



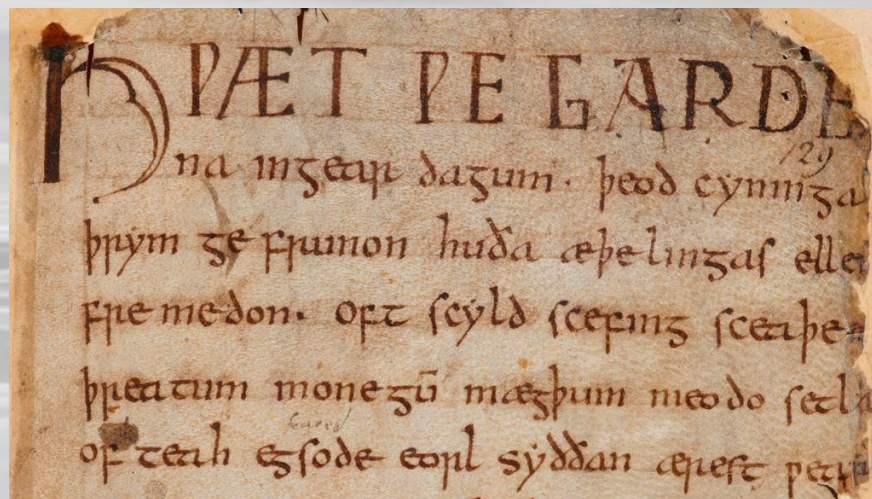
Beowulf





WHAT

- BEOWULF is a **heroic poem**
- The **highest achievement** of Old English
- The longest Old English poem (3,000 lines)
- Only one tenth of the original text survived





WHEN

- The work deals with **events** of the **early 6th century**
- The date of its composition is uncertain
- The poem dates back to the **8th century**





WHO

- Originally untitled
- The poem was later named after the **Scandinavian hero Beowulf**
- There is no evidence of a historical Beowulf





NOMEN OMEN

- The name Beowulf can be split in 2:

1. Beo=bee= honey= Ambrosia

Ambrosia was **the food of gods**, and heroes, in a way, were considered **demigods**

2. wulf=bear=strong

Beowulf is strong and threatening like a bear





Backstory

- In Denmark King Hrothgar has a splendid mead hall known as Heorot
- The joyous noise angers Grendel, an evil monster living in a nearby swamp
- For 12 years the creature:
 1. terrorizes Heorot
 2. carries off Hrothgar's warriors
 3. devours them.





GRENDEL

- Grendel is an **outcast**
 - Descends from the biblical Cain
 - He represents the **moral evil of heathenism**
 - Beowulf's vs Grendel
- =
- Christianity vs heathenism





Grendel & Frankenstein's creature

- They are both outcast
- Emargination makes them:
 1. Evil
 2. Unhappy
 3. Cruel







The arrival of the hero

- Young Beowulf is a prince of the Geats
- He arrives to help the king get rid of the monster
- The king accepts Beowulf's offer
- The king's retainers are jealous
- Grendel at night:
 1. rips open the doors
 2. devours one of the sleeping Geats







A Mortal combat

- Grendel grabs Beowulf, who **refuses to use a weapon**
- Beowulf grips one of Grendel's hands firmly
- Grendel wrenches himself free only when his arm is torn off at the shoulder
- Mortally wounded, Grendel returns to his swamp and dies
- Beowulf then displays the monster's arm in Heorot for all to see









Here comes the mother

- Grendel's mother:
 1. comes to avenge her son's death
 2. kills one of Hrothgar's men
- Beowulf dives into the lake to search for her, and she attacks him
- After a struggle in her dry cave at the lake's bottom, Beowulf kills her with a sword
- In the cave, Beowulf :
 1. discovers Grendel's corpse
 2. cuts off his head
 3. takes the head back to Heorot







Back home

- The Danes rejoice
- Hrothgar makes a farewell speech about the character of **the true hero**
- Beowulf, enriched with honours and princely gifts, returns home to King Hygelac of the Geats







Becoming King

- Hygelac dies in a battle (of historical record)
- His son dies
- Beowulf succeeds him on the throne
- He will rule peacefully for 50 years





The Wyrd (fate)

- A dragon ravages Geatland, as a man steals from its treasure
- Old Beowulf decides to engage it in a fight, despite knowing that he will be likely to die





The End

- All his retainers deserts him except for his young kinsman Wiglaf
- They ultimately kill the venomous dragon, but Beowulf is mortally wounded from a bite in the neck
- Before he dies, he names Wiglaf his successor





The Dragon

- In Christian art the dragon symbolizes **sin** and **paganism**
- It was depicted prostrate beneath the heels of saints and martyrs
- St. Michael is often represented while transfixing a dragon





Fearing for the future

- Beowulf is cremated on a funeral pyre, and his remains are buried in a burial place built by the sea
- His people mourn his death
- They also fear that, without Beowulf, Geatland will be invaded by nearby tribes





1. "For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank
2. *Our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth--*
3. For all of this, that *His grace* has given me,
4. Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
5. Still came to my lips. I sold my life
6. For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take
7. What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people,
8. Help them; my time is gone. Have
9. The brave Geats build me a tomb,
10. When the funeral flames have burned me, and build it
11. Here, at the water's edge, high
12. On this spit of land, so sailors can see
13. This tower, and remember my name, and call it
14. Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness
15. And mist, crossing the sea, will know it.





1. "Then that brave king gave the golden
2. Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf,
3. Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,
4. And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
5. "You're the last of all our far-flung family.
6. Fate has swept our race away,
7. Taken warriors in their strength and led them
8. To the death that was waiting.
9. And now I follow them."
10. The old man's mouth was silent, spoke
11. No more, had said as much as it could;
12. He would sleep in the fire, soon.
13. His soul left his flesh, flew to glory.





Germanic and Christian Values

- The ethical values are Germanic
 1. loyalty to chief and tribe
 2. vengeance to enemies
 3. Fate
- The poem is also infused with a Christian spirit:
 1. Beowulf himself seems more **altruistic** than other Germanic heroes
 2. His three battles are not against men, but against **evil monsters** = **enemies of the whole community** and of civilization itself





A Christian Allegory?

- The poem has been interpreted as a Christian allegory
- Beowulf is the champion of goodness and light who fights the forces of evil and darkness
- His sacrificial death is as befitting the end of a good hero's life





Conclusions

- Through the lines of Beowulf there is a strong feeling of precariousness
- The Germanic world seems to be peopled with monsters
- They represent their fears for the future, which is perceived as scary and uncertain
- In this soil the seed of Christianity blossomed giving hope and comfort

