

Beowulf sails to Denmark (194–224)

E. Talbot Donaldson

Beowulf: A New Prose Translation. W. W. Norton, 1966.
(pages 6–7)

A thane of Hygelac, a good man among the Geats, heard in his homeland of Grendel's deeds: of mankind he was the strongest of might in the time of this life, noble and great. He bade that a good ship be made ready for him, said he would seek the war-king over the swan's road, the famous prince, since he had need of men. Very little did wise men blame him for that adventure, though he was dear to them; they urged the brave one on, examined the omens. From the folk of the Geats the good man had chosen warriors of the bravest that he could find; one of fifteen he led the way, the warrior sought the wooden ship, the sea-skilled one the land's edge. The time had come: the ship was on the waves, the boat under the cliff. The warriors eagerly climbed on the prow — the sea currents eddied, sea against sand: men bore bright weapons into the ship's bosom, splendid armor. Men pushed the well-braced ship from shore, warriors on a well-wished voyage. Then o'er the sea waves, blown by the wind, the foam-necked traveled, most like a bird, until at good time on the second day the curved prow had come to where the seafarers could see land, the sea-cliffs shine, towering hills, great headlands. Then was the sea crossed, the journey at end.

Seamus Heaney

Beowulf: A Verse Translation. W. W. Norton, 2002.
(194–224)

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane
was on home ground, over in Geatland. 195
There was no one else like him alive.
In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,
high-born and powerful. He order a boat
that would ply the waves. He announced his plan:
to sail the swan's road and search out that king, 200
the famous prince who needed defenders.
Nobody tried to keep him from going,
no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.
Instead, they inspected omens and spurred 205
his ambition to go, whilst he moved about
like the leader he was, enlisting men,
the best he could find; with fourteen others
the warrior boarded the boat as captain,
a canny pilot along coast and currents.
Time went by, the boat was on water, 210
in close under the cliffs.
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,
sand churned in surf, warriors loaded
a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear
in the vessel's hold, then heaved out, 215
away with a will in their wood-weathered ship.
Over the waves, with the wind behind her
and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird
until her curved prow had covered the distance
and on the following day, at the due hour, 220
those seafarers sighted land,
sunlit cliffs, sheer crags
and looming headlands, the landfall they sought.
It was the end of their voyage

Beowulf sails to Denmark (194–224)

John McNamara

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Barnes & Noble, 2005.
(194–224)

In his own homeland, the thane of Hygelac,
the valiant Geat, heard the tales told of Grendel. 195
This Geat was among men the greatest in strength,
most noble and mighty, for as long as his life-days
were destined to last. He directed a wave-traveler
to be well prepared, and said he would seek
the Danish war-king, that renowned ruler, 200
over the swan-road, since the Dane was in need.
The wise men of the Geats could find no fault
with that journey, though their hero to them was dear:
they inspected the omens and urged on the brave one.
This excellent chieftain had chosen as comrades 205
the best and the bravest from among the Geats
that he might find. With these fourteen
he sought the sea-planks, a skillful sailor,
leading the way down to the end of the land.
The time was ready, with the ship on the waves, 210
the boat beneath cliffs. Well-equipped young warriors
stepped up on the prow. Sea-currents wound round,
sea against sand. Then the warriors bore
into the ship's bosom the shining war-gear,
their splendid arms. The men shoved off 215
the well-bound vessel, for the much-sought voyage.
The foamy-necked boat, most like a bird,
soared over the waves, made eager by wind—
until in due time, the following day,
the tightly-wound prow had traveled so far 220
that the seafarers now sighted the land:
shining shore-cliffs, the towering banks,
the broad headlands. The boat crossed the waters,
to the end of the sea.

