

## Beowulf, lines 1-86 – Handout #1 for Dusting off the Classics: Beowulf (Richard Sacks)

### Beowulf, lines 1-42 (Heaney translation)

1 So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by    greatness.  
 2 and the kings who ruled them had **courage and**  
 3 We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.  
 4 There was **Shield Sheafson**, scourge of many tribes,  
 5 a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
 6 This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
 7 A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
 8 as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
 9 In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
 10 beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
 11 and begin to pay tribute. That was one **good** king.  
 12 Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
 13 a cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
 14 by **God** to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,  
 15 the long times and troubles they'd come through  
 16 without a leader; so the **Lord of Life**,  
 17 the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
 18 **Shield** had fathered a famous son:  
 19 **Beow**'s name was known through the north.  
 20 And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
 21 giving freely while his father lives  
 22 so that afterwards in age when fighting starts  
 23 steadfast companions will stand by him  
 24 and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired  
 25 is the path to power among people everywhere.  
 26 **Shield** was still thriving when his time came  
 27 and he crossed over into the Lord's Keeping.  
 28 His warrior band did what he bade them  
 29 when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
 30 they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,  
 31 the chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
 32 A **ring-whorled prow** rode in the harbor,  
 33 ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.  
 34 They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
 35 laid out by the mast, amidships,  
 36 the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
 37 were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
 38 I never heard before of a ship so well furbished  
 39 with battle tackle, bladed weapons  
 40 and coats of mail. The massed treasure  
 41 was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
 42 on out into the ocean's sway.

### Beowulf, lines 1-42 (in Old English, Heaney < Wrenn ed.)

1 Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum  
 2 þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,  
 3 hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.  
 4 Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaþena þrēatum,  
 5 monegum mægþum meodo-setla oftēah;  
 6 egsode Eorl[e], syððan ārest wearð  
 7 fēasceaft funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād:  
 8 wēox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þāh,  
 9 oðþæt him æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra  
 10 ofer hron-rāde hýran scolde,  
 11 gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!  
 12 Ðām eafera wæs æfter cenned  
 13 geong in gearдум, þone God sende  
 14 folce tō frōfre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat,  
 15 þæt hīe ær drugon aldor-lēase  
 16 lange hwīle.; him þæs Lif-frēa,  
 17 wuldres Wealdend, worold-āre forgeaf;  
 18 Bēowulf wæs brēme —blæd wīde sprang—  
 19 Scyldes eafera Scede-landum in.  
 20 Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,  
 21 fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme,  
 22 þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen  
 23 wil-gesīþas, þonne wīg cume,  
 24 lēode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal  
 25 in mægþa gehwære man gefēon.  
 26 Him ðā Scyld gewāt tō gescaep-hwīle,  
 27 fela-hrōr fēran on Frēan wære.  
 28 Hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,  
 29 swæse gesīþas, swā hē selfa bæd,  
 30 þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga,  
 31 lēof land-fruma lange āhte.  
 32 Þær æt hýðe stōd hringed-stefna,  
 33 īsig ond ūt-fūs, æþelinges fær;  
 34 ālēdon þā lēofne þeoden,  
 35 bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,  
 36 mārne be mæste; þær wæs mādma fela  
 37 of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelæded.  
 38 Ne hýrde ic cymlicor cēol gegyrwan  
 39 hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,  
 40 billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg  
 41 mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon  
 42 on flōdes æht feor gewītan.

### #1 brym (line 2):

"might, force, glory" = ON þrymr "alarm, noise" (poetically of "battle"); name of the king of the giants who steals Thor's hammer in *Prymsqviða* (poem from the *Poetic Edda*); see also ON *Prym-heimr*, the abode of the giant Thiazzi who steals Idun and her apples of youth.

