

Rode in the harbor, a prince's pride.
 Therein they laid him, their well-loved lord,
 Their ring-bestower, in the ship's embrace,^o
 The mighty prince at the foot of the mast
 Amid much treasure and many a gem
 From far-off lands. No lordlier ship
 Have I ever heard of, with weapons heaped,
 With battle-armor, with bills and byrnies.^o
 On the ruler's breast lay a royal treasure
 40 As the ship put out on the unknown deep.
 With no less adornment they dressed him round,
 Or gift of treasure, than once they gave
 Who launched him first on the lonely sea
 While still but a child. A golden standard
 They raised above him, high over head,
 Let the wave take him on trackless seas.
 Mournful their mood and heavy their hearts;
 Nor wise man nor warrior knows for a truth
 Unto what haven that cargo came.
 50 Then Beowulf ruled o'er the Scylding realm,
 Beloved and famous, for many a year—
 The prince, his father, had passed away—
 Till, firm in wisdom and fierce in war,
 The mighty Healfdene held the reign,
 Ruled, while he lived, the lordly Scyldings.
 Four sons and daughters were seed of his line,
 Heorogar and Hrothgar, leaders of hosts,
 And Halga, the good. I have also heard
 A daughter was Onela's consort^o and queen,
 60 The fair bed-mate of the Battle-Scyfling.
 To Hrothgar was granted glory in war,
 Success in battle; retainers bold
 Obeyed him gladly; his band increased
 To a mighty host. Then his mind was moved
 To have men fashion a high-built hall,
 A mightier mead-hall than man had known,
 Wherein to portion to old and young
 All goodly treasure that God had given,
 Save only the folk-land,^o and lives of men.^o

ship's embrace The sea burial of Scyld reflects earlier pagan Scandinavian practice, but by the time *Beowulf* was written ship burials on land, with the dead chieftain surrounded by rich possessions and a barrow, or burial-mound, heaped above, were common.
 bills and byrnies swords and coats of ring-mail
 Onela's consort The text being defective at this point we can only conjecture that Onela the Swede is referred to, and we are not given the name of Healfdene's daughter, Onela's wife.

Onela was son of Ongentheow (ll. 2750 ff.). His nephews Eadgils and Eanmund rebelled against him (ll. 2466 ff.) and took refuge at the Geatish court. Onela pursued them there and killed the young Geatish king Heardred. Eanmund was also killed. Later, Beowulf helps Eadgils in a punitive expedition against Onela, who is slain (ll. 2261 ff.).
 folk-land public common land, which Germanic law gave by inalienable right to be held by the community at large for grazing
 men i.e. men's bodies; the reference is unclear

70 His word was published to many a people
 Far and wide o'er the ways of earth
 To rear a folk-stead richly adorned;
 The task was speeded, the time soon came
 That the famous mead-hall was finished and done.
 To distant nations its name was known,
 The Hall of the Hart;^o and the king kept well
 His pledge and promise to deal out gifts,
 Rings at the banquet. The great hall rose
 High and horn-gabled,^o holding its place
 80 Till the battle-surge of consuming flame
 Should swallow it up; the hour was near
 That the deadly hate of a daughter's husband
 Should kindle to fury and savage feud.^o
 Then an evil spirit who dwelt in the darkness
 Endured it ill that he heard each day
 The din of revelry ring through the hall,
 The sound of the harp, and the scop's^o sweet song.
 A skillful bard sang the ancient story
 Of man's creation;^o how the Maker wrought
 90 The shining earth with its circling waters;
 In splendor established the sun and moon
 As lights to illumine the land of men;
 Fairly adorning the fields of earth
 With leaves and branches; creating life
 In every creature that breathes and moves.
 So the lordly warriors lived in gladness,
 At ease and happy, till a fiend from hell
 Began a series of savage crimes.
 They called him Grendel, a demon grim
 100 Haunting the fen-lands, holding the moors,
 Ranging the wastes, where the wretched wight
 Made his lair with the monster kin;
 He bore the curse of the seed of Cain^o
 Whereby God punished the grievous guilt
 Of Abel's murder. Nor ever had Cain

Hart Heorot, probably situated near modern Lejre, on the north coast of Zealand, not far from Roskilde, the ancient seat of Danish kingship. The royalty of the hall is emphasized by its name, Hart or Stag, a symbol of kingship—see the stag on the Sutton Hoo scepter (Fig. 17).
 horn-gabled rather "wide-gabled"
 consuming flame . . . feud (ll. 80–83) Heorot stood until it was burned to the ground, probably during an attack by Ingeld, king of the Heathobards, on Hrothgar, which the poet later describes (ll. 1893 ff.). The poet is using his characteristic device of "tragic anticipation" for an audience already familiar with the story: the contrast is made between the present mag-

nificence of Hrothgar's mead-hall and its later fate.
 scop's the singer of tales, the bard chanting stories in verse at the feast to the sound of the harp
 creation i.e. all created good (cf. "Cædmon's Hymn"), and man, sinless and perfect.
 seed of Cain The first murderer—Genesis 4:8 ff. The giant race before Noah's flood (Genesis 6:4) is taken by the Biblical commentators, from very early times, to be not merely strong but also cruel and cunning—cf. Genesis 6:5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth." The giants were thought to spring from the union of the descendants of Cain the wrongdoer with the descendants of the righteous Seth.

In their splendid war-gear they merit well
The esteem of earls; ° he's a stalwart leader
Who led this troop to the land of the Danes.'

360 Hrothgar spoke, the lord of the Scyldings:
"Their leader I knew when he still was a lad.
His father was Ecgtheow; Hrethel ° the Geat
Gave him ° in wedlock his only daughter.
Now is their son come, keen for adventure,
Finding his way to a faithful friend.
Sea-faring men who have voyaged to Geatland
With gifts of treasure ° as token of peace,
Say that his hand-grip has thirty men's strength.
God, in His mercy, has sent him to save us—

370 So springs my hope—from Grendel's assaults.
For his gallant courage I'll load him with gifts!
Make haste now, marshal the men to the hall,
And give them welcome to Danish ground.'

Then to the door went the well-known warrior, °
Spoke from the threshold welcoming words:

"The Danish leader, my lord, declares
That he knows your kinship; right welcome you come,
You stout sea-rovers, to Danish soil.

380 Enter now, in your shining armor
And vizored helmets, to Hrothgar's hall.
But leave your shields and the shafts of slaughter
To wait the issue and weighing of words.'

Then the bold one rose with his band around him,

A splendid massing of mighty thanes;
A few stood guard as the Geat gave bidding
Over the weapons stacked by the wall.
They followed in haste on the heels of their leader

Under Heorot's roof. Full ready and bold
The helmeted warrior strode to the hearth; °

390 Beowulf spoke; his byrny glittered,
His war-net woven by cunning of smith:

"Hail! King Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's thane,
Hygelac's kinsman. Many a deed
Of honor and daring I've done in my youth.
This business of Grendel was brought to my ears
On my native soil. The sea-farers say
This best of buildings, this boasted hall,
Stands dark and deserted when sun is set,

earls originally men of the higher class of society; later use, in poetry, gives it the sense of "warriors"

Hrethel king of the Geats, father of Hygelac, grandfather of Beowulf
him Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father
gifts of treasure The giving of gifts to followers

and to equals was the obligation and the pleasure of Germanic chieftains, see Tacitus, *Germania*, 15.

warrior Wulfgar
strode . . . hearth rather "took up his stand inside the hall"

When darkening shadows gather with dusk.
400 The best of my people, prudent and brave,
Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
They had in remembrance my courage and might.