Edward L. Ridsen

Beowulf: A Verse Translation for Students. Kindle ed. Witan, 2012.
(194–224)

Thus from home heard Hygelac's thane,
good man of the Geats, of Grendel's deeds; 195
he was of mankind the greatest in might
in those days of this life,
noble and mighty. He ordered prepared
a wave-traveler; he said he would seek
over the swan-road the warrior-king, 200
the great lord, who needed men.
With that adventure wise men
found little fault, though he was dear to them,
they urged on the valiant one, examined the omens. 205
From the people of the Geats the good man
chose champions, the best of those
he could find— they were fifteen in all—
and sought the sea-wood. The warrior led them,
the sea-skilled man, to the land-boundary.
A time passed; a floater was on the waves, 210
a craft under the cliffs. Ready soldiers
climbed into the prow; currents eddied,
swimming along the shore. The warriors carried
into the bosom of the ship bright weapons
and noble battle-armor. The men shoved off 215
on a longed-for adventure in the well-braced ship,
embarked over the wave-way urged by the wind,
the foamy-necked floater most like a bird,
till after a dure time the next day
the curve-prowed ship had advanced 220
so that the seafarers saw land,
the sea-cliffs gleam, the steep shores,
the wide sea-headlands. Then was ocean traversed,
the voyage at an end.

Beowulf sails to Denmark (194–224)

Alan Sullivan and Timothy Murphy
Beowulf. Pearson, 2004.
(168–192)

A thane of Hygelac heard in his homeland
of Grendel's deeds. Great among Geats,
this man was more mighty than any then living. 170
He summoned and stocked a swift wave-courser,
and swore to sail over the swan-road
as one warrior should for another in need.
His elders could find no fault with his offer,
and awed by the omens, they urged him on. 175
He gathered the bravest of Geatish guardsmen.
One of fifteen, the skilled sailor
strode to his ship at the ocean's edge.

He was keen to embark: his keel was beached
under the cliff where sea-currents curled 180
surf against sand; his soldiers were ready.
Over the bow they boarded in armor,
bearing their burnished weapons below,
their gilded war-gear to the boat's bosom.
Other men shoved the ship from the shore, 185
and off went the band, their wood-braced vessel
bound for the venture with wind on the waves
and foam under bow, like a fulmar in flight.

On the second day their upswept prow
slid into sight of steep hillsides, 190
bright cliffs, wide capes at the close of their crossing,
the goal of their voyage gained in good time.

J. R. R. Tolkien
Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary. Houghton Mifflin, 2014.
(pages 18–19)

Of this, of Grendel's deeds, the knight of Hygelac, esteemed among the
Geats, heard in his home afar; in that day of man's life here in might
the strongest of mankind was he, noble and of stature beyond man's
measure. He bade men prepare for him a good craft upon the waves,
saying that over the waters where the swan rides he would seek the
warrior-king, that prince of renown, since he had need of men. With
that voyage little fault did wise men find, dear though he were to
them; they encouraged his valiant heart, and they observed the omens.

Champions of the people of the Geats that good man had chosen
from the boldest that he could find, and fifteen in all they sought now
their timbered ship, while that warrior, skilled in the ways of the sea,
led them to the margins of the land. Time passed on. Afloat upon the
waves was the boat beneath the cliffs. Eagerly the warriors mounted
the prow, and the streaming seas swirled upon the sand. Men-at-arms
bore to the bottom of the ship their bright harness, their cunning gear
of war; they then, men on a glad voyage, thrust her forth with
well-jointed timbers. Over the waves of the deep she went sped by the
wind, sailing with foam at throat most like unto a bird, until in due
hour upon the second day her curving beak had made such way that
those sailors saw the land, the cliffs beside the ocean gleaming, and
sheer headlands and capes thrust far to sea. Then for that sailing ship
the journey was at an end.

Beowulf fights Grendel (790–818)

E. Talbot Donaldson

Beowulf: A New Prose Translation. W. W. Norton, 1966.

(page 15)

Not for anything would the protector of warriors let the murderous guest go off alive: he did not consider his life-days of use to any of the nations. There more than enough of Beowulf's earls drew swords, old heirlooms, wished to protect the life of their dear lord, famous prince, however they might. They did not know when they entered the fight, hardy-spirited warriors, and when they thought to hew him on every side, to seek his soul, that not any of the best of irons on earth, no war-sword, would touch the evil-doer: for with a charm he had made victory-weapons useless, every sword-edge. His departure to death from the time of this life was to be wretched; and the alien spirit was to travel far off into the power of fiends. Then he who before had brought trouble of heart to mankind, committed many crimes — he was at war with God — found that his body would do him no good, for the great-hearted kinsman of Hygelac had him by the hand. Each was hateful to the other alive. The awful monster had lived to feel pain in his body, a huge wound in his shoulder was exposed, his sinews sprang apart, his bone-locks broke.

