemunde' gesprong°	laid low (with) sprang up
	æfter dēaðdæge dōm° unlytel°,	fame no little
185	syþðan wīges° heard° wyrms° ācwealde°,	in battle fierce serpent killed
	hordes° hyrde°. Hē under hārne° stān,	hoard guardian grey
	æþelinges° bearn°, āna° genēðde°	prince's son alone ventured on
	frēcne° dæde°, ne wæs him Fitela mid;	daring deed
[890]	hwæpre° him gesælde° ðæt þæt swurd þurhwōd°	still it chanced pierced
190	wrætlīcne° wyrms, þæt hit on wealle ætstōd°,	wondrous stayed fast
	dryhtlīc° iren°; draca° morðre° swealt°. lordly sword dragon (by) violence died	
	Hæfde 'āglæca' elne° gegongen°	by courage brought it about
	þæt hē bēahhordes° brūcan° mōste	ring-hoard enjoy
	'selfes dōme'; sēbāt° gehleōð°,	sea-boat loaded
195	bær° on bearm° scipes beorhte° frætwa°,	carried hold gleaming ornaments
	Wælses eafera°. 'Wyrms hāt' gemealt°.	son <i>ns</i> melted away
	Sē wæs wreccena° wīde° mærost°	of exiles far and wide most famed
	ofer° werþeode°, wīgendra° hlēo°,	among nations warriors' protector
[900]	ellendædum° ('hē þæs ær onðāh'),	for courage-deeds
200	siððan° Heremōdes' hild° sweðrode°,	after valour diminished
	eafod° ond ellen°. Hē 'mid Eōtenum' wearð	(his) strength courage
	on fēonda geweald° forð° forlācen°,	power away seduced
	snūde° forsended°. Hine sorhwylmas°	swiftly dispatched surges of sorrow
	lemedon° tō lange; hē his lēodum° 'wearð,	disabled people
205	eallum æþellingum tō aldorceare°;	

183 *Sigemunde* 'for Sigemund' (dat.). In Germanic legend, the dragon-slaying about to be described is carried out, not by Sigemund himself but by another of his sons, Sigurðr. The creature is first called a *wyrms*, 'serpent' (185, 190), then a *draca*, 'dragon' (191), then again a *wyrms* (196). Alliteration seems to affect choice of word. Beowulf kills a dragon, with fatal consequences for him, too, at the end of the poem.

192 *āglæca* This time it is Sigemund who is being described as an 'awesome adversary'; cf. 31.

194 *selfes dōme* 'by the judgement of himself', i.e. as he himself chose.

196 *Wyrms hāt* Either 'the hot serpent or 'the serpent, being hot'; the idea is that dragon was destroyed by its own heat.

199 *hē þæs ær onðāh* 'by such [*þæs*] he had previously [*or* already] prospered'.

200 *Heremodes* Heremod is here the type of a bad king (see headnote), but his particular problem with the Jutes (see 201) is unknown.

201 *mid Eōtenum* 'among the Jutes'. The Jutes of Jutland, absorbed in the Danish kingdom by the sixth century, figure also in the next extract. On possible confusion of *Eote*, 'Jute', with *eoten*, 'giant' (used above in 60 and 182), see 31b/10n.

204–5 *wearð* ... *tō aldorceare* lit. 'became to life-care', i.e. 'became a cause of lifelong anxiety'; *eallum æþellingum* (dat. pl., 'to . . .') varies *leodum* in 204.

	swylce oft bemearn°	ærran° mælum°	mourned (on) earlier occasions
	ʿswiðferhþes siðʿ	snotor° ceorl° monig,	wise man
	ʿsē þe him bealwa tō	bōte gelyfdeʿ,	
[910]	þæt þæt ðeodnes° bearn°	geþeon° scolde,	prince's son prosper
210	fæderæþelum° onfōn°,	folc gehealdan°,	father's noble qualities take on guard
	hord ond hlēoburh°,	hæleþa° rīce,	stronghold of warriors
	ēþel° Scyldinga.	Hē þær ʿeallumʿ wearð°,	native land became
	mæg Higelāces,	manna cynne,	
	frēondum° ʿgefægraʿ;	ʿhineʿ fyren° onwōd°.	to friends sin invaded
215	Hwīlum flitende°	fealwe° stræte°	competing sand-coloured road as
	mēarum° mæton°.	Ðā wæs morgenlēoht	on (their) horses traversed
	scofen ond scyndedʿ.	Ēode° scealc° monig	Went retainer
	swiðhicgende°	tō sele þām hēan	determined
[920]	ʿsearowundorʿ sēon°;	swylce° self cyning	to see also
220	of brýdbūre°,	bēahhorda° weard°,	marriage-chamber ring-hoards guardian
	tryddode° fīrfæst°	ʿgetrume micleʿ,	stepped glory-firm
	cystum° gecýped°,	ond his cwēn mid him	for merits well-known
	ʿmedostigge mætʿ	mægþa° hōse°.	of maidens with a troop

207 *swiðferhþes sið* 'the fortune (or fate) of the fierce-minded (one)', i.e. of Heremod.

208 *sē þe him . . . gelyfde* The prep. *tō* is best connected with *him*; 'who had expected [gelyfde] from him [tō him] relief [bōte] from [lit. "of"] (their) miseries [bealwa]'.

209 *þæt* '(and) that'; this begins a long list of further things expected of Heremod.

212 *Hē* Clearly *hē* here is Beowulf. *eallum* Presumably to be construed with *manna cynne* in 213, 'to all the race of men'.

214 *gefægra* Perhaps 'more dear', taking this to be the comp. form of a hypothetical adj. *gefæg*, 'pleasing', 'acceptable' or 'dear'; but other suggestions include a misspelling of the comp. form of *gefraege*, 'renowned'. Whatever the case, the sense is that Beowulf became ever more acceptable to all, to mankind, to his friends. *hine* 'him'; this is now Heremod, with whom Beowulf is being contrasted.

216–17 *Ðā wæs morgenlēoht scofen ond scynded* lit. 'Then was the morning light moved on and hastened'. Perhaps, 'Now the morning light was advanced and hastening on'.

219 *searowundor* 'curious wonder' or 'astonishing thing'; i.e. Grendel's arm.

221 *getrume micle* descriptive dat.: 'with a great retinue'.

223 *medostigge mæt* 'measured [i.e. traversed] the mead-path'; perhaps, 'trod the path to the mead-hall'.