Many had seen me come safe from the conflict,
Bloody from battle; five foes I bound
Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.
Hard-driven in danger and darkness of night
I slew the nicors ° that swam the sea,
Avenged the woe they had caused the Weders,
And ended their evil—they needed the lesson!

410 And now with Grendel, the fearful fiend,
Single-handed I'll settle the strife!
Prince of the Danes, protector of Scyldings,
Lord of nations, and leader of men,
I beg one favor—refuse me not,
Since I come thus faring from far-off lands—
That I may alone with my loyal earls,
With this hardy company, cleanse Hart-Hall.

I have heard that the demon in proud disdain
Spurns all weapons; and I too scorn—

420 May Hygelac's heart have joy of the deed—
To bear my sword, or sheltering shield,
Or yellow buckler, to battle the fiend.

With hand-grip only I'll grapple with Grendel;
Foe against foe I'll fight to the death,
And the one who is taken must trust to God's grace!
The demon, I doubt not, is minded to feast
In the hall unaffrighted, as often before,
On the force of the Hrethmen, ° the folk of the Geats.
No need then to bury the body he mangles!

430 If death shall call me, he'll carry away
My gory flesh to his fen-retreat
To gorge at leisure and gulp me down,
Soiling the marshes with stains of blood.
There'll be little need longer to care for my body!
If the battle slays me, to Hygelac send
This best of corselets that covers my breast,
Heirloom of Hrethel, and Wayland's work, °
Finest of byrnies. Fate goes as Fate must!

Hrothgar spoke, the lord of the Scyldings:

440 'Deed of daring and dream of honor
Bring you, friend Beowulf, knowing our need!
Your father once fought the greatest of feuds,

nicors water monsters

Hrethmen Perhaps a name for the Geats; it may not be a proper name at all but a compound noun meaning "glorious warriors."
Wayland's work i.e. a mail-shirt which is both

ancient and excellent. Wayland or Weland, the cunning smith of the gods in Germanic legend, was a magician in his own right; see "Deor's Lament" below.

Or fall in the struggle slain by the foe.
 I shall either perform deeds fitting an earl
 Or meet in this mead-hall the coming of death!
 Then the woman was pleased with the words he uttered,
 610 The Geat-lord's boast; the gold-decked queen
 Went in state to sit by her lord.

[*Beowulf Slays Grendel*]

In the hall as of old were brave words spoken,
 There was noise of revel; happy the host
 Till the son of Healfdene would go to his rest.
 He knew that the monster would meet in the hall
 Relentless struggle when light of the sun
 Was dusky with gloom of the gathering night,
 And shadow-shapes crept in the covering dark,
 Dim under heaven. The host arose.

620 Hrothgar graciously greeted his guest,
 Gave rule of the wine-hall, and wished him well,
 Praised the warrior in parting words:
 'Never to any man, early or late,
 Since first I could brandish buckler and sword,
 Have I trusted this ale-hall save only to you!
 Be mindful of glory, show forth your strength,
 Keep watch against foe! No wish of your heart
 Shall go unfulfilled if you live through the fight.'

Then Hrothgar withdrew with his host of retainers,

630 The prince of the Scyldings, seeking his queen,
 The bed of his consort. The King of Glory
 Had stablished a hall-watch, a guard against Grendel,
 Dutifully serving the Danish lord,
 The land defending from loathsome fiend.

The Geatish hero put all his hope
 In his fearless might and the mercy of God!
 He stripped from his shoulders the byrny of steel,
 Doffed helmet from head; into hand of thane
 Gave inlaid^o iron, the best of blades;

640 Bade him keep well the weapons of war.
 Beowulf uttered a gallant boast,
 The stalwart Geat, ere he sought his bed:
 'I count myself nowise weaker in war
 Or grapple of battle than Grendel himself.
 Therefore I scorn to slay him with sword,
 Deal deadly wound, as I well might do!
 Nothing he knows of a noble fighting,
 Of thrusting and hewing and hacking of shield,
 Fierce as he is in the fury of war.'

inlaid "engraved," "patterned"; the reference is not necessarily to the blade, but may be to hilt or pommel

650 In the shades of darkness we'll spurn the sword
 If he dares without weapon to do or to die.
 And God in His wisdom shall glory assign,
 The ruling Lord, as He deems it right.
 Then the bold in battle bowed down to his rest,
 Cheek pressed pillow; the peerless thanes
 Were stretched in slumber around their lord.
 Not one had hope of return to his home,
 To the stronghold or land where he lived as a boy.
 For they knew how death had befallen the Danes,
 660 How many were slain as they slept in the wine-hall.
 But the wise Lord wove them fortune in war,
 Gave strong support to the Weder people;
 They slew their foe by the single strength
 Of a hero's courage. The truth is clear,
 God rules forever the race of men.

Then through the shades of enshrouding night
 The fiend came stealing; the archers slept
 Whose duty was holding the horn-decked hall—
 Though one was watching—full well they knew
 670 No evil demon could drag them down
 To shades under ground if God were not willing.^o
 But the hero watched awaiting the foe,
 Abiding in anger the issue of war.

From the stretching moors, from the misty hollows,
 Grendel came creeping, accursed of God,
 A murderous ravager minded to snare
 Spoil of heroes in high-built hall.
 Under clouded heavens he held his way
 Till there rose before him the high-roofed house,

680 Wine-hall of warriors gleaming with gold.
 Nor was it the first of his fierce assaults
 On the home of Hrothgar; but never before
 Had he found worse fate or hardier hall-thanes!
 Storming the building he burst the portal,
 Though fastened of iron, with fiendish strength;
 Forced open the entrance in savage fury
 And rushed in rage o'er the shining floor.
 A baleful glare from his eyes was gleaming
 Most like to a flame. He found in the hall

690 Many a warrior sealed in slumber,
 A host of kinsmen. His heart rejoiced;
 The savage monster was minded to sever
 Lives from bodies ere break of day,
 To feast his fill of the flesh of men.
 But he was not fated to glut his greed

God . . . willing Here it is God, not Fate, who has pre-decided the issue.

With more of mankind when the night was ended!

The hardy kinsman of Hygelac waited

To see how the monster would make his attack.

The demon delayed not, but quickly clutched

700 A sleeping thane in his swift assault,

Tore him in pieces, bit through the bones,

Gulped the blood, and gobbled the flesh,

Greedily gorged on the lifeless corpse,

The hands and the feet. Then the fiend stepped nearer,

Sprang on the Sea-Geat lying outstretched,

Clasping him close with his monstrous claw.

But Beowulf grappled and gripped him hard,

Struggled up on his elbow; the shepherd of sins

Soon found that never before had he felt

710 In any man other in all the earth

A mightier hand-grip; his mood was humbled,

His courage fled; but he found no escape!

He was fain to be gone; he would flee to the darkness,

The fellowship of devils. Far different his fate

From that which befell him in former days!

The hardy hero, Hygelac's kinsman,

Remembered the boast he had made at the banquet;

He sprang to his feet, clutched Grendel fast,

Though fingers were cracking, the fiend pulling free.

720 The earl pressed after; the monster was minded

To win his freedom and flee to the fens.

He knew that his fingers were fast in the grip

Of a savage foe. Sorry the venture,

The raid that the ravager made on the hall.

There was din in Heorot. For all the Danes,

The city-dwellers, the stalwart Scyldings,

That was a bitter spilling of beer!^o

The walls resounded, the fight was fierce,

Savage the strife as the warriors struggled.

