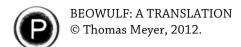


BEOWULF

A Translation

Thomas Meyer



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Front flyleaf drawing by Heather Masciandaro. The drawing on the frontispiece of *Part II: Homelands* is a plan of a large building at Hofsthahir, Iceland, most likely a farmhouse, although the element *hof*-suggests it may have once been a pagan temple.

OVERSEA is a translation of lines 1 through 1887, following Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd edition (1950). The second section, HOMELANDS, completes that text up to line 3182.



HEY now hear

what spears of Danes in days of years gone by did, what deeds made their power their glory —

their kings & princes:

SCYLD SCEFING,

wretched foundling,

grew under open skies & in him glory thrived & all who threatened his meadhall ran in terror & all neighboring nations brought him gold following whaleroads.

BEOWULF,

this good king's son

grew glorious in the heart of all Scandinavia, born to keep his fathers' rule & answer his people's need & his gifts brought trust,

men to stand by him in war, in old age —

the tribe thrives with each man's rewarded deed.

Scyld's hour came, his strength went unto his God's keeping

His beloved men carried out his last request, they bore their king to the shores of the land he long ruled,

> to the sea's surge & harbor where a ringprowed, kingly vessel tossed, icecrusted, keen to set off.

They laid his glorious, beloved frame amidship, against the mast & covered it with treasure, trappings

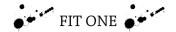
from the realm's farthest reaches, weapons of war, armor, sword & byrne set upon his breast.

The seas have never possessed a better geared keel than that. The riches his people bestowed matched those cast off with him

> as a child in his beginnings alone upon waves.

They flew a flag woven with golden threads high above his head & then let the waters bear him unto Ocean's arms away from their

grief & sad hearts. No counselor nor warrior can say for sure where that cargo will arrive.



& THEN

Beowulf of the Scyldings

succeeded his departed father & lord to rule that country many years

well known, well loved

& his son, grim, gray

HEALFDENE lifelong light of the Scyldings

bore two sons & two daughters by all counts:

HEOROGAR & HROTHGAR & good Helga

& Yrse (was it?

. . . Onela the Swede's queenconsort?)

Luck in battle

brought Hrothgar

friends,

kinsmen ready to serve him, young blood flocked to join his band, swell his ranks.

Then it came to him to command to be built a great lodge & men undertook this work erecting a meadhall larger than any they had ever seen or heard of

under whose beams

all gifts God gave him

(all but

the landshare & lifebreath He provides for men)

would be dealt out

to young & old alike.

& tribe upon tribe arrived from all throughout Midgarth to girt, to decorate this meetingplace

& despite its size their work went quickly.

That greatest hall stood ready for Hrothgar's lips & hands to shape its name, fulfill its promise:

He called it Heorot & there bestowed rings & riches upon his warriors as they feasted under towering, cliffhigh

gablehorns.

One day not long off

fire will burn those walls flames

will temper hatred's blade, cleave son & fatherinlaw but this has yet to be.

The dark rang.
The new hall's
noise fell
upon tortured ears. In

the dark dwelt

a beast who ached as he heard

loud sweet

harp notes

cast song's sharp shape, craft

unfold the airs

& fill the ears

with all origins —

Where water rings the world's bright fields sun & moon lend their glory's light as lamps for men on land

& tree leaf & limb deck out earth's every fold as breath quickens each creaturekind.

Hrothgar's men enjoyed happy lives at Heorot & then

the Hellfiend's raids began . . .

That grim ghostbeast called Grendel dwelled on doomed ground in demonrealms & made swamp & moor his stronghold. He stalked those borderlands one of the banished kin of outcast Cain, Abel's killer, Almighty God condemned to live beyond mankind.

Cain's crime fathered an evil brood:

ents & orcs & elves & giants who long ago waged war on God & won themselves His reward.



NIGHT came. He went to check out those Danes boozing at home in their big house & pay them a call.

He found them snoozing like fat, well fed babies safe from boogies.

BANG! like a flash that hard hearted, grim, greedy, sick thing snatched 30 sleeping Danes &

jiggetyjig ran home again, fists full of blood candy.

& then

	dawn's	first
	light	lit
	what	Grendel
	did	
		hid
	none	of it
& then		
	last	night's
	cups	brimmed
	with	morning
	wept	
		tears

An old, renowned king's grief. An evil ghost's ugly foot print.

Too much pain too soon, too long. Murder's fearless pattern set

in less than a night.

Feud Sin certain sign clear token

Sin Feud out of season no let up

Men sought digs outside the hall, got as far from hate's haunt as they could.

One took them all on. That greatest of houses stood idle.

12 bitter winters taught the Scyldings' king each sorrow under the sun.

Tongues wagged, lips clacked: Grendel's attacks, Hrothgar's pain common knowledge.

No truce, no ransom, no glory possible for men, seasoned or green, at the hands of that horrible beast. Death's dark shadow

hovered over moors,

plot thickened mist

& never ending night.

