

Proceedings  
of the  
First Dakotas Conference  
on  
Earlier British Literature

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Edited by  
*Jay Ruud*  
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Northern State University Press  
*Aberdeen, South Dakota*  
1993

*Proceedings of the First Dakotas Conference  
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Published by the Northern State University Press  
Northern State University  
Aberdeen, SD 57401

ISBN: 1-883120-00-4

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## Preface

The ten essays included in this volume were presented at the First Dakotas Conference on Earlier British Literature, held in Aberdeen, South Dakota on October 16-17, 1992. The conference was the first attempt to establish a network of scholars with similar interests in the northern plains area, and those attending were enthusiastic about continuing the process, endorsing a plan to hold a second conference in the spring of 1994.

The papers here included are arranged chronologically, and represent the variety of papers presented at the conference. They concern a range of British literature from *Beowulf* to the eighteenth century, with comparative studies branching into American and modern Scandinavian literature. Also representative of the conference is the fact that authors of the papers range from graduate students to full professors, and come from eight different institutions in four states.

The conference was funded by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council and by Northern State University. Funding made it possible to bring in Shirley Garner of the University of Minnesota to deliver a keynote address on Shakespeare, and Susanna Fein of Kent State University and David Raybin of Eastern Illinois University to perform with me a dramatic reading of Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" in Middle English. Both activities were well received by conference participants.

These funds also made possible the printing of this volume.

JAY RUUD

*Aberdeen, S.D.*

*Murnan or Wreacan:*  
The Idea of Vengeance in *Beowulf*

Thomas J. Gasque  
*University of South Dakota*

Day two in Denmark. Grendel is dead. Beowulf, the savior from abroad, is everyone's hero, being compared to Sigemund, the great dragon slayer of Germanic myth (ll. 875-897), and contrasted to Heremod, whose long periods of self-pity had caused *snotor ceorl monig*<sup>1</sup> "many wise men" (l.908) to mourn (*bemearn*—l. 907). Beowulf alone has been able to destroy the monster that has made life for the Danes unbearable for the last twelve years, and that night there is a celebration in Heorot to honor the hero for what he has done. Everyone is happy, though the poet ominously forecasts a future feud between Hrothgar and his nephew Hrothulf (l. 1019). Hrothgar orders wergild to be paid to the Geats for the death of the one man among them who did not survive Grendel's sudden onslaught, signalling his—Hrothgar's—taking on himself the responsibility for ending the feud.

Then, to continue the festivities, Hrothgar's scop sings a long tale about the unexplained attack of Finn's Frisians on the visiting Half-Danes led by Hnæf, brother of Finn's wife Hildeburh. Many are killed on both sides, including Hnæf. His sister has cause to mourn (*bemearn*—l. 1077) the loss of her kin and her honor. A truce is drawn with the new leader, Hengest, and the Half-Danes become reluctant

