

# **Beowulf**

Anonymous

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# Beowulf

## Anonymous

*Translated by Gummere*

### **BEOWULF**

#### **PRELUDE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE DANISH HOUSE**

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings  
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!  
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since erst he lay  
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gifts: a good king he!  
To him an heir was afterward born,  
a son in his halls, whom heaven sent  
to favor the folk, feeling their woe  
that erst they had lacked an earl for leader  
so long a while; the Lord endowed him,  
the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown.  
Famed was this Beowulf: far flew the boast of him,  
son of Scyld, in the Scandian lands.  
So becomes it a youth to quit him well  
with his father's friends, by fee and gift,  
that to aid him, aged, in after days,  
come warriors willing, should war draw nigh,  
liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds  
shall an earl have honor in every clan.  
Forth he fared at the fated moment,  
sturdy Scyld to the shelter of God.  
Then they bore him over to ocean's billow,  
loving clansmen, as late he charged them,  
while wielded words the winsome Scyld,  
the leader beloved who long had ruled....  
In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel,  
ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge:  
there laid they down their darling lord  
on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings,  
by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure  
fetched from far was freighted with him.  
No ship have I known so nobly dight  
with weapons of war and weeds of battle,  
with breastplate and blade: on his bosom lay  
a heaped hoard that hence should go

far o'er the flood with him floating away.  
No less these loaded the lordly gifts,  
thanes' huge treasure, than those had done  
who in former time forth had sent him  
sole on the seas, a suckling child.  
High o'er his head they hoist the standard,  
a gold-wove banner; let billows take him,  
gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits,  
mournful their mood. No man is able  
to say in sooth, no son of the halls,  
no hero 'neath heaven, — who harbored that freight!

*I*

Now Beowulf bode in the burg of the Scyldings,  
leader beloved, and long he ruled  
in fame with all folk, since his father had gone  
away from the world, till awoke an heir,  
haughty Healfdene, who held through life,  
sage and sturdy, the Scyldings glad.  
Then, one after one, there woke to him,  
to the chieftain of clansmen, children four:  
Heorogar, then Hrothgar, then Halga brave;  
and I heard that — was — 's queen,  
the Heathoscyfing's helpmate dear.  
To Hrothgar was given such glory of war,  
such honor of combat, that all his kin  
obeyed him gladly till great grew his band  
of youthful comrades. It came in his mind  
to bid his henchmen a hall uprear,  
ia master mead-house, mightier far  
than ever was seen by the sons of earth,  
and within it, then, to old and young  
he would all allot that the Lord had sent him,  
save only the land and the lives of his men.  
Wide, I heard, was the work commanded,  
for many a tribe this mid-earth round,  
to fashion the folkstead. It fell, as he ordered,  
in rapid achievement that ready it stood there,  
of halls the noblest: Heorot he named it  
whose message had might in many a land.  
Not reckless of promise, the rings he dealt,  
treasure at banquet: there towered the hall,  
high, gabled wide, the hot surge waiting  
of furious flame. Nor far was that day  
when father and son-in-law stood in feud  
for warfare and hatred that woke again.  
With envy and anger an evil spirit  
endured the dole in his dark abode,  
that he heard each day the din of revel  
high in the hall: there harps rang out,  
clear song of the singer. He sang who knew

tales of the early time of man,  
 how the Almighty made the earth,  
 fairest fields enfolded by water,  
 set, triumphant, sun and moon  
 for a light to lighten the land-dwellers,  
 and braided bright the breast of earth  
 with limbs and leaves, made life for all  
 of mortal beings that breathe and move.  
 So lived the clansmen in cheer and revel  
 a winsome life, till one began  
 to fashion evils, that field of hell.  
 Grendel this monster grim was called,  
 march-riever mighty, in moorland living,  
 in fen and fastness; fief of the giants  
 the hapless wight a while had kept  
 since the Creator his exile doomed.  
 On kin of Cain was the killing avenged  
 by sovran God for slaughtered Abel.  
 Ill fared his feud, and far was he driven,  
 for the slaughter's sake, from sight of men.  
 Of Cain awoke all that woful breed,  
 Etins and elves and evil-spirits,  
 as well as the giants that warred with God  
 weary while: but their wage was paid them!

**II**

WENT he forth to find at fall of night  
 that haughty house, and heed wherever  
 the Ring-Danes, outrevelled, to rest had gone.  
 Found within it the atheling band  
 asleep after feasting and fearless of sorrow,  
 of human hardship. Unhallowed wight,  
 grim and greedy, he grasped betimes,  
 wrathful, reckless, from resting-places,  
 thirty of the thanes, and thence he rushed  
 fain of his fell spoil, faring homeward,  
 laden with slaughter, his lair to seek.  
 Then at the dawning, as day was breaking,  
 the might of Grendel to men was known;  
 then after wassail was wail uplifted,  
 loud moan in the morn. The mighty chief,  
 atheling excellent, unblithe sat,  
 labored in woe for the loss of his thanes,  
 when once had been traced the trail of the fiend,  
 spirit accurst: too cruel that sorrow,  
 too long, too loathsome. Not late the respite;  
 with night returning, anew began  
 ruthless murder; he recked no whit,  
 firm in his guilt, of the feud and crime.  
 They were easy to find who elsewhere sought  
 in room remote their rest at night,  
 bed in the bowers, when that bale was shown,

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was seen in sooth, with surest token, --  
the hall-thane's hate. Such held themselves  
far and fast who the fiend outran!  
Thus ruled unrighteous and raged his fill  
one against all; until empty stood  
that lordly building, and long it bode so.  
Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,  
sovrán of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,  
boundless cares. There came unhidden  
tidings true to the tribes of men,  
in sorrowful songs, how ceaselessly Grendel  
harassed Hrothgar, what hate he bore him,  
what murder and massacre, many a year,  
feud unfading, -- refused consent  
to deal with any of Daneland's earls,  
make pact of peace, or compound for gold:  
still less did the wise men ween to get  
great fee for the feud from his fiendish hands.  
But the evil one ambushed old and young  
death-shadow dark, and dogged them still,  
lured, or lurked in the livelong night  
of misty moorlands: men may say not  
where the haunts of these Hell-Runes be.