

***Beowulf* 1321-96**

Translation policy:

I have translated the lines 1321-96 from *Beowulf* in modern English by using free verse. I have tried to maintain the original meaning; yet, for the sake of fluency and the form I have chosen, I have added words where I have thought it necessary. I have ignored the restrictions of modern English grammar as well as the constraints of the Old English version. I have also divided the passage in question into eleven alternating stanzas, which hopefully reflect the development of the poem. I have italicised lines 1321 and 1383 to mark the change of the speakers, and each line begins with a capital letter, which reflects the seriousness of the exchange between Hrothgar and Beowulf.

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Beowulf 1321-96

The protector of Scyldings, Hrothgar spoke:

“Do not ask about joy!
Sorrow is renewed to the Danish people.
Aeshere is dead, the elder brother of Yrmenlaf
Is gone, my private counsellor, my adviser,
And my close comrade,
When we in the battle defended our heads,
When the bands on foot clashed,
When the bear figures stroke.
Such should an earl be, as was Aeshere:
A nobleman of proven excellence!

II

He was slain in Heorot by the hand
Of a deadly wandering creature. I do not know
Whether the terrible one glorying in the carrion and glad
About her feast has gone away.

III

She has avenged the hostile deed
By which you last night killed Grendel in
A violent manner with a hard grip, because
Too long he had injured and diminished my people.
He fell at battle having forfeited his life, and now
The other strong and evil ravening beast has come.
She wanted to avenge her kinsman and has gone far enough
In avenging the hostile deed;
So it may seem to many thanes whose hearts
Weep at hard distress for the giver of treasures.
That hand, which granted your every desire
Now lies still.

IV

I have heard my people, the dwellers of this land, say
That they have seen two of such mighty prowlers of the borderland
Occupy the marshlands. The other was
- As much as they could be certain – of the likeness of the woman.
The other - a wretched creature – trod on a path of an exile
In the form of man, except that he was larger than any other man.
The folk in the olden days named him Grendel.
They do not know of his father, whether any such
Mysterious being had been born
Before him.

V

They inhabit a secret land:
Wolf-inhabited slopes, windy headlands, and

Perilous fen paths, where the mountain stream goes
Downward underneath the headland – far beneath the earth.
It is not that far from here - measured in miles –
Where the mere stands.
Groves covered with frost overhang it, and
Firmly rooted trees overshadow the water.
Each night a fearful wonder can be seen there:
Fire over water.

VI

Not one of the children of men alive knows where the bottom is.
Though the heath-stalker, the strong-antlered stag,
When harassed by hounds, pursued from far off,
Will seek the wood, it rather gives its life on the bank
Than it will plunge its head.¹
It is not a pleasant place!

VII

From there the dark surging waves rise up to the clouds,
When the wind blows grievous storms,
Until the air becomes gloomy and
The skies weep.

VIII

Now the help depends again on you alone.
You do not yet know the region, the perilous
Place where you might seek the creature of many sins;
Seek it if you dare!

IX

I will reward you for that feud with ancient treasure
And with coiled gold as I did before
– If you came back alive.”

X

Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow:

“ Do not grieve wise man.
It is better for each man to avenge
His friend than to mourn greatly.
Each of us shall experience the end of his worldly life.
Let him, who may, achieve glory before death.²
After death that is best for a retainer.
Arise, the guardian of the kingdom,
Let us go quickly to find the trail
Of the kinswoman of Grendel.

¹ Here I am indebted to Kevin Crossley-Holland’s translation. Kevin Crossley-Holland (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 108.

² George Jack (ed.), *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 112, note to lines 1387b-8a.

XI

I promise you this:

She shall not escape to safety –

Not in the bosom of the earth, nor in the mountain wood,

Nor in the bottom of the sea - wherever she goes.

Thus, have patience today in every misery –

As I expect of you.”