Hell's runes

hid all trails.

Singlehanded
Hell's fiend held Heorot,
made its cold hearth his home.
Night's dark. Scylding's grief.
That beast knelt before no Lord's
throne.
His deeds went unrewarded.

Men of rank met, asked:

"What runes, what sacrifice will answer our people's need?"

Priests & chiefs prayed:

"Troll Killer, our god & single aid, deliver us!"

Hell dwelled in their hearts, heathen rites darkened their minds. They knew nothing of

God Almighty, Heaven's Helm, Judge of Deeds. Pagans deaf to Glory's praises know no solace,

shove their souls into terrorrealms unto fires' arms,

remain unborn.

Death's day brings joy to men if they seek peace,

the Father's arms.



NIGHT & day

care's tides

rose & fell,

drowned Healfdene's

son. No runes

stilled storm's

rage. Damned

wrack, grim doom,

nightfear.

Too much pain too soon, too long.

Hygelac's thane, noble, mighty, brave Geat, his manhood, then ripe, got wind of Grendel's rampage & decked out a ship fit to fare waves, said "I'll track swans' path to seek that good king in need of men."

Friends & counselors
unable to turn him from
his journey
urged him on,
drew his sorts, checked omens
for the brave, beloved prince.

He picked a company from the best men he could find.

15 sought seawood, led to land's edge by seawise warrior,

set keel to breakers,

left
shore's ledge,
leapt
churned sand.

Sea surge bore forth bright cargo:

weapons, trappings, hearts keen to man timberbound, wavelapped, windwhipped, foamthroated bird.

Ship floated. Sail filled. A day & a day prow plowed & crew saw bright cliffs, steep hills, wide beaches.

Sea crossed. Land at last. Boat moored. Byrnes shook.

Weder men thanked God for an easy voyage over waves.

Glint of shieldbosses

across gangplanks

caught in coastguard's eye

on seawall at seawatch

flashed upon his mind,

pricked his brain.

"Who goes there? Why? What are they up to?"

Hrothgar's thane rode his horse down to the beach.

Spear's great wood quaked in his hand.

He drew his quick breath, steadied himself & said:

"Who are you in your armor & your mail, brought by tall keel along the sea's road upon wide waves? For years at land's end I've watched the shore for enemy armies come by ship to invade & raid us Danes & never seen shielded men arrive so openly.

Yet I've had no warning, no news of you, no orders from my kinsmen to let you pass.

& I've seen no greater earl on earth than one of you appears to be,

no mere hallman glamorized by dazzling armor, strengthened by weapons alone,

unless his looks weave lies, he has no equal.

But now before you take another step on Danish soil I must be told where you sailed from & why. For all I know you foreigners & seafarers may be spies, so answer my simple question, haste is best:

Where have you come from?"



"WE are Geats!"

Crew's captain & chief unlocked his wordhoard, his answer rolled from his tongue:

"Ecgtheow,

my father,
all folk knew well,
the flower of his kinship
survived many winters
before it faded
ripened by many years

leaving his memory to thrive in the minds of all wisemen throughout wide earth." We come with warm hearts to seek Healfdene's son.

Show us goodwill, give us godspeed on our guest errand unto your illustrious Danish lord.

Our journey's rime will soon be no secret, I think.

You know — if rumors we've heard hold true — that some scourge among Scyldings shapes its hate's deeds by dead of night, twisting its terror's strange, violent designs from living men's humiliation & dead men's blood.

I bring buried in the wide ground of my heart seeds of an answer for brave, old Hrothgar: how he might overcome this fiend, untwist the tight net its evil weaves & cast good fortune's change, stilling care's swelling tides —

if it is any longer possible —

for otherwise forever after suffering & sorrow shall be every day's necessity at good Heorot, best of halls, for as long as it endures upon its lofty heights." Coastguard on horseback

cleared his throat, unfaltering officer spoke:

"As any clever shieldbearer in his right mind would, I've weighed your words & deeds & now think you a troop loyal to Scyldings' lord. Bear forth your weapons in battledress, I'll be your guide & leave my men to guard your freshtarred boat from enemies, keeping its curved wood keel safe on sand until it's ready to bear its beloved band

whom fate allows to weather war's storm whole

back across sea's streams to Wederland."

They set off, their widehulled boat at rest, rope & anchor held it fast.

Gold swine emblems gleamed above cheekguards — inlaid, firehard tusk & snout, twisted tail.

Bristled boar:

warhearts' blazon, lifebreaths' protector.

Together men marched.

Their quick pace brought them

in sight of

gilt, glint,

splendor,

timbered hall,

mighty king's seat,

house

most prime

under heaven

in earthdwellers' minds

whose fires' light lit

many lands.

Coastguard pointed out the direct route to that bright lodge, lighthearted men's home, turned his horse & said:

"It is time now for me to get back. May the allruling Father's mercy keep you & your mission sound.

I go to the sea to resume my watch against our enemies."