730 The wonder was that the lofty wine-hall

Withstood the struggle, nor crashed to earth,

The house so fair; it was firmly fastened

Within and without with iron bands

Cunningly smithied; though men have said

That many a mead-bench gleaming with gold

Sprang from its sill as the warriors strove.

The Scylding wise men had never weened

That any ravage could wreck the building,

Firmly fashioned and finished with bone,

740 Or any cunning^o compass its fall,

bitter . . . beer the characteristic Old English grimly allusive poetic understatement: i.e. that was no feast, such as the hall had been built for - cunning skill

Till the time when the swelter and surge of fire
Should swallow it up in a swirl of flame.

Continuous tumult filled the hall;

A terror fell on the Danish folk

As they heard through the wall the horrible wailing,

The groans of Grendel, the foe of God

Howling his hideous hymn of pain,

The hell-thane shrieking in sore defeat.

He was fast in the grip of the man who was greatest

750 Of mortal men in the strength of his might,

Who would never rest while the wretch was living,

Counting his life-days a menace to man.

Many an earl of Beowulf brandished

His ancient iron^o to guard his lord,

To shelter safely the peerless prince.

They had no knowledge, those daring thanes,

When they drew their weapons to hack and hew,

To thrust to the heart, that the sharpest sword,

The choicest iron in all the world,

760 Could work no harm to the hideous foe.

On every sword he had laid a spell,

On every blade; but a bitter death

Was to be his fate; far was the journey

The monster made to the home of fiends.

Then he who had wrought such wrong to men,

With grim delight as he warred with God,

Soon found that his strength was feeble and failing

In the crushing hold of Hygelac's thane.

Each loathed the other while life should last!

770 There Grendel suffered a grievous hurt,

A wound in the shoulder, gaping and wide;

Sinews snapped and bone-joints broke,

And Beowulf gained the glory of battle.

Grendel, fated, fled to the fens,

To his joyless dwelling, sick unto death.

He knew in his heart that his hours were numbered,

His days at an end. For all the Danes

Their wish was fulfilled in the fall of Grendel.

The stranger from far, the stalwart and strong,

780 Had purged of evil the hall of Hrothgar,

And cleansed of crime; the heart of the hero

Joyed in the deed his daring had done.

The lord of the Geats made good to the East-Danes

The boast he had uttered; he ended their ill,

And all the sorrow they suffered long

And needs must suffer—a foul offense.

ancient iron a sword, sometimes with a name, which was of especially good quality and strength and would be handed down as a prized heirloom from generation to generation

By a narrow path the king pressed on
 Through rocky upland and rugged ravine,
 A lonely journey, past looming headlands,
 The lair of monster and lurking troll.
 Tried retainers, a trusty few,
 Advanced with Hrothgar to view the ground.
 1300 Sudden they came on a dismal covert
 Of trees that hung over hoary stone,
 Over churning water and blood-stained wave.
 Then for the Danes was the woe the deeper,
 The sorrow sharper for Scylding earls,
 When they first caught sight, on the rocky sea-cliff,
 Of slaughtered Æschere's severed head.
 The water boiled in a bloody swirling
 With seething gore as the spearmen gazed.
 The trumpet sounded a martial strain;
 1310 The shield-troop halted. Their eyes beheld
 The swimming forms of strange sea-dragons,
 Dim serpent shapes in the watery depths,
 Sea-beasts sunning on headland slopes;
 Snakelike monsters that oft at sunrise
 On evil errands scour the sea.
 Startled by tumult and trumpet's blare,
 Enraged and savage, they swam away;
 But one the lord of the Geats brought low,
 Stripped of his sea-strength, despoiled of life,
 1320 As the bitter bow-bolt pierced his heart.
 His watery-speed grew slower, and ceased,
 And he floated, caught in the clutch of death.
 Then they hauled him in with sharp-hooked boar-spears,
 By sheer strength grappled and dragged him ashore,
 A wondrous wave-beast; and all the array
 Gathered to gaze at the grisly guest.
 Beowulf donned his armor for battle,
 Heeded not danger; the hand-braided byrny,
 Broad of shoulder and richly bedecked,^o
 1330 Must stand the ordeal of the watery depths.
 Well could that corselet defend the frame
 Lest hostile thrust should pierce to the heart.
 Or blows of battle beat down the life.
 A gleaming helmet guarded his head
 As he planned his plunge to the depths of the pool
 Through the heaving waters—a helm adorned
 With lavish inlay and lordly chains,
 Ancient work of the weapon-smith
 Skillfully fashioned, beset with the boar,

richly bedecked "Strongly made" is more accurate.

1340 That no blade of battle might bite it through.
 Not the least or the worst of his war-equipment
 Was the sword^o the herald of Hrothgar^o loaned
 In his hour of need—Hrunting^o its name—
 An ancient heirloom, trusty and tried;
 Its blade was iron, with etched design,
 Tempered in blood of many a battle.
 Never in fight had it failed the hand
 That drew it daring the perils of war,
 The rush of the foe. Not the first time then
 1350 That its edge must venture on valiant deeds.
 But Ecglaf's stalwart son was unmindful
 Of words he had spoken while heated with wine,
 When he loaned the blade to a better swordsman.
 He himself dared not hazard his life
 In deeds of note in the watery depths;
 And thereby he forfeited honor and fame.
 Not so with that other undaunted spirit
 After he donned his armor for battle.
 Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow:
 1360 'O gracious ruler, gold-giver to men,
 As I now set forth to attempt this feat,
 Great son of Healfdene, hold well in mind
 The solemn pledge we plighted of old,
 That if doing your service I meet my death
 You will mark my fall with a father's love.
 Protect my kinsmen, my trusty comrades,
 If battle take me. And all the treasure
 You have heaped on me bestow upon Hygelac,
 Hrothgar beloved! The lord of the Geats,
 1370 The son of Hrethel, shall see the proof,
 Shall know as he gazes on jewels and gold,
 That I found an unsparing dispenser of bounty,
 And joyed, while I lived, in his generous gifts.
 Give back to Unferth the ancient blade,
 The sword-edge splendid with curving scrolls,
 For either with Hrunting I'll reap rich harvest
 Of glorious deeds, or death shall take me.'
 ¶ After these words the prince of the Weders
 Awaited no answer, but turned to the task,
 1380 Straightway plunged in the swirling pool.
 Nigh unto a day he endured the depths
 Ere he first had view of the vast sea-bottom.
 Soon she found, who had haunted the flood,
 A ravening hag, for a hundred half-years,

sword The text calls it "gleaming with venom twigs," which may mean that the blade had a serpentine pattern.

herald of Hrothgar Unferth Hrunting perhaps meaning Thruster

Greedy and grim, that a man was groping
 In daring search through the sea-troll's home.
 Swift she grappled and grasped the warrior
 With horrid grip, but could work no harm,
 No hurt to his body; the ring-locked byrny
 1390 Cloaked his life from her clutching claw;
 Nor could she tear through the tempered mail
 With her savage fingers. The she-wolf bore
 The ring-prince down through the watery depths
 To her den at the bottom; nor could Beowulf draw
 His blade for battle, though brave his mood.
 Many a sea-beast, strange sea-monsters,
 Tasked him hard^o with their menacing tusks,
 Broke his byrny and smote him sore.
 1400 Then he found himself in a fearsome hall
 Where water came not to work him hurt,
 But the flood was stayed by the sheltering roof.
 There in the glow of firelight gleaming
 The hero had view of the huge sea-troll.
 He swung his war-sword with all his strength,
 Withheld not the blow, and the savage blade
 Sang on her head its hymn of hate.
 But the bold one found that the battle-flasher
 Would bite no longer, nor harm her life.
 The sword-edge failed at his sorest need.
 1410 Often of old with ease it had suffered
 The clash of battle, cleaving the helm,
 The fated warrior's woven mail.
 That time was first for the treasured blade
 That its glory failed in the press of the fray.
 But fixed of purpose and firm of mood
 Hygelac's earl was mindful of honor;
 In wrath, undaunted, he dashed to earth
 The jewelled sword with its scrolled design,
 The blade of steel; staked all on strength,
 1420 On the might of his hand, as a man must do
 Who thinks to win in the welter of battle
 Enduring glory; he fears not death.
 The Geat-prince joyed in the straining struggle,
 Stalwart-hearted and stirred to wrath,
 Gripped the shoulder of Grendel's dam
 And headlong hurled the hag to the ground.
 But she quickly clutched him and drew him close,
 Countered the onset with savage claw.
 1430 The warrior staggered, for all his strength,
 Dismayed and shaken and borne to earth.

