
Beowulf — opening lines (1–11)

R. M. Liuzza

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Peterborough: Broadview, 2000.

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
þeod-cyninga þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodo-setla ofteah 5
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feasceaft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah
oðþæt him æghwylc ymsittendra
ofer hron-rade hyran scolde, 10
gomban gyldan. Þæt wæs god cyning.

Seamus Heaney

Beowulf: A Verse Translation. New York: Norton, 2002.

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.
There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes. 5
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him 10
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Liuzza's literal word-for-word translation (The italicized words are implied by the inflectional endings in original Old English.)

What! We *of the* Spear-Danes in days-of-yore
of the people-kings glory heard,
how the noblemen valor did.
Often Scyld son-of-Sceaf *from* enemies' troops
from many tribes mead-benches took away 5
terrified nobles. After first he was
destitute found, he for-that comfort awaited,
grew under *the* skies, *in* honors prospered
until *to* him each *of the* surrounding ones
over *the* whale-riding obey had to, 10
tribute yield. That was *a* good king.

John McNamara

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005.

Hail! We have heard tales sung of the Spear-Danes,
the glory of their war-kings in days gone by,
how princely nobles performed heroes' deeds!
Oft Scyld Scefing captured the mead halls
from many peoples, from troops of enemies, 5
terrifying their chieftains. Though he was first
a poor foundling, he lived to find comfort;
under heavens he flourished, with honors fulfilled—
till each neighboring nation, those over the whale-road,
bowed under his rule, paid the price of tribute. 10
That was a good king!
