

The Beowulf
Manuscript

Complete Texts and
The Fight at Finnsburg



Edited and Translated by

R. D. FULK

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Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum,
þeod-cyninga þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
5 monegum mægþum meodo-setla ofteah,
egsode eorlas, syððan ærest wearð
fea-sceaft funden. He þæs frofre gebad:
weox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þah,
oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb-sittendra
10 ofer hron-rade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan. Þæt wæs god cyning.
Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned
geong in geardum, þone God sende
folce to frofre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat—
15 þæt hie ær drugon aldorlease
lange hwile. Him þæs Lif-Frea,
wuldres wealdend worold-are forgeaf:
Beow wæs breme —blæd wide sprang—
Scyldes eafera Scede-landum in.
20 Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean,
fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wil-gesipas, þonne wig cume,
leode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal
25 in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.

Yes, we have heard of the greatness of the Spear-Danes' high
kings in days long past, how those nobles practiced bravery.

Often Scyld, son of Scef, expelled opponents' hosts, many 4
peoples, from mead-seats, made men fear him, after he was
first discovered destitute. He lived to see remedy for that:
grew up under the heavens, prospered in marks of distinc-
tion, until every neighbor across the whale-road had to an-
swer to him, pay tribute. That was a good king. A son was 11
born in succession to him, a young one among manors,
whom God sent as a comfort to his people; he had perceived
their dire need, what they had suffered, lordless, for a great
while. For that the Lord of life, wielder of glory, granted
them that worldly favor: Beow was renowned—his fame
sprang wide—the heir of Scyld, in Scania. So ought a young 20
man to ensure by his liberality, by ready largess, while in his
father's care, that close companions will in turn stand by
him in his later years, his men be true when war comes; from
praiseworthy deeds comes success in every nation.

Him ða Scyld gewat to gescæp-hwile
 fela-hror feran on Frean wære.
 Hi hyne þa ætbæron to brimes faroðe,
 swæse gesiþas, swa he selfa bæd
 30 þenden wordum weold. Wine Scyldinga,
 leof land-fruma lange ahte—
 þær æt hyðe stod, hringed-stefna
 isig ond ut-fus— æþelinges fær;
 aledon þa leofne þeoden,
 35 beaga bryttan on bearm scipes,
 mærne be mæste. Þær wæs madma fela
 of feor-wegum frætwa gelæded.
 Ne hyrde ic cymlicor ceol gegyrwan
 hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,
 40 billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg
 madma mænigo, þa him mid scoldon
 on flodes æht feor gewitan.
 Nalæs hi hine læssan lacum teodan,
 þeod-gestreonum, þonne þa dydon
 45 þe hine æt frum-sceaft forð onsendon
 ænne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.
 Ða gyt hie him asetton segen gylðenne
 heah ofer heafod, leton holm beran,
 geafon on garsecg; him wæs geomor sefa,
 50 murnende mod. Men ne cunnon
 secgan to soðe, sele-rædende,
 hæleð under heofenum, hwa þæm hlæste onfeng.
 I
 Ða wæs on burgum Beow Scyldinga,
 leof leod-cyning longe þrage
 55 folcum gefræge — fæder ellor hwearf,

Then at the appointed time Scyld, very elderly, set out to 26
 pass into the keeping of the Lord. They bore him then to
 the ocean's shore, his close confederates, as he himself had
 requested while he had command of words. The friend of 30
 the Scyldings, beloved leader of that race, had long owned—
 it stood there in the harbor, a ring-prowed one, icy and set
 to depart—a prince's vessel; then they laid their well-loved
 lord, disburser of rings, in the ship's bosom, the renowned
 man by the mast. A trove of treasures and trappings was
 brought there from far ways. I have never heard of a ferry
 more finely decked with war-weapons and battle-garments,
 blades and chain-mail; in his lap lay a mass of riches, which
 were to go far with him into the possession of the flood.
 They equipped him with offerings, treasures of the commu- 43
 nity by no means humbler than the ones they had provided
 who sent him forth at the start, alone over the wave in his
 infancy. And now they raised high over his head a golden
 standard, let the sea take him, gave him over to the deep;
 their spirits were brooding, their mood full of mourning.
 No one can say for a fact, counselors in halls, heroes under
 heaven, who received that cargo.