Tasked him hard i.e. tore at him

She knelt upon him and drew her dagger,
 With broad bright blade, to avenge her son,
 Her only issue. But the corselet's steel
 Shielded his breast and sheltered his life
 Withstanding entrance of point and edge.

Then the prince of the Geats would have gone his journey,
 The son of Ecgtheow, under the ground;
 But his sturdy breast-net, his battle-corselet,
 Gave him succor, and holy God,
 1440 The Lord all-wise, awarded the mastery;
 Heaven's Ruler gave right decree.

Swift the hero sprang to his feet;
 Saw 'mid the war-gear a stately sword,
 An ancient war-brand of biting edge,
 Choicest of weapons worthy and strong,
 The work of giants,^o a warrior's joy,
 So heavy no hand but his own could hold it,
 Bear to battle or wield in war.
 Then the Scylding warrior, savage and grim,
 1450 Seized the ring-hilt and swung the sword,
 Struck with fury, despairing of life,
 Thrust at the throat, broke through the bone-rings;
 The stout blade stabbed through her fated flesh.
 She sank in death; the sword was bloody;
 The hero joyed in the work of his hand.
 The gleaming radiance shimmered and shone
 As the candle of heaven shines clear from the sky.
 Wrathful and resolute Hygelac's thane
 Surveyed the span of the spacious hall;
 1460 Grimly gripping the hilted sword
 With upraised weapon he turned to the wall.
 The blade had failed not the battle-prince;
 A full requital he firmly planned
 For all the injury Grendel had done
 In numberless raids on the Danish race,
 When he slew the hearth-companions of Hrothgar,
 Devoured fifteen of the Danish folk
 Clasped in slumber, and carried away
 As many more spearmen, a hideous spoil.
 1470 All this the stout-heart had stern requited;
 And there before him bereft of life
 He saw the broken body of Grendel
 Stilled in battle, and stretched in death,
 As the struggle in Heorot smote him down.
 The corpse sprang wide as he struck the blow,
 The hard sword-stroke that severed the head.

Then the tried retainers, who there with Hrothgar

Watched the face of the foaming pool,
 Saw that the churning reaches were reddened,
 1480 The eddying surges stained with blood.
 And the gray, old spearmen spoke of the hero,
 Having no hope he would ever return
 Crowned with triumph and cheered with spoil.
 Many were sure that the savage sea-wolf
 Had slain their leader. At last came noon.
 The stalwart Scyldings forsook the headland;
 Their proud gold-giver departed home.
 But the Geats sat grieving and sick in spirit,
 Stared at the water with longing eyes,
 1490 Having no hope they would ever behold
 Their gracious leader and lord again.
 Then the great sword, eaten with blood of battle,
 Began to soften and waste away
 In iron icicles, wonder of wonders,
 Melting away most like to ice
 When the Father looses the fetters of frost,
 Slackens the bondage that binds the wave,
 Strong in power of times and seasons;
 He is true God! Of the goodly treasures
 1500 From the sea-cave Beowulf took but two,
 The monster's head and the precious hilt
 Blazing with gems; but the blade had melted,
 The sword dissolved, in the deadly heat,
 The venomous blood of the fallen fiend.

[*Beowulf Returns to Heorot*]

Then he who had compassed the fall of his foes
 Came swimming up through the swirling surge.
 Cleansed were the currents, the boundless abyss,
 Where the evil monster had died the death
 And looked her last on this fleeting world.
 1510 With sturdy strokes the lord of the seamen
 To land came swimming, rejoiced in his spoil,
 Had joy of the burden he brought from the depths.
 And his mighty thanes came forward to meet him,
 Gave thanks to God they were granted to see
 Their well-loved leader both sound and safe.
 From the stalwart hero his helmet and byrny
 Were quickly loosened; the lake lay still,
 Its motionless reaches reddened with blood.
 Fain of heart men fared o'er the footpaths,
 1520 Measured the ways and the well-known roads.
 From the sea-cliff's brim the warriors bore
 The head of Grendel, with heavy toil;
 Four of the stoutest, with all their strength,

Could hardly carry on swaying spear
 Grendel's head to the gold-decked hall.
 Swift they strode, the daring and dauntless,
 Fourteen Geats, to the Hall of the Hart;
 And proud in the midst of his marching men
 Their leader measured the path to the mead-hall.
 1530 The hero entered, the hardy in battle,
 The great in glory, to greet the king;
 And Grendel's head by the hair was carried
 Across the floor where the feasters drank—
 A terrible sight for lord and for lady—
 A gruesome vision whereon men gazed!
 Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow:
 'O son of Healfdene, lord of the Scyldings!
 This sea-spoil wondrous, whereon you stare,
 We joyously bring you in token of triumph!
 1540 Barely with life surviving the battle,
 The war under water, I wrought the deed
 Weary and spent; and death had been swift
 Had God not granted His sheltering strength.
 My strong-edged Hrunting, stoutest of blades,
 Aailed me nothing. But God revealed—
 Often His arm has aided the friendless—
 The fairest of weapons hanging on wall,
 An ancient broadsword; I seized the blade,
 Slew in the struggle, as fortune aailed,
 1550 The cavern-warders. But the war-brand old,
 The battle-blade with its scrolled design,
 Dissolved in the gush of the venomous gore;
 The hilt alone I brought from the battle.
 The record of ruin, and slaughter of Danes,
 These wrongs I avenged, as was fitting and right.
 Now I can promise you, prince of the Scyldings,
 Henceforth in Heorot rest without rue
 For you and your nobles; nor need you dread
 Slaughter of follower, stalwart or stripling,^o
 1560 Or death of earl, as of old you did.'
 Into the hand of the aged leader,
 The gray-haired hero, he gave the hilt,
 The work of giants, the wonder of gold.
 At the death of the demons the Danish lord
 Took in his keeping the cunning craft,
 The wondrous marvel, of mighty smiths;
 When the world was freed of the ravaging fiend,
 The foe of God, and his fearful dam

stalwart or stripling i.e. member of the *duguth*,
 the tried and seasoned warriors; or the *geogoth*,
 the young retainers

