

UPDATE PAGE FOR CLASS OF 4/11/19

Richard Sacks – Dusting Off the Classics: *Beowulf*

University of Denver – University College Enrichment Program – Winter/Spring 2019

Course "materials and info" page: <https://sacks-richard.com/beowulf-course-materials>

For our fourth class (that of 4/11), **we will focus our attention on lines 2200-2820** as the poem leaps forward more than half a century and focuses on Beowulf's encounter with the dragon that is destroying the land of the Geats which, we are told in lines 2208-2209, Beowulf has now ruled for 50 years. Here yet again are some passage-based questions (including a few details in each) you might want to play around with if you're so inclined:

- 1) What do you make of the narrative's brief transition (2200-2210) to this later section of the poem?** Note the parataxis with which this short passage cadences in the second half of line 2209 and the first half of line 2210: **wæs ðā frōd cyning, / eald eðel-weard** (literally, "since he was an old/wise [=frōd] king, / an old native-land guard). For what it's worth, the first two instances of **frōd** in the poem (our introduction to the word, so to speak) come at line 279 when Beowulf calls Hrothgar **frōd ond gōd** ("old/wise and good") and then at line 1306 when we are reminded that after the attacks of Grendel, Hrothgar **wæs frōd cyning**. Note also (and this involves a slightly different approach methodologically) that from line 2211 (when we are first introduced to the dragon) up through the first half of line 2708 (when the dragon dies), every sure instance of compound **-weard** (2293, 2302, 2554, 2593, all in **hord-weard** ["hoard-guard"]) is used of the dragon (2334 **eorð-weard** is in a line containing serious manuscript issues so we are not certain how that line reads).
- 2) What do you make of the poem's vision (lines 2233-2280) of a "last survivor" from 300 hundred years earlier as the source of the dragon's treasure hoard?** Note in particular his lament at lines 2247-2267.
- 3) What do you make of the narrative's first extended focus on Beowulf after its 50+ year leap forward: lines 2324 (when Beowulf "was given the bad news" about the dragon) up through line 2424 (just before Beowulf's first speech of this later section of the poem)?** Some details you might want to consider: **3a)** lines 2345-2354 in which we are told that Beowulf "was too proud [=2345 **oferhogode**, a verbal form of **ofer-hygd**, a compound we saw at lines 1740 and 1760] / to line up with a large army / against the sky-plague. He had scant regard / for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all / of its courage [= **ellen** in 2349] and strength..."; **3b)** lines 2354-2379 in which we hear of the battle in Friesland (= Frisia) when Hygelac died and after which Hygd offered Beowulf the kingship of the Geats; and **3c)** lines 2379-2396 in which we hear of the battle between Swedes and Geats in which Hygelac's son Heardred dies and after which Beowulf becomes king.
- 4) What do you make of the extended set of speeches Beowulf delivers at lines 2426-2537?** Some details you might want to consider: **4a)** the first part (lines 2426-2471) of the initial and longest speech in the sequence in which Beowulf tells his history of being fostered out to his grandfather King Hrethel, including the tragic story of Hrethel's eldest son Herebeald being accidentally shot and killed with an arrow by the second eldest son Haethcyn and cadencing on Hrethel's fatal grief; **4b)** the next part of the speech (lines 2472-2489) in which we hear of the battle between Swedes and Geats in Haethcyn dies; **4c)** the third and last part of that first speech (2490-2509) in which Beowulf focuses on his sword (evidently the one given to him by Hygelac at 2190ff.) "which has stood me in good stead / late and soon, ever since I killed / Dayraven the Frank [=Frisian] in front of the two armies..."; and finally **4d)** the last two speeches in the sequence (lines 2511-2515 and 2518-2537, each one given after a very brief (+/-2 line) pause) which include Beowulf saying "I would rather not / use a weapon if I knew another way / to grapple with the dragon..." (2518-2520), and "Men at arms, remain here on the barrow, / safe in your armour... / This fight is not yours, / nor is it up to any man except me / to measure his strength against the monster / or to prove his worth (2529-2531).
- 5) What do you make of the narrative's decision to interrupt the fight with the dragon with a digression on Wiglaf's history (lines 2602-2630)?** Note, among other details, that Wiglaf is a "Shylfing" [=Swede] (2603), that he lived among the Waegmundings" (2607 and also mentioned at 2814), and that he possessed a sword which was given to him by his father Weohstan and which had a complicated and poignant history in the Swedish-Geat wars.
- 6) What do you make of Beowulf's final speeches before he dies: lines 2729-2751, 2794-2808, and 2813-2816?** Note also the introduction (lines 2809-2812) to the last of the three in which Beowulf gives Wiglaf the "collar of gold from his neck" (2810).