Seamus Heaney

Beowulf: A Verse Translation. W. W. Norton, 2002.

(790–818)

But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined 790
to allow his caller to depart alive:
he did not consider that life of much account
to anyone anywhere. Time and again,
Beowulf warrior's worked to defend
their lord's life, laying about them 795
as best they could with their ancestral blades.
Stalwart in action, they kept striking out
on every side, seeking to cut
straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle
there was something they could not have known at the time, 800
that no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art
could ever damage their demon opponent.
He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge
of every weapon. But his going away
out of this world and the days of his life 805
would be agony to him, and his alien spirit
would travel far into fiends' keeping.
Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men
with pain and affliction in former times
and had given offence to God 810
found that his bodily powers failed him.
Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly
locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived,
he was hateful to the other. The monster's whole
body was in pain, a tremendous wound 815
appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split
and the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted
the glory of winning.

Beowulf fights Grendel (790–818)

John McNamara

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Barnes & Noble, 2005.
(791–819)

This protector of warriors did not at all wish
to let loose the death-bringer while still alive,
nor did he count Grendel's life-days of value
to anyone at all. There many a man of Beowulf's band
eagerly brandished their ancient sword-blades,
795 wishing to protect the life of their lord,
the widely famed chief, any way they could.
While engaged in the fray, these brave-minded warriors
sought to strike at the foe from every side,
but could not figure how to hew Grendel down,
800 how to seek out his soul: nor might any war-sword,
not the strongest of irons in all of the earth,
even touch to do harm to that evil destroyer—
for Grendel wove spells round all human weapons,
on all swords of victory. Yet severed from life,
805 he was fated to feel misery at the end of his days,
his time on the earth, and the alien terror must now
embark on a far journey into the power of fiends.
Then that one found out, who so often before
810 had wrought wicked evils, terrified the spirits
of the race of men—he waged war against God—
that this time his fearsome strength would fail him,
for his high-spirited foe, the kinsman of Hygelac,
held him fast by the hand. Each hated the other,
while they both lived. The dreaded demon
815 suffered terrible torture, as his shoulder tore open,
a great wound gaping as sinews sprang apart,
and the bone-locks burst. To Beowulf then
was glory given in battle.

Edward L. Ridsen

Beowulf: A Verse Translation for Students. Kindle ed. Witan, 2012.
(788–809)

He held him fast,
he who of them was the strongest in might
in those days of this life. 790
Nor would the protector of men by any means
leave alive the murderous-visitor,
nor did any of the men consider useful
his life-days. There most often
805 Beowulf's men drew old swords;
they wished to defend their lord's life,
the fame of the leader as best they could.
They did not know, when they drew into the fray,
stern-minded sword-soldiers,
800 and on every side thought to hew,
to seek the life of the evil-enemy,
that throughout the earth none of the best of swords,
none of the battle-blades would touch him,
but victory-weapons he had made useless by magic,
805 any sword. It had to be that his death
in those days of this life
be miserable and the alien-spirit
in the power of fiends to travel far.
Then he discovered, he who before many
810 crimes committed against the race of men
to spirits' sorrow— he fought against god—
815 that his body would not serve,
but the mighty one, kinsman of Hygelac,
had him in his hands; each to the other was,
living, loathsome. The horrible monster
805 suffered a body-wound: in his shoulder was
manifest a sin-payment; sinews sprung out,
joints burst. To Beowulf was given
glory in battle.