1570 Marked with murder and badged^o with blood,
 The bound hilt passed to the best of kings
 Who ever held sceptre beside two seas,
 And dealt out treasure in Danish land!
 Hrothgar spoke, beholding the hilt,
 The ancient relic whereon was etched
 An olden record of struggle and strife,
 The flood that ravaged the giant race,^o
 The rushing deluge of ruin and death.
 That evil kindred were alien to God,
 But the Ruler avenged with the wrath of the deep!
 1580 On the hilt-guards, likewise, of gleaming gold
 Was rightly carven in cunning runes,
 Set forth and blazoned, for whom that blade,
 With spiral tooling and twisted hilt,
 That fairest of swords, was fashioned and smithied.
 Then out spoke Hrothgar, Healfdene's son,
 And all the retainers were silent and still:
 'Well may he say, whose judgment is just,
 Recalling to memory men of the past,
 That this earl was born of a better stock!
 1590 Your fame, friend Beowulf, is blazoned abroad
 Over all wide ways, and to every people.
 In manful fashion have you showed your strength,
 Your might and wisdom. My word I will keep,
 The plighted friendship we formerly pledged.
 Long shall you stand as a stay to your people,
 A help to heroes, as Heremod^o was not
 To the Honor-Scyldings, to Ecgwela's^o sons!
 Not joy to kindred, but carnage and death,
 He wrought as he ruled o'er the race of the Danes.
 1600 In savage anger he slew his comrades,
 His table-companions, till, lawless and lone,
 An odious outcast, he fled from men.
 Though God had graced him with gifts of strength,
 Over all men exalting him, still in his breast
 A bloodthirsty spirit was rooted and strong.
 He dealt not rings to the Danes for glory;
 His lot was eternal torment of woe,
 And lasting affliction. Learn from his fate!
 Strive for virtue! I speak for your good;
 1610 In the wisdom of age I have told the tale.
 'Tis a wondrous marvel how mighty God^o

badged marked, distinguished by
 The flood . . . race Noah's flood, which over-
 whelmed the wicked race of giants
 Heremod see above, ll. 841 ff. His name means
 "Warlike disposition." King of the Danes before
 Scyld, he seems to have given promise of being
 a splendid king, but he turned out to be cruel,
 avaricious, and oppressive.

Ecgwela's a Danish king, otherwise unknown:
 his name means "Sword-wealth"
 'Tis . . . God Hrothgar seizes the occasion to
 moralize the encounter—cf. the earlier Heremod
 digression above—in terms of spiritual attack
 and defense, the transitoriness of human life
 and happiness.

In gracious spirit bestows on men
 The gift of wisdom, and goodly lands,
 And princely power! He rules over all!
 He suffers a man of lordly line
 To set his heart on his own desires,
 Awards him fullness of worldly joy,
 A fair home-land, and the sway of cities,
 The wide dominion of many a realm,
 1620 An ample kingdom, till, cursed with folly,
 The thoughts of his heart take no heed of his end.
 He lives in luxury, knowing not want,
 Knowing no shadow of sickness or age;
 No haunting sorrow darkens his spirit,
 No hatred or discord deepens to war;
 The world is sweet, to his every desire,
 And evil assails not—until in his heart
 Pride overpowering gathers and grows!
 The warder slumbers, the guard of his spirit;
 1630 Too sound is that sleep, too sluggish the weight
 Of worldly affairs, too pressing the Foe,
 The Archer who looses the arrows of sin.
 Then is his heart pierced, under his helm,
 His soul in his bosom, with bitter dart.
 He has no defense for the fierce assaults
 Of the loathsome Fiend. What he long has cherished
 Seems all too little! In anger and greed
 He gives no guerdon of plated rings.
 Since God has granted him glory and wealth
 1640 He forgets the future, unmindful of Fate.
 But it comes to pass in the day appointed
 His feeble body withers and fails;
 Death descends, and another seizes
 His hoarded riches and rashly spends
 The princely treasure, imprudent of heart.
 Beloved Beowulf, best of warriors,
 Avoid such evil and seek the good,
 The heavenly wisdom. Beware of pride!
 Now for a time you shall feel the fullness
 1650 And know the glory of strength, but soon
 Sickness or sword shall strip you of might,
 Or clutch of fire, or clasp of flood,
 Or flight of arrow, or bite of blade,
 Or relentless age; or the light of the eye
 Shall darken and dim, and death on a sudden,
 O lordly ruler, shall lay you low.
 A hundred half-years I've been head of the Ring-Danes,
 Defending the folk against many a tribe
 With spear-point and sword in the surges of battle
 1660 Till not one was hostile 'neath heaven's expanse.

But a loathsome change swept over the land,
 Grief after gladness, when Grendel came,
 That evil invader, that ancient foe!
 Great sorrow of soul from his malice I suffered;
 But thanks be to God who has spared me to see
 His bloody head at the battle's end!
 Join now in the banquet; have joy of the feast,
 O mighty in battle! And the morrow shall bring
 Exchange of treasure in ample store.'

1670 Happy of heart the Geat leader hastened,
 Took seat at the board as the good king bade.
 Once more, as of old, brave heroes made merry
 And tumult of revelry rose in the hall.

Then dark over men the night shadows deepened;
 The host all arose, for Hrothgar was minded,
 The gray, old Scylding, to go to his rest.
 On Beowulf too, after labor of battle,
 Came limitless longing and craving for sleep.
 A hall-thane graciously guided the hero,
 1680 Weary and worn, to the place prepared,
 Serving his wishes and every want
 As befitted a mariner come from afar.
 The stout-hearted warrior sank to his rest;
 The lofty building, splendid and spacious,
 Towered above him. His sleep was sound
 Till the black-coated raven, blithesome of spirit,
 Hailed the coming of Heaven's bliss.°

[*The Parting of Beowulf and Hrothgar*]

Then over the shadows uprose the sun.
 The Geats were in haste, and eager of heart
 1690 To depart to their people. Beowulf longed
 To embark in his boat, to set sail for his home.
 The hero tendered the good sword Hrunting
 To the son of Ecglaf,° bidding him bear
 The lovely blade; gave thanks for the loan,
 Called it a faithful friend in the fray,
 Bitter in battle. The greathearted hero
 Spoke no word in blame of the blade!
 Arrayed in war-gear, and ready for sea,
 The warriors bestirred them; and, dear to the Danes,
 1700 Beowulf sought the high seat of the king.
 The gallant in war gave greeting to Hrothgar;
 Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow:
 'It is time at last to tell of our longing!
 Our homes are far, and our hearts are fain
 To seek again Hygelac over the sea.

Heaven's bliss i.e. the sun

son of Ecglaf Unferth

You have welcomed us royally, harbored us well
 As a man could wish; if I ever can win
 Your affection more fully, O leader of heroes,
 Swift shall you find me to serve you again!
 1710 If ever I learn, o'er the levels of ocean,
 That neighboring nations beset you sore,
 As in former days when foemen oppressed,
 With thanes by the thousand I will hasten to help.
 For I know that Hygelac, lord of the Geats,
 Prince of the people, though young in years,
 Will favor and further by word and deed
 That my arm may aid you, and do you honor,
 With stout ash-spear and succor of strength
 In the press of need. And if princely Hrethric°
 1720 Shall purpose to come to the court of the Geats,
 He will find there a legion of loyal friends.
 That man fares best to a foreign country
 Who himself is stalwart and stout of heart.'

Hrothgar addressed him, uttered his answer:

'Truly, these words has the Lord of wisdom
 Set in your heart, for I never have harkened
 To speech so sage from a man so young.
 You have strength, and prudence, and wisdom of word!
 I count it true if it come to pass
 1730 That point of spear in the press of battle,
 Or deadly sickness, or stroke of sword,
 Shall slay your leader, the son of Hrethel,
 The prince of your people, and you still live,
 The Sea-Geats could have no happier choice
 If you would be willing to rule the realm,
 As king to hold guard o'er the hoard and the heroes.
 The longer I know you, the better I like you,°
 Beloved Beowulf! You have brought it to pass
 That between our peoples a lasting peace
 1740 Shall bind the Geats to the Danish-born;
 And strife shall vanish, and war shall cease,
 And former feuds, while I rule this realm.
 And many a man, in the sharing of treasure,
 Shall greet another with goodly gifts
 O'er the gannet's° bath. And the ring-stemmed ship
 Shall bear over ocean bountiful riches
 In pledge of friendship. Our peoples, I know,
 Shall be firm united toward foe and friend,
 Faultless in all things, in fashion of old.'