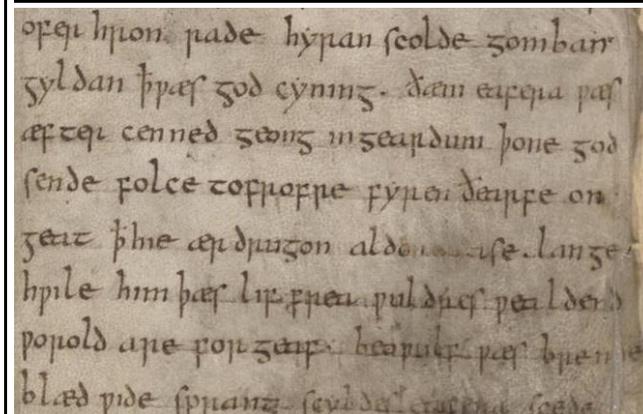
### #2 Two Scyld ("Shield") traditions in Germanic

a) From the Old Norse *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson:  
 One of **Odin's** sons, named **Skjöldr**, – from whom the **Skjöldungs** are come, – had his abode and ruled in the realm which now is called **Denmark**, but then was known as Gotland...

b) From the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

**Woden** [son of] of Frithuwald, ... of Freawine, ... of Frithuwulf, ... of Finn, ... of Godwulf, ... of Geat, ... of Taetwa, ... of **Beaw**, ... of **Sceldwa**, ... of Heremod, ... of Itermon, ... of Hathra, ... of Hwala, ... of Bedwig [**Beowi** in the D MS.], ... of **Scaef**; that is, the son of Noah, who was born in Noah's ark: ... [son of] Adam the first man...

### #3 Lines 10-19 from the first page of the manuscript:



### #4 hringed-stefna (line 32):

"ring-prowed" of Scyld's funeral ship; also at 1897 and in 1862 *hring-naca* "ring-necked" (both compounds unique to *Beowulf* in OE) and no other "ring-" compounds in OE used of ships; the only "ring-" compound used of a ship in ON is Hring-horni, the funeral ship of the god Baldr whose death brings on Ragnarok (the doom of the gods).

### Beowulf, lines 43-86 (Heaney translation)

43 They decked his body no less bountifully  
44 with offerings than those first ones did  
45 who cast him away when he was a child  
46 and launched him alone out over the waves.  
47 And they set a gold standard up  
48 high above his head and let him drift  
49 to wind and tide, bewailing him  
50 and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
51 no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
52 knows for certain who salvaged that load.  
53 Then it fell to **Beow** to keep the forts.  
54 He was well regarded and ruled the Danes  
55 for a long time after his father took leave  
56 of his life on earth. And then his heir,  
57 the great Halfdane, held sway  
58 for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.  
59 He was four times a father, this fighter prince:  
60 one by one they entered the world,  
61 Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga  
62 and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,  
63 a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.  
64 The fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.  
65 Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
66 young followers, a force that grew  
67 to be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
68 to **hall-building**: he handed down orders  
69 for men to work on a great **mead-hall**  
70 meant to be a wonder of the world forever;  
71 it would be his throne-room and there he would dis-  
72 his God-given goods to young and old— pense  
73 but not the common land or people's lives.  
74 Far and wide **through the world**, I have heard,  
75 orders for the work to adorn that wallstead  
76 were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,  
77 finished and ready, in full view,  
78 **the hall of halls**. Heorot was the name  
79 he had settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
80 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings  
81 and torques at the table. The hall towered,  
82 its gables wide and high and awaiting  
83 a barbarous burning. That doom abided,  
84 but in time it would come: the killer instinct  
85 unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.  
86 Then a **powerful demon**, a prowler through the dark...