Beowulf fights Grendel (790–818)

Alan Sullivan and Timothy Murphy
Beowulf. Pearson, 2004.
(lines 705–727)

That shielder of men meant by no means 705
to let the death-dealer leave with his life,
a life worthless to anyone elsewhere.
Then the young soldiers swung their old swords
again and again to save their guardian,
their kingly comrade, however they could. 710
Engaging with Grendel and hoping to hew him
from every side, they scarcely suspected
that blades wielded by worthy warriors
never would cut to the criminal's quick.
The spell was spun so strongly about him 715
that the finest iron of any on earth,
the sharpest sword-edge left him unscathed.
Still he was soon to be stripped of his life
and sent on a sore sojourn to Hell.
The strength of his sinews would serve him no more; 720
no more would he menace mankind with his crimes,
his grudge against God, for the high-hearted kinsman
of King Hygelac had hold of his hand.
Each found the other loathsome in life;
but the murderous man-bane got a great wound 725
as tendons were torn, shoulder shorn open,
and bone-locks broken.

J. R. R. Tolkien

Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary. Houghton Mifflin, 2014.
(pages 35–36)

In no wise would that captain of men permit that deadly guest to go
forth alive, nor did he account the days of his life of use to any man.
There many a knight of Beowulf drew swift his ancient blade,
wishing to defend the life of his lord and master renowned prince, if
so he might. They know it not, young warriors brave-hearted, as
they fought their fight, and on each side sought to hew the foe and
pierce his vitals: that doer of evil none upon the earth of swords of
war would touch, no the most excellent things of iron; not so, for he
had laid a spell upon all victorious arms and upon every blade. On
that day of this life on earth unhappy was fated to be the sending
forth of his soul, and far was that alien spirit to fare into the realm
of fiends. Now did he perceive who aforetime had wrought the race
of men many a grief of heart and wrong — he had a feud with God
— that his body's might would not avail him, but the valiant
kinsman of Hygelac had him by the arm — hateful to each was the
other's life. A grievous hurt of body that fierce slayer and dire now
endured; a might wound was seen upon his shoulder; the sinews
sprang apart, he joint of his bones burst.

Beowulf fights Grendel's mother (1537–69)

E. Talbot Donaldson

Beowulf: A New Prose Translation. W. W. Norton, 1966.
(page 15)

Then he seized by the hair Grendel's mother—the man of the War-Geats did not shrink from the fight. Battle-hardened, now swollen with rage, he pulled his deadly foe so that she fell to the floor. Quickly in her turn she repaid him his gift with her grim claws and clutched at him: then weary-hearted, the strongest of warriors, of foot-soldiers, stumbled so that he fell. Then she sat upon the hall-guest and drew her knife, broad and bright-edged. She would avenge her child, her only son. The woven breast-armor lay on his shoulder: that protected his life, withstood entry of point or or edge. Then the son of Ecgtheow would have fared amiss under the wide ground, the champion of the Geats, if the battle-shirt had not brought help, the hard war-net — and holy God brought about victory in war; the wise Lord, Ruler of the Heavens, decided it with right, easily, when Beowulf had stood up again.

Then he saw among the armor a victory-blessed blade, an old sword made by the giants, strong of its edges, glory of warriors: it was the best of weapons, except that it was larger than any other man might bear to war-sport, good and adorned, the work of giants. He seized the linked hilt, he who fought for the Scyldings, savage and slaughter-bent, drew the patterned blade; desperate of life, he struck angrily so that it bit her hard on the neck, broke the bone-rings. The blade went through all the doomed body. She fell to the floor, the sword was sweating, the man rejoiced in his work.

Seamus Heaney

Beowulf: A Verse Translation. W. W. Norton, 2002.
(1537–69)

Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight
with Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder
and laid about him in a battle frenzy:
he pitched his killer opponent to the floor 1540
but she rose quickly and retaliated,
grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.
The sure-footed fighter felt daunted,
the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.
So she pounced upon him and pulled out 1545
a broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge
her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail
on Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,
turned the edge and tip of the blade.
The son of Ecgtheow would have surely perished 1550
and the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth
had the strong links and locks of his war-gear
not helped to save him: holy God
decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,
the Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance 1555
once Beowulf got back up on his feet.