1750 Then the son of Healfdene, shelter of earls,
 Bestowed twelve gifts on the hero in hall,

Hrethric eldest son of Hrothgar
 The longer . . . you lit. "The temper of your

heart pleases me more the more I see of it . . ."
 gannet's sea-bird's

To fight for pay; in the press of battle
 I was always before him alone in the van.
 So shall I bear me while life-days last,
 While the sword holds out that has served me well
 Early and late since I slew Dæghrefn,^o
 2360 The Frankish hero, before the host.
 He brought no spoil from the field of battle,
 No corselet of mail to the Frisian king.
 Not by the sword the warden of standards,
 The stalwart warrior, fell in the fight.
 My battle-grip shattered the bones of his body
 And silenced the heart-beat. But now with the sword,
 With hand and hard blade, I must fight for the treasure.'

[*Beowulf and Wiglaf Slay the Dragon*]

For the last time Beowulf uttered his boast:

2370 'I came in safety through many a conflict
 In the days of my youth; and now even yet,
 Old as I am, I will fight this feud,
 Do manful deeds, if the dire destroyer
 Will come from his cavern to meet my sword.'
 The king for the last time greeted his comrades,
 Bold helmet-bearers and faithful friends:
 'I would bear no sword nor weapon to battle
 With the evil worm, if I knew how else
 I could close with the fiend, as I grappled with Grendel.
 From the worm I look for a welling of fire,
 2380 A belching of venom, and therefore I bear
 Shield and byrny. Not one foot's space
 Will I flee from the monster, the ward of the mound.
 It shall fare with us both in the fight at the wall
 As Fate shall allot, the lord of mankind.
 Though bold in spirit, I make no boast
 As I go to fight with the flying serpent.
 Clad in your corselets and trappings of war,
 By the side of the barrow abide you to see
 Which of us twain may best after battle
 2390 Survive his wounds. Not yours the adventure,
 Nor the mission of any, save mine alone,
 To measure his strength with the monstrous dragon
 And play the part of a valiant earl.
 By deeds of daring I'll gain the gold
 Or death in battle shall break your lord.'

Then the stalwart rose with his shield upon him,
 Bold under helmet, bearing his sark
 Under the stone-cliff; he trusted the strength

Dæghrefn a Frankish (Huga) warrior, standard bearer, and perhaps slayer of Hygelac on his last expedition; killed by Beowulf at that time

2400 Of his single might. Not so does a coward!
 He who survived through many a struggle,
 Many a combat and crashing of troops,
 Saw where a stone-arch stood by the wall
 And a gushing stream broke out from the barrow.
 Hot with fire was the flow of its surge,
 Nor could any abide near the hoard unburned,
 Nor endure its depths, for the flame of the dragon.
 Then the lord of the Geats in the grip of his fury
 Gave shout of defiance; the strong-heart stormed.
 His voice rang out with the rage of battle,
 2410 Resounding under the hoary stone.
 Hate was aroused; the hoard-warden knew
 'Twas the voice of a man. No more was there time
 To sue for peace; the breath of the serpent,
 A blast of venom, burst from the rock.
 The ground resounded; the lord of the Geats
 Under the barrow swung up his shield
 To face the dragon; the coiling foe
 Was gathered to strike in the deadly strife.
 The stalwart hero had drawn his sword,
 2420 His ancient heirloom of tempered edge;
 In the heart of each was fear of the other!
 The shelter of kinsmen stood stout of heart
 Under towering shield as the great worm coiled;
 Clad in his war-gear he waited the rush.
 In twisting folds the flame-breathing dragon
 Sped to its fate. The shield of the prince
 For a lesser while guarded his life and his body
 Than heart had hoped. For the first time then
 It was not his portion to prosper in war;
 2430 Fate did not grant him glory in battle!
 Then lifted his arm the lord of the Geats
 And smote the worm with his ancient sword
 But the brown^o edge failed as it fell on bone,
 And cut less deep than the king had need
 In his sore distress. Savage in mood
 The ward of the barrow countered the blow
 With a blast of fire; wide sprang the flame.
 The ruler of Geats had no reason to boast;
 His unsheathed iron, his excellent sword,
 Had weakened as it should not, had failed in the fight.
 It was no easy journey for Ecgtheow's son
 To leave this world and against his will
 Find elsewhere a dwelling! So every man shall
 In the end give over this fleeting life.
 Not long was the lull. Swiftly the battlers

brown lit. "bright," "shining"

Renewed their grapple. The guard of the hoard
Grew fiercer in fury. His venomous breath
Beat in his breast. Enveloped in flame
The folk-leader suffered a sore distress.

2450 No succoring band of shoulder-companions,
No sons of warriors aided him then
By valor in battle. They fled to the forest
To save their lives; but a sorrowful spirit
Welled in the breast of one of the band.

The call of kinship can never be stilled
In the heart of a man who is trusty and true.

His name was Wiglaf, ° Weohstan's ° son,
A prince of the Scylfings, a peerless thane,
Ælfhere's ° kinsman; he saw his king
2460 Under his helmet smitten with heat.
He thought of the gifts which his lord had given,
The wealth and the land of the Wægmunding line
And all the folk-rights his father had owned;
Nor could he hold back, but snatched up his buckler,
His linden shield and his ancient sword,
Heirloom of Eanmund, Ohthere's son,
Whom Weohstan slew with the sword in battle,
Wretched and friendless and far from home.

2470 The brown-hued ° helmet he bore to his kinsmen,
The ancient blade and the byrny of rings.
These Onela ° gave him—his nephew's arms—
Nor called for vengeance, nor fought the feud,
Though Weohstan had slaughtered his brother's son. °
He ° held the treasures for many half-years,
The byrny and sword, till his son was of age
For manful deeds, as his father before him.

Among the Geats he gave him of war-gear
Countless numbers of every kind;
Then, full of winters, he left the world,
2480 Gave over this life. And Wiglaf, the lad,

Wiglaf The passage seems at first contradictory about the origins of Wiglaf in that he is said to be both Swede (Scylfing) and Geat (the Wægmundings were the Geat family to which Beowulf belonged). But the poet may mean that the young Wiglaf is of Swedish royal blood and now under the protection of Beowulf, as one of his household. This system of putting children, sometimes as young as seven years old, to be brought up in another family was common among Germanic peoples.

Weohstan's Wiglaf's father, a Swede, may also have changed his allegiance and become a vassal of Beowulf's. Previously, he had taken part in Swedish King Onela's attack on Heardred, king of the Geats, and himself killed Eanmund, whom Heardred was protecting, receiving Eanmund's sword and armor as the spoils of war. Wiglaf had inherited Eanmund's sword from

his father and was now using it against the dragon.

Ælfhere not otherwise known
brown-hued lit. "shining bright"

Onela All the spoils of war belonged by right to the lord, who apportioned them among his followers.

Nor called . . . brother's son The remark has nothing to do with *wergild*: in the heroic age the normal thing would have been for Eanmund's killing to be avenged in blood by his uncle Onela, but Eanmund, having fought against his uncle, has forfeited this family right and Onela is, on the contrary, grateful to Weohstan for killing his kinsman, so that he rewards Weohstan instead of demanding retribution from him.

he Weohstan

Was to face with his lord the first of his battles,
The hazard of war. But his heart did not fail
Nor the blade of his kinsman weaken in war,
As the worm soon found when they met in the fight!