Then among the strongholds Beow of the Scyldings, be- 53
 loved king of that folk, was celebrated by peoples for long
 years—his father had passed elsewhere, that elder from the

aldor of earde— oþ þæt him eft onwoc
 heah Healfdene; heold þenden lifde
 gamol ond guð-reouw glæde Scyldingas.
 Ðæm feower bearn forð-gerimed
 60 in worold wocun, weoroda ræswan,
 Heorogar ond Hroðgar ond Halga til;
 hyrde ic þæt [.] wæs Onelan cwen,
 Heaðo-Scilfingas heals-gebedda.
 Ða wæs Hroðgare here-sped gyfen,
 65 wiges weorð-mynd, þæt him his wine-magas
 georne hyrdon, oðð þæt seo geogoð geweox,
 mago-driht micel. Him on mod bearn
 þæt heal-reced hatan wolde,
 medo-ærn micel men gewyrcean
 70 þonne ylðo bearn æfre gefrunon,
 ond þær on innan eall gedælan
 geongum ond ealdum swylc him God sealde,
 buton folc-scare ond feorum gumena.
 Ða ic wide gefrægn weorc gebannan
 75 manigre mægþe geond þisne middan-geard,
 folc-stede frætwan. Him on fyrste gelomp,
 ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wearð eal gearo,
 heal-ærna mæst; scop him Heort naman
 se þe his wordes geweald wide hæfde.
 80 He beot ne aleh: beagas dælde,
 sinc æt symle. Sele hlifade
 heah ond horn-geap; heaðo-wylma bad,
 laðan liges— ne wæs hit lenge þa gen
 þæt se ecg-hete apum-sweoran
 85 æfter wæl-niðe wæcnan scolde.
 Ða se ellen-gæst earfoðlice

earth—until to him in turn high Healfdene awoke; he held
 sway as long as he lived, old and battle-fierce, over the gra-
 cious Scyldings. To him four children in sum awoke in the
 world, to that leader of armies, Heorogar and Hrothgar and
 Halga the good; I have heard that [. . . .] was Onela's queen,
 cherished bedfellow of the War-Scylfing.

Then to Hrothgar was given war-success, distinction in 64
 battle, so that his friends and kinsmen were willingly ruled
 by him, until the cadre of new recruits grew to a large force
 of young men. It became fixed in his mind that he would
 direct men to construct a hall-structure, a mead-mansion
 larger than the offspring of the ancients had ever heard of,
 and there inside he would hand over to young and old all
 such as God had granted him, aside from the state itself and
 human lives. Then, I have heard, the work was imposed far 74
 and wide on many a folk throughout this middle-earth, the
 public place furnished. By and by it came to pass for them,
 not long among humankind, that it was all finished, the
 greatest of hall-houses; he whose word had wide authority
 crafted for it the name Heorot. He did not neglect his prom-
 ise: he distributed rings, a fortune at feast. The hall towered,
 tall and wide-gabled; it awaited battle-surges, dreaded flame;
 it was sooner yet that the blade-hostility should be roused
 for father- and son-in-law after deadly violence.

Then the powerful demon endured the time with effort, 86

þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,
 þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
 hludne in healle. Ðær wæs hearpan sweg,
 90 swutol sang scopes. Sægde se þe cuþe
 frum-scaft fira feorran reccan,
 cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,
 wlite-beorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð,
 gesette sige-hreþig sunnan ond monan,
 95 leoman to leohte land-buendum,
 ond gefrætwaðe foldan sceatas
 leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop
 cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.
 Swa ða driht-guman dreamum lifdon,
 100 eadiglice, oð ðæt an ongan
 fyrene fremman feond on helle;
 wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten,
 mære mearc-stapa, se þe moras heold,
 fen ond fæsten; fifel-cynnes eard
 105 won-sæli wer weardode hwile,
 siþðan him scyppen forscifen hæfde
 in Caines cynne— þone cwealm gewræc
 ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog;
 ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, ac he hine feor forwræc,
 110 Metod for þy mane man-cynne fram.
 Ðanon untydras ealle onwocon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orc-neas,
 swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon
 lange þrage; he him ðæs lean forgeald.
 II
 115 Gewat ða neosian, syþðan niht becom,
 hean huses, hu hit Hring-Dene