Then he saw a blade that boded well,
a sword in her armory, and ancient heirloom
from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,
one that any warrior would envy, 1560
but so huge and heavy of itself
only Beowulf could wield it in battle.
So the Shieldings' hero, hard-pressed and enraged,
took a firm hold of the hilt and swung
the blade in an arc, a resolute blow 1565
that bit deep into her neck-bone
and severed it entirely, toppling the doomed
house of her flesh; she fell to the floor.
The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was elated.

Beowulf fights Grendel's mother (1537–69)

John McNamara

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Barnes & Noble, 2005.
(1537–69)

Not flinching from the feud, the prince of the War-Geats
grasped hold of the shoulder of the mother of Grendel,
and bulging with rage, fighting hard in the battle,
he swung her around till she fell on the floor. 1540
Right away after that she repaid his tactic
and crushed him against her in brutal embrace.
She wrestled to throw her spirit-weary foe,
the strongest of warriors, till he slipped and fell down.
She sat on her hall-guest and drew out her dagger, 1545
broad and bright-edged, hoping to avenge her son,
her only offspring. Across his shoulders lay
the woven mail-shirt watching over his life,
guarding against both knife-point and blade.
Then the son of Ecgtheow, stout hero of the Geats, 1550
would have journeyed to death, under wide earth,
except that the battle-shirt, the mail made for war,
provided protection—and the holy God
decreed which was the victor. For the wise lord,
the Ruler of Heaven, decided according to right, 1555
so the hero of the Geats easily got to his feet.
Then he saw among war-gear a victory-blessed sword,
an old blade made by giants with edges strong and sharp,
the glory of warriors. That was the greatest of weapons,
though its size was so large that no other man 1560
might bear it out to the play of battle—
it was huge and heroic, the work of giants.
The champion for the Danes, in a dreadful fury,
despairing of life, seized the hilt of the sword,
swung its great blade and angrily struck 1565
so that it dug deep in the neck of the monster,
breaking the bone-rings, slicing all the way through
her body doomed by fate, and she fell dead on the floor.
The sword sweat blood, while the warrior rejoiced.

Edward L. Ridsen

Beowulf: A Verse Translation for Students. Kindle ed. Witan, 2012.
(1537–69)

The man of the war-Geats then seized by the shoulder
Grendel's mother— he did not mourn for that feud.
The strong one flung into the fight the mortal foe
when he was enraged, so that she fell on the hall-floor. 1540
She quickly after paid him requital
with fierce grips and seized him against her.
The strongest of men then stumbled disheartened
so that he fell, foot-warrior.
She then sat on her hall-guest and drew her knife. 1545
broad and bright-edged; she wished to avenge her son,
her only progeny. On his shoulder lay
the woven breast-net: that saved his life—
it withstood entry against point and edge.
Then Ecgtheow's son had perished 1550
under the earth, champion of the Geats,
but the battle-byrnie provided help,
hard war-net, and holy god
brought him battle-victory— the wise lord,
ruler of the heavens, decided it rightly, 1555
quite easily, once he again stood up.
He saw then among the armor a victory-blessed blade,
an old monstrous sword with firm edges,
honor-memorial of men; that was the best of weapons,
though it was larger than any other man 1560
could carry into battle-play,
good and noble, the work of giants.
He grasped the ring-hilt, adventurer of the Scyldings,
fierce and battle-grim, drew the ring-decorated one,
despairing of life, and angrily struck 1565
so that it grievously gripped against her neck.
Bone-rings broke; the blade passed entirely through
the death-fated flesh-home. She crashed on the floor.
The sword was bloody; the soldier rejoiced in the deed.

Beowulf fights Grendel's mother (1537-69)

Alan Sullivan and Timothy Murphy
Beowulf. Pearson, 2004.
(1356-84)

Grabbing the tresses of Grendel's mother,
the Geats' battle-chief, bursting with wrath,
wrestled her down: no deed to regret
but a favor repaid as fast as she fell.
With her grim grasp she grappled him still. 1360
Weary, the warrior stumbled and slipped;
the strongest foot-soldier fell to the foe.
Astraddle the hall-guest, she drew her dagger,
broad and bright-bladed, bent on avenging
her only offspring. His mail-shirt shielded 1365
shoulder and breast. Barring the entry
of edge or point, the woven war-shirt
saved him from harm. Ecgtheow's son,
the leader of Geats, would have lost his life
under Earth's arch but for his armor 1370
and heaven's favor furnishing help.
The Ruler of All readily aided
the righteous man when he rose once more.