Wiglaf spoke in sorrow of soul,
With bitter reproach rebuking his comrades: °
I remember the time, as we drank in the mead-hall,
When we swore to our lord who bestowed these rings
That we would repay for the war-gear and armor,
2490 The hard swords and helmets, if need like this
Should ever befall him. He chose us out
From all the host for this high adventure,
Deemed us worthy of glorious deeds,
Gave me these treasures, regarded us all
As high-hearted bearers of helmet and spear—
Though our lord himself, the shield of his people,
Thought single-handed to finish this feat,
Since of mortal men his measure was most
Of feats of daring and deeds of fame.
2500 Now is the day that our lord has need
Of the strength and courage of stalwart men.
Let us haste to succor his sore distress
In the horrible heat and the merciless flame.
God knows I had rather the fire should enfold
My body and limbs with my gold-friend and lord.
Shameful it seems that we carry our shields
Back to our homes ere we harry the foe
And ward the life of the Weder king.
Full well I know it is not his due

2510 That he alone, of the host of the Geats,
Should suffer affliction and fall in the fight.
One helmet and sword, one byrny and shield,
Shall serve for us both in the storm of strife.
Then Wiglaf dashed through the deadly reek
In his battle-helmet to help his lord.
Brief were his words: 'Beloved Beowulf,
Summon your strength, remember the vow
You made of old in the years of youth
Not to allow your glory to lessen
2520 As long as you lived. With resolute heart,
And dauntless daring, defend your life
With all your force. I fight at your side!'

Once again the worm, when the words were spoken,
The hideous foe in a horror of flame,
Rushed in rage at the hated men.
Wiglaf's buckler was burned to the boss

In the billows of fire; his byrny of mail
 Gave the young hero no help or defense.
 But he stoutly pressed on under shield of his kinsman
 2530 When his own was consumed in the scorching flame.

Then the king once more was mindful of glory,
 Swung his great sword-blade with all his might
 And drove it home on the dragon's head.
 But Nægling^o broke, it failed in the battle,
 The blade of Beowulf, ancient and gray.

It was not his lot that edges of iron
 Could help him in battle; his hand was too strong,
 Overtaxed, I am told, every blade with its blow.
 Though he bore a wondrous hard weapon to war,
 2540 No whit the better was he thereby!

A third time then the terrible scather,
 The monstrous dragon inflamed with the feud,
 Rushed on the king when the opening offered,
 Fierce and flaming; fastened its fangs
 In Beowulf's throat; he was bloodied with gore;
 His life-blood streamed from the welling wound.

As they tell the tale, in the king's sore need
 His shoulder-companion showed forth his valor,
 His craft^o and courage, and native strength.
 2550 To the head of the dragon he paid no heed,
 Though his hand was burned as he helped his king.

A little lower the stalwart struck
 At the evil beast, and his blade drove home
 Plated^o and gleaming. The fire began
 To lessen and wane. The king of the Weders
 Summoned his wits; he drew the dagger
 He wore on his corselet, cutting and keen,
 And slit asunder the worm with the blow.

So they felled the foe and wrought their revenge;
 2560 The kinsmen together had killed the dragon.
 So a man should be when the need is bitter!
 That was the last fight Beowulf fought;
 That was the end of his work in the world.

[*Beowulf's Death*]

The wound which the dragon had dealt him began
 To swell and burn; and soon he could feel
 The baneful venom inflaming his breast.
 The wise, old warrior sank down by the wall
 And stared at the work of the giants of old,^o
 The arches of stone and the standing columns
 2570 Upholding the ancient earth-hall within.

Nægling Beowulf's sword
 craft skill in battle
 plated or ornamented

work . . . old ancient buildings, usually taken
 to be Roman ruins

His loyal thane, the kindest of comrades,
 Saw Beowulf bloody and broken in war;
 In his hands bore water and bathed his leader,
 And loosened the helm from his dear lord's head.

Beowulf spoke, though his hurt was sore,
 The wounds of battle grievous and grim.
 Full well he weened that his life was ended,
 And all the joy of his years on earth;
 That his days were done, and Death most near:
 2580 'My armor and sword I would leave to my son
 Had Fate but granted, born of my body,
 An heir to follow me after I'm gone.
 For fifty winters I've ruled this realm,
 And never a lord of a neighboring land
 Dared strike with terror or seek with sword.
 In my life I abode by the lot assigned,
 Kept well what was mine, courted no quarrels,
 Swore no false oaths. And now for all this
 Though my hurt is grievous, my heart is glad.
 2590 When life leaves body, the Lord of mankind
 Cannot lay to my charge the killing of kinsmen!
 Go quickly, dear Wiglaf, to gaze on the gold
 Beneath the hoar stone. The dragon lies still
 In the slumber of death, despoiled of his hoard.
 Make haste that my eyes may behold the treasure,
 The gleaming jewels, the goodly store,
 And, glad of the gold, more peacefully leave
 The life and the realm I have ruled so long.'

Then Weohstan's son, as they tell the tale,
 2600 Clad in his corselet and trappings of war,
 Harkened at once to his wounded lord.
 Under roof of the barrow he broke his way.
 Proud in triumph he stood by the seat,
 Saw glittering jewels and gold on the ground,
 The den of the dragon, the old dawn-flief,
 And all the wonders along the walls.
 Great bowls and flagons of bygone men
 Lay all unburnished and barren of gems,
 Many a helmet ancient and rusted,
 Many an arm-ring cunningly wrought.
 Treasure and gold, though hid in the ground,
 Override man's wishes, hide them who will!
 High o'er the hoard he beheld a banner,^o
 2610 Greatest of wonders, woven^o with skill,
 All wrought of gold; its radiance lighted
 The vasty ground and the glittering gems.

banner The word may mean a standard, not a flag.
 woven "Worked" is more accurate.

On the dreadful dragon guarding the gold;
 To let him lie where he long had lurked
 In his secret lair till the world shall end.
 But Beowulf, dauntless, pressed to his doom.
 The hoard was uncovered; heavy the cost;
 Too strong the fate that constrained the king!
 I entered the barrow, beholding the hoard
 And all the treasure throughout the hall;
 In fearful fashion the way was opened,
 2890 An entrance under the wall of earth.
 Of the hoarded treasure I heaped in my arms
 A weighty burden, and bore to my king.
 He yet was living; his wits were clear.
 Much the old man said in his sorrow;
 Sent you greeting, and bade you build
 In the place of burning a lofty barrow,
 Proud and peerless, to mark his deeds;
 For he was of all men the worthiest warrior
 In all the earth, while he still might rule
 2900 And wield the wealth of his lordly land.
 Let us haste once more to behold the treasure,
 The gleaming wonders beneath the wall.
 I will show the way that you all may see
 And closely scan the rings and the gold.
 Let the bier be ready, the pyre prepared,
 When we come again to carry our lord,
 Our leader beloved, where long he shall lie
 In the kindly care of the Lord of all.'

[*Beowulf's Funeral*]

Then the son of Weohstan, stalwart in war,
 2910 Bade send command to the heads of homes
 To bring from afar the wood for the burning
 Where the good king lay: 'Now gleed° shall devour,
 As dark flame waxes, the warrior prince
 Who has often withstood the shower of steel
 When the storm of arrows, sped from the string,
 Broke over shield, and shaft did service,
 With feather-fittings guiding the barb.'