he who waited in the shadows, that every day he heard noisy
 pleasures in the hall. There was the music of the harp, the
 clear song of the performer. He who could reckon the ori-
 gins of mortals from distant times said that the Almighty
 created the earth, a resplendent world, as far as contained
 by water—positioned, triumphant, sun and moon, lamps as
 illumination to landsmen, and embellished the surface of
 the earth with branches and leaves, likewise generated life
 in all the species that actively move about. Thus the troop- 99
 men lived agreeably, at ease, until a certain one began to per-
 petrate crimes, a hellish foe; the unyielding demon was
 named Grendel, a well-known wanderer in the wastes, who
 ruled the heath, fen, and fastnesses; the ill-starred man had
 occupied for some time the habitat of monstrosities, after
 the Creator had cursed him among the race of Cain—the
 eternal Lord was avenging the murder after he killed Abel;
 he derived no satisfaction from that feud, but Providence
 banished him far away from humankind on account of that
 crime. Thence awoke all deformed races, ogres and elves and 111
 lumbering brutes, likewise giants, who struggled against
 God for a long while; he gave them their deserts for that.

He set out then after night fell to examine the tall build- 11
 ing, how the Ring-Danes had settled in after the drinking 115

æfter beorþege gebun hæfdon.
 Fand þa ðær inne æþelunga gedriht
 swefan æfter symble; sorge ne cuðon,
 120 won-sceaft wera. Wiht unhælo,
 grim ond grædig, gearo sona wæs,
 reoc ond reþe, ond on ræste genam
 þritig þegna; þanon eft gewat
 huðe hremig to ham faran,
 125 mid þære wæl-fylle wica neosan.
 Ða wæs on uhtan mid ær-dæge
 Grendles guð-cræft gumum undyrne;
 þa wæs æfter wiste wop up ahafen,
 micel morgen-sweg. Mære þeoden,
 130 æþeling ær-god, unbliðe sæt,
 þolode ðryð-swyð, þegn-sorge dreah,
 syðþan hie þæs laðan last sceawedon,
 wergan gastes; wæs þæt gewin to strang,
 lað ond longsum. Næs hit lengra fyrst,
 135 ac ymb ane niht eft gefremede
 morð-beala mare, ond no mearn fore,
 fæhðe ond fyrene; wæs to fæst on þam.
 Ða wæs eað-fynde þe him elles hwær
 gerumlicor ræste sohte,
 140 bed æfter burum, ða him gebeacnod wæs,
 gesægd soðlice sweotolan tacne
 heal-ðegnes hete; heold hyne syðþan
 fyr ond fæstor se þæm feonde ætwand.
 Swa rixode ond wið rihte wan,
 145 ana wið eallum, oð þæt idel stod
 husa selest. Wæs seo hwil micel:
 twelf wintra tid torn gepolode

rounds. He found therein a band of nobles sleeping after the
 feast; they knew no cares, no human misfortune. The crea- 120
 ture of malignity, unyielding and rapacious, was ready at
 once, fierce and savage, and seized where they lay thirty men
 of the court; from there he set out again, exulting in the
 spoils, to go home, to visit his territory with his fill of the
 slaughtered. Then in the early hours before dawn Grendel's
 warfare was revealed to all; then after feasting, wailing was
 lifted up, a loud morning-song. The renowned lord, a prince 129
 good since old times, sat distraught; the mighty one suf-
 fered, endured misery over his men, after they observed the
 track of the despised one, the accursed demon; that afflic-
 tion was too strong, repellent and enduring. There was little
 delay, but after a single night he committed more murders,
 feuding and crimes, and showed no remorse; he was too in-
 tent on it. Then there was no dearth of those who found
 themselves sleeping-quarters elsewhere, farther away, a bed
 among the private chambers, when the hall-thane's malice
 was demonstrated to them, truly expressed by clear signs;
 whoever escaped the fiend lodged themselves farther away
 and more securely after that. Thus he reigned and made war 144
 on justice, alone against all, until the finest of buildings
 stood idle. The period was long; for the space of twelve win-