He beheld in a hoard of ancient arms
a battle-blessed sword with strong-edged blade, 1375
a marvelous weapon men might admire
though over-heavy for any to heft
when finely forged by giants of old.
The Scyldings' shielder took hold of the hilt
and swung up the sword, though despairing of life. 1380
He struck savagely, hit her hard neck
and broke the bone-rings, cleaving clean through
her fated flesh. She fell to the floor;
the sword sweated; the soldier rejoiced.

J. R. R. Tolkien

Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary. Houghton Mifflin, 2014.
(pages 57-58)

Then seized the prince of the Geatish warriors Grendel's mother
by her locks, ruing not the cruel deed, and his mortal foe he threw,
for now he grim in war was filled with wrath, and she was bowed
upon the floor. Again she swiftly answered him with like, and
grappling cruelly she clutched at him. Then stumbled, desperate at
heart, that warrior most strong, that champion of the host, and he
in turn was thrown. Then did she bestride the invader in her hall,
and drew her knife with broad and burnished blade: she thought to
avenge her son and only child. Upon his shoulders hung the woven
net of mail about his breast; this now his life defended, and
withstood the entry of both point and edge. In that hour had the son
of Ecgtheow, champion of the Geats, come to an ill end beneath the
widespread earth, had not his corslet, the stout net of rings,
furnished him help in fight and fray — there Holy God did rule the
victory in battle. The allseeing Lord who governeth the heavens on
high with ease did give decision to the right, when Beowulf again
sprang up.

Lo! among the war-gear there he beheld a sword endowed with
charms of victory, a blade gigantic, old with edges stern, the pride of
men at arms: the choicest of weapons that, albeit greater than any
other man might have borne unto the play of war, a good and costly
thing, the work of giants. Now he grasped its linkèd hilt, that
champion of the Scyldings' cause, in fierce mood and fell he flashed
forth the ring-adornèd blade; despairing of his life with ire he
smote, and on her neck it bitter seized, and shivered the bony joints.
Through and through the sword pierced her body doomed. She
sank upon the floor. The sword was wet. The knight rejoiced him in
the deed.

Beowulf and Wiglaf kill the dragon (2672–2708)

E. Talbot Donaldson

Beowulf: A New Prose Translation. W. W. Norton, 1966.
(page 46)

Fire advanced in waves; shield burned to the boss; mail-shirt might give no help to the young spear-warrior; but the young man went quickly under his kinsman's shield when his own was consumed with flames. Then the war-king was again mindful of fame, struck with his war-sword with great strength so that it stuck in the head-bone, driven with force: Nægling broke, the sword of Beowulf failed in the fight, old and steel-gray. It was not ordained for him that iron edges might help in the combat. Too strong was the hand that I have heard strained every sword with its stroke, when he bore wound-hardened weapon to battle: he was none the better for it.

Then for the third time the folk-harmer, the fearful fire-dragon, was mindful of feuds, set upon the brave one when the chance came, hot and battle-grim seized all his neck with his sharp fangs: he was smeared with life-blood, gore welled out in waves.

Then, I have heard, at the need of the folk-king the earl at his side made his courage known, his might and his keenness — as was natural to him. He took no heed for that head, but the hand of the brave man was burned as he helped his kinsman, as the man in armor struck the hateful foe a little lower down, so that the sword sank in, shining and engraved, and then the fire began to subside. The king himself then still controlled his senses, drew the battle-knife, biting and war-sharp, that he wore on his mail-shirt: the protector of the Weather-Geats cut the worm through the middle. They felled the foe, courage drove his life out, and they had destroyed him together, the two noble kinsmen.