Then the wise son of Weohstan chose from the host
 Seven thanes of the king, the best of the band;
 2920 Eight heroes together they hied to the barrow
 In under the roof of the fearful foe;
 One of the warriors leading the way
 Bore in his hand a burning brand.
 They cast no lots who should loot the treasure

gleed fire

When they saw unguarded the gold in the hall
 Lying there useless; little they scrupled
 As quickly they plundered the precious store,
 Over the sea-cliff into the ocean
 They tumbled the dragon, the deadly worm,
 2930 Let the sea-tide swallow the guarder of gold.
 Then a wagon was loaded with well-wrought treasure,
 A countless number of every kind;
 And the aged warrior, the white-haired king,
 Was borne on high to the Cape of the Whale.
 [The Geat folk fashioned a peerless pyre
 Hung round with helmets and battle-boards,^o
 With gleaming byrnies as Beowulf bade.
 In sorrow of soul they laid on the pyre
 Their mighty leader, their well-loved lord.
 2940 The warriors kindled the bale° on the barrow,
 Wakened the greatest of funeral fires.
 Dark o'er the blaze the wood-smoke mounted;
 The winds were still, and the sound of weeping
 Rose with the roar of the surging flame
 Till the heat of the fire had broken the body.
 With hearts that were heavy they chanted their sorrow,
 Singing a dirge for the death of their lord;
 And an aged woman with upbound locks
 Lamented for Beowulf, wailing in woe.^o
 Over and over she uttered her dread
 Of sorrow to come, of bloodshed and slaughter,
 Terror of battle, and bondage, and shame.
 The smoke of the bale-fire rose to sky!
 The men of the Weder folk fashioned a mound
 Broad and high on the brow of the cliff,
 Seen from afar by seafaring men.
 Ten days they worked on the warrior's barrow
 Inclosing the ash of the funeral flame
 With a wall as worthy as wisdom could shape.
 They bore to the barrow the rings and the gems,
 The wealth of the hoard the heroes had plundered.
 The olden treasure they gave to the earth,
 The gold to the ground, where it still remains
 As useless to men as it was of yore.
 Then round the mound rode the brave in battle,^o
 The sons of warriors, twelve in a band,
 Bemoaning their sorrow and mourning their king.

battle-boards i.e. shields
 bale pyre, bonfire
 And . . . woe (ll. 2948-49) The manuscript
 is damaged at this point, but the word "Geatish"
 has been deciphered as describing the woman.

Some take this to mean that Beowulf had
 married Hygelac's widow, Hygd.
 round . . . battle See the account in the sixth-
 century Gothic historian Jordanes of the funeral
 of Attila the Hun; and Virgil's *Aeneid* XI.182-
 212.

They sang their dirge and spoke of the hero
Vaunting his valor and venturous deeds.

2970 So is it proper a man should praise
His friendly lord with a loving heart,
When his soul must forth from the fleeting flesh.
So the folk of the Geats, the friends of his hearth,
Bemoaned the fall of their mighty lord;
Said he was kindest of worldly kings,
Mildest, most gentle, most eager for fame.

8th century

1815

Deor's Lament

This poem and "The Wanderer," which follows it here, are preserved in the Exeter Book, a manuscript collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry transcribed at the end of the tenth century and given to the chapter of Exeter Cathedral, in Devon, by its Archbishop, Leofric, in the middle of the eleventh. The book is still kept in the chapter library at Exeter. None of the poems in it has a title: the titles by which the poems are now known have all been supplied by modern editors.

Nothing is known of the bard who names himself *Deor* (Brave or Excellent) in line 35. We do not know, either, when he wrote his poem. It cannot (by reason of the references to Theodoric the Ostrogoth) be earlier than the sixth century in origin; it may belong to the eighth; and there is evidence that it existed in King Alfred's time (reigned 871-99). Perhaps the most likely date is the late ninth century.

The mood of "Deor's Lament" is elegiac, and its genre that of the *consolatio*, the topics of which go back at least as far as Homer. The Roman poets use them often—Horace, for example:

Dead too is the sire of Pelops, the guest of the gods
And Tithonus, carried off into air,
And Minos, party to Jove's secrets. Now Tartarus
Keeps Panthous' son . . .

All these great men had to die: their greatness could not save them from the greatest misfortune of all. We who remain must take what consolation we can from the realization that our lot is common to all. What must happen must happen. We can hope for better in this life than its misfortunes, but the ways of the gods are inscrutable.

When Christian writers took over the topics of the *consolatio*, they could add a dimension: God's ways were mysterious, but there was the promise of eternal life, vindication, and happiness for the good man. But though "Deor's Lament" is a poem written by a Christian, it can hardly be called a Christian poem: hope is for the passing of sorrow in this world, not in the world to come. The quality of that hope can be read as stoical resignation toward, or as heroic defiance of, the lot of Deor. The refrain which drives home the moral and separates the single *exempla* of misfortune one from another can be read in either sense. In the conventional consolatory mode, the poem proceeds by these *exempla* of misfortune, its structure a set of such units, its movement punctuated by the refrain. In this it is unusual, almost unique in Anglo-

Saxon poetry: only one other poem, and that a late one, uses a stanza division, and only one other any kind of refrain.

Though the poet is using a genre that was popular in the Latin poetry of the early Middle Ages, his *exempla* are all drawn from Germanic legend. His characters would be well known to his audience. Weland, Beadohild, and Mæthhild are entirely mythological; Theodoric and Eormanric were historical characters around whom legend grew. But though all but Mæthhild are familiar figures, no coherent or convincing explanation of their presence together in the poem has yet been offered.

The translations of this poem and the three that follow ("The Wanderer," *The Battle of Maldon*, and *The Dream of the Rood*) are those of C. W. Kennedy, published in his *An Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 1960. The lines have been numbered here merely as a guide.

Deor's° Lament

Weland° knew fully° affliction and woe,
Hero unflinching enduring distress;
Had for companionship heart-break and longing,
Wintry exile and anguish of soul,
When Nithhad bound him, the better man,
Grimly constrained him with sinewy bonds.°

That evil ended.° So also may this!

Nor was brother's death to Beadohild
A sorrow as deep as her own sad plight,
When she knew the weight of the child in her womb,
But little could know what her lot might be.

That evil ended.° So also may this!

Many have heard of the rape of Hild,°
Of her father's affection and infinite love,
Whose nights were sleepless with sorrow and grief.

That evil ended. So also may this!

Deor's This poet is mentioned nowhere else and nothing is known of him beyond the poem's implication that he was an exile; the name is probably a persona adopted by the poet. Weland or Wayland or Welund, whose name means "maker" or "workman," the smith of Germanic legend, a supernatural being corresponding to the Vulcan of classical mythology. He had been captured by Nithhad, set to work, and hamstrung to prevent his escape. But he managed to escape, after all, killing the two sons of Nithhad and raping his daughter Beadohild. Weland is shown on the whalebone reliefs of the Franks Casket (Northumbria, c. 700) in the British Museum (Fig. 22).
fully a fill-in for two words in the Old English for which no one has yet suggested a suitable translation

sinewy bonds bonds imposed by cutting the sinews
That . . . ended Weland got away (by flying, in one form of the story).
That . . . ended (l. 12) As a result of the rape, Beadohild bore the hero Widia; the poet considers that to be the mother of a hero is sufficient compensation for her.
Hild Beadohild. This translation takes this and the obscure next two lines to be a restatement of Beadohild's plight as it affected her father. The reference may rather be to an unidentified Hild or Mæthhild and an unidentified Geat, her lover, so that affection . . . love should be rendered "passion," and sorrow and grief as "bitter love."