

# **B E O W U L F**

**A N E W V E R S E T R A N S L A T I O N**

**S E A M U S H E A N E Y**

Sample



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Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum  
þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,  
hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaþena þrēatum,  
monegum mægþum meodo-setla oftēah;  
egsode Eorle, syððan ærest wearð  
fēasceaft funden; hē þæs frōfre gebād;  
wēox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þāh,  
oðþæt him æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra  
ofer hron-rāde hýran scolde,  
gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!

Ðām eafera wæs æfter cenned  
geong in geardum, þone God sende  
folce tō frōfre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat,  
þæt hīe ær drugon aldor-lēase  
lange hwīle; him þæs Lif-frēa,  
wuldres Wealdend, worold-āre forgeaf;  
Bēowulf wæs brēme —blæd wīde sprang—  
Scyldes eafera, Scede-landum in.

Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,  
fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme,  
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by  
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

*The Danes have legends about their warrior kings. The most famous was Shield Sheafson, who founded the ruling house*

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,  
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

10

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,  
the long times and troubles they'd come through  
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:

Beow's name was known through the north.  
And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
giving freely while his father lives  
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts

20

wil-gesīþas, þonne wīg cume,  
lēode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal  
in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.

Him ða Scyld gewāt tō gescæp-hwīle,  
fela-hrōr, fēran on Frēan wære.

Hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,  
swāse gesīþas, swā hē selfa bæd,

30 þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga,  
lēof land-fruma lange āhte.

Þær æt hýðe stōd hringed-stefna,  
īsig ond üt-fūs, æþelinges fær;

ālēdon þā lēofne þeoden,

bēaga bryttan on bearm scipes,  
mārne be mæste; þær wæs mādma fela  
of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelæded.

Ne hýrde ic cýmlīcor cēol gegyrwan  
hilde-wæpnum ond heaðo-wædum,

40 billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg  
mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon  
on flōdes æht feor gewītan.

Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,  
þeod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,  
þe hine æt frumsceafta forð onsendon  
æne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.

Þā gýt hī him āsetton segend gyldenne  
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,  
gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs geōmor sefa,

50 murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon

secgan tō sōðe, sele-rædende,

hæleð under heofenum, hwā þām hlæste onfēng.

Ðā wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga,

steadfast companions will stand by him  
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired  
is the path to power among people everywhere.

*Shield's funeral*

Shield was still thriving when his time came  
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them  
when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
30 they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,  
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,  
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.  
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
laid out by the mast, amidships,  
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
I never heard before of a ship so well furnished  
with battle tackle, bladed weapons  
40 and coats of mail. The massed treasure  
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
on out into the ocean's sway.  
They decked his body no less bountifully  
with offerings than those first ones did  
who cast him away when he was a child  
and launched him alone out over the waves.  
And they set a gold standard up  
high above his head and let him drift  
to wind and tide, bewailing him  
50 and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.