Seamus Heaney

Beowulf: A Verse Translation. W. W. Norton, 2002.
(2672–2708)

Flames lapped the shield,
charred it to the boss, and the body armour
on the young warrior was useless to him.
but Wiglaf did well under the wide rim 2675
Beowulf shared with him once his own had shattered
in sparks and ashes.

Inspired again
by the thought of glory, the war-king threw
his whole strength behind a sword-stroke
and connected with the skull. And Naegling snapped. 2680
Beowulf's ancient iron-grey sword
let him down in the fight. It was never his fortune
to be helped in combat by the cutting edge
of weapons made of iron. When he wielded a sword,
no matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade 2685
his hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt
(I have heard) would ruin it. He could reap no advantage.

Then the bane of that people, the fire-breathing dragon,
was mad to attack for a third time.
When a chance came, he caught the hero 2690
in a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs
into his neck. Beowulf's body
ran wet with his life-blood: it came welling out.

Next thing, they say, the noble son of Weohstan
saw the king in danger at his side 2695
and displayed his inborn bravery and strength.
He left the head alone, but his fighting hand
was burned when he came to his kinsman's aid.
He lunged at the enemy lower down
so that his decorated sword sank into its belly 2700
and the flames grew weaker.

Once again the king
gathered his strength and drew a stabbing knife
he carried on his belt, sharpened for battle.
He stuck it deep into the dragon's flank.
Beowulf dealt it a deadly wound. 2705
They had killed the enemy, courage quelled his life;
that pair of kinsman, partners in nobility,
had destroyed the foe.

Beowulf and Wiglaf kill the dragon (2672–2708)

John McNamara

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Barnes & Noble, 2005.
(2672–2708)

Waves of fire swept Wiglaf's shield,
burned it up to its boss, nor might the mail-coat
provide needed protection to the young warrior,
but the youth fought on bravely, nonetheless, 2675
under his kinsman's shield, when his own was consumed,
in the storm of fire. Then once more the famed war-king
was mindful of glory, and with mighty strength,
pressed hard by the evil foe, swung his battle-sword,
so it stuck in the dragon's head. Yet Naegling shattered, 2680
Beowulf's great blade, the ancient gray iron,
failed in the fighting. It was not given to him
that he might get help in that hard-fought battle
from the edge of the sword—for his hand was too strong,
so he over-taxed every sword, as I have heard told, 2685
with the power of his swing, when he bore into battle
a wondrously hard weapon. He got nothing from that!
Then for the third time, the threatening monster,
the frightful fire-dragon, mindful of their feud,
rushed on the famed ruler when he saw an opening, 2690
seething and battle-grim, surrounding his neck
with fierce sharp fangs, digging into his flesh
to drain life from his body, as the blood streamed out.
When the prince of the people had greatest need,
I have heard that his comrade displayed great courage, 2695
great skill and boldness, as befit his nature.
Brave Wiglaf did not strike at the head of the beast,
but his hand was burned in helping his kinsman,
striking the creature somewhat lower down,
so the warrior's sword, gleaming with gold, 2700
plunged into the dragon, and the deadly flames
began to die down. Then once more the king
gained control of himself, and gripped his short sword,
sharpened for battle, that he wore at his waist,
and the people's protector sliced through the serpent. 2705
They had felled their foe, bravely taking its life,
and the two had together brought down the dragon
as noble kinsmen.

Edward L. Ridsen

Beowulf: A Verse Translation for Students. Kindle ed. Witan, 2012.
(2672–2708)

