

who never backed down. At last, a shaft sounded his depths,
pursuing the barb as it primed his heart,
feathers fanning across his breast.”

3120 The son of Weohstan summoned seven
of the best men to descend again into darkness,
and went alongside them, the eighth man,
entering that cursed place. One soldier,
the man in front, carried a light.
No one sought to gamble or grab.
The guard was gone and the challenge
was pointless. They carried it all out,
dazzle-draped, a heaving hoard of gore-bought
gold, unprotected, and piled it in public.

3130 It was easy to enact their leader's last wish.
Then they heaved the dragon over the cliffs
into the sea, brine-bedding that beast-bride,
that ring-taker. The endless accursed treasures
they stacked on a cart, and bore them
with their dead leader, his skin gone gray
as a barnacle, to Whales' Cape.

The Geats began the pyre, howling over
Beowulf, their best brother, hanging hoard-helmets
about it, shields and steel-shirts, as he'd insisted.

3140 They placed him in the center of all this treasure,
their lost love, and built a bone-fire worthy
of men's ends. Storm-smoke shuddered
from the blaze thick and dark, and the flames
keened louder than any man's weeping.
The whipping winds momentarily stilled,
until Beowulf's heart-helm broke. His bones
blackened as his boys bellowed their grief.

Then another dirge rose, woven uninvited
by a Geatish woman, louder than the rest.

3150 She tore her hair and screamed her horror
at the hell that was to come: more of the same.
Reaping, raping, feasts of blood, iron fortunes
marching across her country, claiming her body.
The sky sipped the smoke and smiled.

The Geats got down to it, driving the materials
of the memorial into a mound, a promontory
crowned with Beowulf's marker, lit so sailors
could see it from afar. Ten days it took to make
their hero's new home. It contained, walled up,
3160 the remnant of his hoard-gold, wrought to remain
long after Geats were gone. Rings of kings,
and torcs, jewels clouded with black smoke,
the dragon's darlings—and before her, that lost tribe's,

a trove of treasure trespass-cursed from out of earth,
now gone to ground again. They covered it over
with gravel, and I hear it's there still, a leftover lament,
lacking living hands for spending.

Twelve thanes, battle-tested sons of worthy men,
took themselves to horseback and coursed
3170 around the tomb, weeping, wringing
the old songs from their tongues, dirge-chanting,
telling the legend of Beowulf, their king.
His courage, his fury, his wars.
They did all this grieving the way men do,
but, bro, no man knows, not me, not you,
how to get to goodbye. His guys tried.
They remembered the right words. Our king!
Lonely ring-wielder! Inheritor of everything!
He was our man, but every man dies.
3180 Here he is now! Here our best boy lies!
He rode hard! He stayed thirsty! He was the man!
He was the man.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2017, I was nominated for a World Fantasy Award, and two of the award jurors, Betsy Mitchell and Elizabeth Engstrom, attended a reading at which I read from *The Mere Wife* and talked about my research for the novel, the translations of *Beowulf* I'd read, and the ways in which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century translations by men had shaped our understanding of the female characters in the poem. During the Q&A, they asked when my translation would be out. I laughed and said there wouldn't be one—I wasn't qualified—and both jurors laughed back and said it sounded like I was as qualified as many of the other people who'd translated it over the years. "Qualified," to my mind, meant I'd certainly need a PhD, perhaps a Nobel Prize. This perception, obviously, didn't come from nowhere. Despite the significant work of female and other marginalized scholars, despite several excellent translations by women, the fact remains that *Beowulf*, at least for publication, has longstandingly been aggressively marketed as an off-limits area. I'd adapted it into a novel, but somehow it still seemed off-limits for me to dig into the actual poem. Well, fuck that. The notion of *Beowulf* through the lens of the bro-story had been rattling around in my head for a decade. I took the idea to a writing retreat a few weeks later and pitched it to a group of