

Selection of Focus Passages for *Beowulf*

Passages taken from translation by Professor R.K. Gordon

<https://archive.org/stream/songofbeowulfrenoOgorduoft#page/n9/mode/2up>

Lo! we have heard the glory of the kings of the Spear-Danes in days gone by, how the chieftains wrought mighty deeds. Often Scyld-Scefing wrested the mead-benches from troops of foes, from many tribes; he made fear fall upon the earls. After he was first found in misery (he received solace for that), he grew up under the heavens, lived in high honour; until each of his neighbours over the whale-road must needs obey him and render tribute.

That was a good king!

Lines 1–11 (Section I in Gordon [p13], Introduction in other editions)

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It came into his mind that he would order men to make a hall-building, a mighty mead-dwelling, greater than ever the children of men had heard, of; and therein that he should part among young and old all which God gave unto him except the nation and the lives of men. Then I heard far and wide of work laid upon many a tribe throughout this world, the task of adorning the place of assembly. Quickly it came to pass among men that it was perfect; the greatest of hall-dwellings; he whose word had wide sway gave it the name of Heorot. He broke not his pledge, he bestowed bracelets and treasure at the banquet. The hall towered up, lofty and wide-gabled; it endured the surges of battle, of hostile fire.

Lines 67b–83a (Section II in Gordon [p15], Section I in other editions)

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The warriors hastened, went up together, until they could see the well-built hall, splendid and gold-adomed. That was foremost of buildings under the heavens for men of the earth, in which the mighty one dwelt; the light shone over many lands.

The man bold in battle pointed out to them the abode of brave men, as it gleamed, so that they could go thither.

Lines 306b–314a (Section V in Gordon [p23], Section IV in other editions)

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A man cunning in knowledge of the sea showed the way along the edge of the land. Time passed on; the ship was on the waves, the boat beneath the cliff. The warriors eagerly embarked. The currents turned the sea against the sand. Men bore bright ornaments, splendid war-trappings to the bosom of the ship. The men, the heroes on their willing venture, shoved out the well-timbered ship. The foamy-necked floater like a bird went then over the wave-filled sea, sped by the wind, till after due time on the next day the boat with twisted prow had gone so far that the voyagers saw land, the sea-cliffs shining, the steep headlands, the broad sea-capes. Then the sea was traversed, the journey at an end. The men of the Weders mounted thence quickly to the land; they made fast the ship. The armour rattled, the garments of battle. They thanked God that the sea voyage had been easy for them.

Then the watchman of the Scyldings whose duty it was to guard the sea-cliffs saw from the height bright shields and battle-equipment ready for use borne over the gangway. A desire to know who the men were pressed on his thoughts. The Thane of Hrothgar went to the shore riding his steed; mightily he brandished his spear in his hands, spoke forth a question: “What

warriors are ye, clad in corslets, who have come thus bringing the high ship over the way of waters, hither over the floods? Lo! for a time I have been guardian of our coasts, I have kept watch by the sea lest any of the Danes' enemies should make ravage with their sea-raiders. No shield-bearing warriors have ventured here more openly; nor do ye know at all that ye have the permission of warriors, the consent of kinsmen. I never saw in the world a greater earl than one of your band is, a hero in his harness. He is no stay-at-home decked out with weapons; unless his face belies him, his excellent front. Now I must know your race rather than ye should go further hence as spies in the land of the Danes. Now, ye far-dwellers, travellers of the sea, hearken but to my thought. It is best to tell forth quickly whence ye are come.”

Lines 208b–257 (Section IV in Gordon [pp20–21], Section III in other editions)

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The son of Healfdene gave then to Beowulf a golden ensign as a reward for victory, an ornamented banner with a handle, a helmet and corslet, a famous precious sword. Many saw them borne before the warrior. Beowulf took the goblet in hall; he needed not to be ashamed in front of the warriors of the bestowing of gifts.

I have not heard of many men giving to others on the ale-bench in more friendly fashion four treasures decked with gold. Around the top of the helmet a jutting ridge twisted with wires held guard over the head, so that many an old sword, proved hard in battle, could not injure the bold man, when the shield-bearing warrior was destined to go against foes. Then the protector of earls commanded eight horses with gold-plated bridles to be led into the hall, into the house; on one of them lay a saddle artfully adorned with gold, decked with costly ornament. That was the

war-seat of the noble king, when the son of Healfdene was minded to practise sword-play. Never did the bravery of the far-famed man fail in the van when corpses were falling. Then the protector of the friends of Ing gave power over both to Beowulf, over horses and weapons; he bade him use them well. Thus manfully did the famous prince, the treasure-keeper of heroes, reward the rushes of battle with steeds and rich stores, so that he who wishes to speak truth in seemly fashion will never scoff at them.

Lines 1020–1049 (Section XVI in Gordon [pp46–47], Section XV in other editions)
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at times the king's thane, a man with many tales of exploits, mindful of measures, he who remembered a great number of the old legends, found other words which failed not in truth. The man began again wisely to frame Beowulf's exploit and skilfully to make deft measures, to deal in words.

Lines 867b–873a (Section XIV, p14 in Gordon, Section XIII in other editions)

There was song and music mingled before Healfdene's chieftain; the harp was touched; a measure often recited at such times as it fell to Hrothgar's minstrel to proclaim joy in hall along the mead-bench.

Lines 1063–1068 (Section XVII in Gordon [p41], Section XVI in other editions)
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Then the people of the Geats made ready for him a pyre firm on the ground, hung round with helmets, battle-targes, bright corslets, as he had craved; then the sorrowing men laid in the midst the famous prince, their loved lord. The warriors began to rouse on the barrow the greatest of funeral fires; the wood-reek

mounted up dark above the smoking glow, the crackling flame, mingled with the cry of weeping— the tumult of the winds ceased—until it had consumed the body, hot to the heart. Sad in heart, they lamented the sorrow of their souls, the slaying of their lord; likewise the woman with bound tresses sang a dirge . . . the sky swallowed up the smoke.'

Then the people of the Weders wrought a mound, which was lofty and broad, at the edge of the headland, visible far and wide to seafarers; and in ten days they finished the beacon of the man mighty in battle; the remnant of the pyre they compassed round with a wall, as exceeding wise men might most worthily devise it. They laid on the barrow rings and ornaments, all such adornments as men, eager for combat, had erstwhile taken from the hoard; they let the earth keep the treasure of earls, the gold in the ground, where it yet lies, as useless to men as it was before. Then men bold in battle, sons of chieftains, twelve in all, rode about the mound; they were minded to utter their grief, to lament the king, to make a chant and to speak of the man; they exalted his heroic life and praised his valorous deed with all their strength.

Thus it is fitting that a man should extol his friendly lord in words, should heartily love him, when he must needs depart from his body and pass away. Thus did the men of the Geats, his hearth-companions, bewail the fall of their lord; they said that among the kings of the world he was the mildest of men and most kindly, most gentle to his people and most eager for praise.

Lines 3137–3182, Section XLIII in Gordon [pp117–118], Section XLIII in other editions)
<https://archive.org/stream/songofbeowulfrenOogorduoft#page/116/mode/2up>