The fire flowed in waves,
burnt up the shield to the rim; the byrnie could not
provide help for the young spear-warrior,
but the young kinsman went with courage 2675
under his kinsman's shield when his own was
consumed in flames. Then yet the war-king
remembered glory, with might-strength struck
with battle-blade so that it stood in the head,
compelled by ferocity: Naegling burst, 2680
failed in battle, Beowulf's sword,
old and gray. To him it was not given
that edges of iron could
help in battle: the hand was too strong,
that which with a stroke, I have heard, 2685
overtaxed each sword when he to battle bore
weapons hard with wounds, nor was he any the better for them.
Then the enemy of the people was for a third time
mindful of the feud, fearsome fire-dragon.
He rushed the renowned one when the chance was granted him, 2690
hot and battle-grim, completely clasped the neck,
the bones of the fierce one. He was bloodied
with soul's-blood: the fluid welled in waves.
Then in his need I have heard of the king
that the man at his side showed courage, 2695
skill and boldness, as was natural to him.
Nor did he heed that head, but the hand
of the brave man was burned when he helped his kinsman
because he struck the evil-guest somewhat farther down,
man in armor, so that the sword dived in, 2700
shining and gold-coated, such that the fire began
to abate afterwards. Then the king himself yet
ruled his senses, drew his slaughter-knife,
bitter and battle-sharp, that he bore in his byrnie.
The protector of the Weathers cut the worm through the middle. 2705
The enemy fell— courage avenged life—
and they both had killed him,
the noble kinsmen.

Beowulf and Wiglaf kill the dragon (2672–2708)

Alan Sullivan and Timothy Murphy

Beowulf. Pearson, 2004.

(2358–91)

His dreadful fire-wind drove in a wave,
charring young Wiglaf's shield to the boss,
nor might a mail-shirt bar that breath
from burning the brave spear-bearer's breast. 2360
Wiglaf took cover close to his kinsman,
shielded by iron when linden was cinder.
Then the war-king, recalling past conquests,
struck with full strength straight at the head. 2365
His battle-sword, Naegling, stuck there and split,
shattered in combat, so sharp was the shock
to Beowulf's great gray-banded blade.
He never was granted the gift of a sword
as hard and strong as the hand that held it. 2370
I have heard that he broke blood-hardened brands,
so the weapon-bearer was none the better.

The fearful fire-drake, scather of strongholds,
flung himself forward a final time,
wild with wounds yet wily and sly. 2375
In the heat of the fray, he hurtled headlong
to fasten his fangs in the foe's throat.
Beowulf's life-blood came bursting forth
on those terrible tusks. Just then, I am told,
the second warrior sprang from his side, 2380
a man born for battle proving his mettle,
keen to strengthen his kinsman in combat.
He took no heed of the hideous head
scorching his hand as he hit lower down.
The sword sank in, patterned and plated; 2385
the flames of the foe faltered, faded.
Quick-witted still, the king unsheathed
the keen killing-blade he kept in his corselet.
Then the Geats' guardian gutted the dragon,
felling that fiend with the help of his friend, 2390
two kinsmen together besting the terror.

J. R. R. Tolkien

Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary. Houghton Mifflin, 2014.

(page 91–92)

His buckler in the billowing flames was burned even to the boss, his corslet could afford no help to that young wielder of the spear; but beneath his kinsman's shield stoutly fared that warrior young, when his own crumbled in the glowing fires. Now once more the king of battles recalled his renowned deeds, with mighty strength he smote with his warlike sword, and fast in the head it stood driven by fierce hate. Naegling burst asunder! Beowulf's sword, old, grey-bladed, had failed him in the fight. It was not vouchsafed to him that blades of iron might be his aid in war: too strong that hand, that as I have heard with its swing overtaxed each sword, when he to the battle bore weapons marvelously hard; no whit did it profit him.

Then for the third time the destroyer of the folk, the fell fire-dragon, bethought him of deeds of enmity, and rushed upon the valiant man, now that a clear field was given him, burning and fierce in battle. His neck with his sharp bony teeth he seized now all about, and Beowulf was reddened with his own life-blood; it welled forth in gushing streams. I have heard tell that in that hour of his king's need the good man unbowed showed forth his valour, his might and courage, as was the manner of his kin. He heeded not those jaws; nay, his hand was burned, as valiant he aided now his kinsman, and smote that alien creature fierce a little lower down — a knight in arms was he! — so that bright and golden-hilted his sword plunged in, and the fire began thereafter to abate. Once more the king himself mastered his senses; drew forth a deadly dagger keen and whetted for the fray, that he wore against his mail; Lord of the windloving folk he ripped up the serpent in the midst. They had slain their foe — valour had vanquished life; yea, together they had destroyed him, those two princes of one house