### Beowulf, lines 43-86 (in OE, Heaney<Wrenn ed.)

43 Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,  
44 þeod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,  
45 þe hine æt frumsceaft forð onsendon  
46 ænne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.  
47 Þa gýt hī him āsetton segen g[y]ldenne  
48 hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,  
49 gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs gēomor sefa,  
50 murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon  
51 secgan tō sōðe, sele-rædende,  
52 hælēð under heofenum, hwā þām hlæste onfēng.  
53 Ðā wæs on burgum **Bēowulf Scyldinga**,  
54 lēof lēod-cyning, longe þrāge  
55 folcum gefræge; fæder ellor hwearf,  
56 aldor of earde. Opþæt him eft onwōc  
57 hēah Healfdene; hēold, þenden lifde,  
58 gamol ond gūð-rēow, glæde Scyldingas.  
59 Ðām feower bearn forð gerīmed  
60 in worold wōcun: weoroda ræswa[n],  
61 Heorogār, ond Hrōðgār ond Hālgā til;  
62 hýrde ic þæt [..... wæs **On]elan cwēn**,  
63 Heaðo-Scilfinges heals-gebetta.  
64 Þā wæs Hrōðgāre here-spēd gyfen,  
65 wīges weorð-mynd, þæt him his wine-māgas  
66 georne hýrdon, oððþæt sēo geogoð gewēox  
67 mago-driht micel. Him on mōd be-arn,  
68 þæt **heal**-reced hātan wolde,  
69 medo-**ærn** micel men gewyrcean,  
70 þon[n]e ylde bearn æfre gefrūnon,  
71 ond þær on innan eall gedælan  
72 geongum ond ealdum, swylc him God sealde,  
73 būton folc-scare ond feorum gumena.  
74 Ðā ic wīde gefrægn weorc gebannan  
75 manigre mægþe geond þisne **middan-geard**,  
76 folc-stede frætwan. Him on fyrste gelomp,  
77 ædre mid yldum, þæt hit wearð eal gearo,  
78 **heal-ærna mæst**; scōp him Heort naman,  
79 sē þe his wordes geweald wīde hæfde.  
80 Hē bēot ne ālēh, bēagas dælde,  
81 sinc æt symle. Sele hlīfade  
82 hēah ond horn-gēap, heaðo-wylma bād,  
83 lāðan līges; ne wæs hit lenge þā, gēn,  
84 þæt se ecg-hete āþum-swerian  
85 æfter wæl-nīðe wæcnan scolde.  
86 Ðā se **ellen-gæst** earfoðlice...

### #5 the Swedish king Onela (line 62):

Also in lines 2616 and 2932. In the former we hear how Onela "ignored the blood feud / the fact that Eanmund was his bother's son" (Eanmund was killed by the father of Beowulf's loyal thane Wiglaf, who will be king after Beowulf's death and has Eanmund's sword). In the latter, the context is the battle "when the Geat people in their arrogance / first attacked the fierce [Swedes]," and we hear of how Onela's mother – who seems to be a Geat and probably Beowulf's great aunt – was rescued by her husband (Onela's father, the Swedish king Ongentheow).

### #6 the "hall" compounds of lines 68-78:

Note the progression of 68 **heal**-reced "hall-hall" > 69 medo-**ærn** ("mead-hall") > 78 **heal-ærna** mæst ("greatest of hall-halls")

- 1) the poetic tradition does not use compounds in which both elements mean "hall"
- 2) the poetic tradition does not use **heal**- as the first element in a compound
- 3) *Beowulf's* use of hall compounds largely agrees with what we find in OE poetry as a whole with three notable exceptions: compound initial **heal**- and compound final **-reced** and **-ærn**.

### #7 middan-geard (line 75):

"middle-habitation/-earth" (from which, Tolkien's "middle-earth") = ON *Miðgarðr* which is the stronghold of the giants, given to them when the gods make a new stronghold for themselves (*Asgarðr*) because giants kept attacking the gods in their original stronghold *Miðgarðr* (made during creation from the eyebrows of the "original" giant Ymir whom Oðin and company had killed and from whom they created the world). *Miðgarðr* is also the first element of the compound describing the serpent who kills (and is killed by) Thor at Ragnarok.

### #8 ellen-gæst (line 86):

The first mention of Grendel in the poem. Heaney translates this compound as "powerful demon." Note that because long marks do not appear in the manuscript, we cannot tell whether the manuscript spelling *gæst* is from *gæst* (variant of *gāst*) "ghost, spirit, demon" or from *gæst* (variant of *gīst*) "stranger, visitor, guest." Note also that *ellen* was used in line 3 of the courageous deeds princes of old performed.