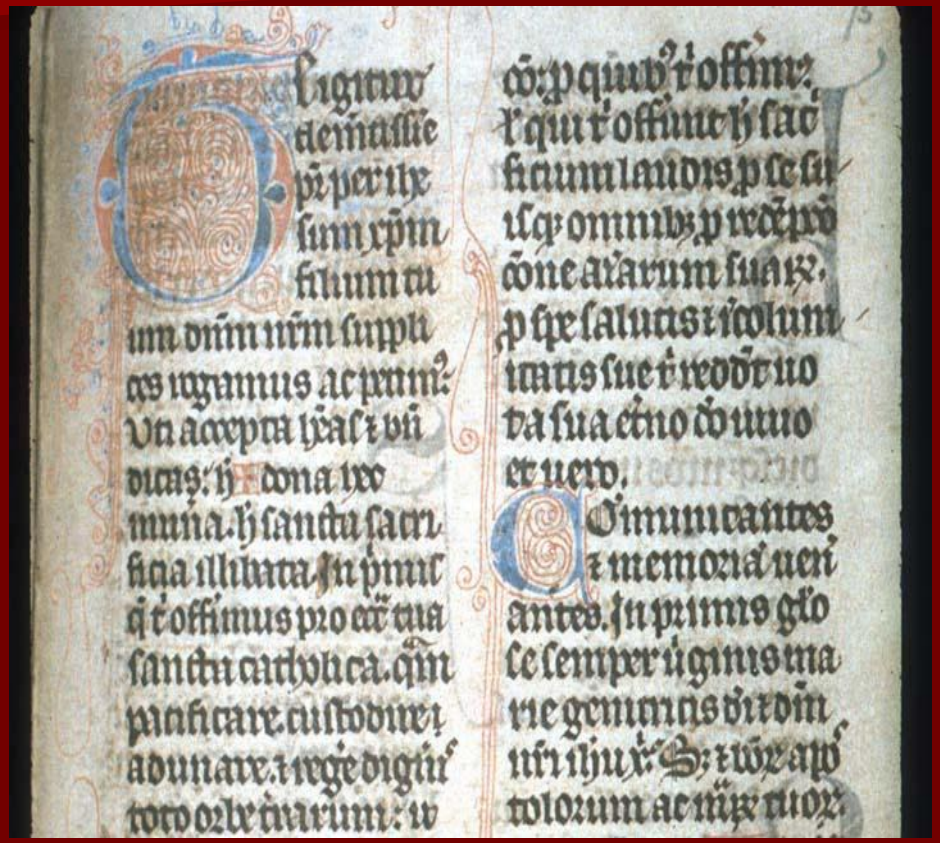
OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE



DONE by KIREEVA O.A.

BEOWULF







BEOWULF

Beowulf was written in Anglo-Saxon (Old English), the language which, through the centuries, has developed into the English language we know today. As Anglo-Saxon is like a foreign language even to a native speaker of English, the extracts you are going to read have been translated into modern English. The translation by Francis Gunmere (published in 1910) closely follows the original text and maintains some of its stylistic features.

BEOWULF





The story

Hrothgar, king of Denmark, suffered while his kingdom was being attacked by a devouring monster, named Grendel.

BEOWULF





He lived in the wastelands, and every night he visited Hrothgar's hall carrying off and killing his guests.

BEOWULF





Beowulf lived in the nearby kingdom of Geatland. From a very early age he showed signs of great strength and extraordinary courage. He killed many sea monsters and defended his country from enemy attacks.

BEOWULF





When he heard from mariners of Grendel's murderous attacks, he decided to help Hrothgar. He and some of his bravest followers crossed the sea to Denmark where they were welcomed by the king.

BEOWULF





A big feast was held in their honour. That night everybody slept except Beowulf. Grendel entered Hrothgar's hall and killed one of Beowulf's sleeping men.

BEOWULF





Beowulf, unarmed, fought the monster and with his great strength tore out one of Grendel's arms at the shoulder. Mortally wounded, Grendel retreated to his home in the surrounding wastelands.

BEOWULF





Grendel's mother came to avenge her monster son's fatal injury and carried off a Danish nobleman and Grendel's torn off arm.

BEOWULF





Beowulf and his men followed the blood trail left by the arm and came to the lake where Grendel's mother had taken refuge. Beowulf plunged into the lake and swam into a chamber.

BEOWULF





He fought Grendel's mother, killing her with an old sword he found in an underwater cavern. Grendel's body was also lying in the cavern so Beowulf cut off his head and brought it back to King Hrothgar.

BEOWULF





There was a great feast in the hall to celebrate Beowulf's victory and an even greater celebration when he returned to his home country, where he was made king.

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

Alliteration

Now many an earl
of **B**eowulf **b**randished **b**lade ancestral



One of the most important stylistic elements of Anglo-Saxon poetry is alliteration. Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning or in the middle of two or more words.

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

Anglo-Saxon poetry was recited, often accompanied by music, in front of an audience. Alliteration gave the language a musical quality. It also played the same role as rhyme in later poetry; it helped the poet and the audience to memorise the poem.

Task Underline other examples of alliteration in Text B1.



BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

- What did Beowulf's followers try to do?
- What did they not know about the monster?
- What evil deeds had Grendel done in the the past?
- What part of Grendel's body did Beowulf wound?
- Where did Grendel go after was injured?
- Did Grendel know he was going to die?



BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

ANALYSIS

1 Find expressions in Text B1 that are used to avoid the repetition of frequently recurring terms.

line 4 line 20 line 1-2
line 6 line 5 line 8
line 10 line 22 line 2
line 8 line 9

- Beowulf
- Beowulf's followers
- Grendel
- sword



BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

2 ***Rhythm**** is an important stylistic element in poetry throughout all ages including the Anglo-Saxon period. The Gunmere translation you are reading tries to maintain some of the original rhythmic elements.



Listen again to the recording as you read the following extract (the stressed syllables are in bold type). Are the lines rhythmic?

Soon he **found**, who in **for**mer **days**,

harmful in **heart** and **hat**ed of **God**,

on **man**y a **man** such **mur**der **wrought**

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

3 A feature which regulated the rhythm of Anglo-Saxon poetry is the pause or *caesura*.* In original transcripts of the poem this is marked by a space while in the Gunmere translation it is represented by a comma.

Tha come of more under misthleotiim

then came from the moor, under the mist-hills

Grendel gongan Godes yrre baer

Grendel stalking, he bore God's anger.

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL



Find examples of lines in Text B1 where Gunmere has tried to reproduce the original caesura by dividing the line with a comma, colon, semi-colon or full stop.

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

«Beowulf» is an epic poem. The epic is a long narrative poem presented in elevated style which deals with heroic deeds of the character who is noble or supernatural. Here are some features of the epic:

- The central character is heroic.
- The action deals with the fate of a community or the whole humanity.
- Gods help one side or the other.
- The story begins "in the middle of things" - at a critical point of the action.

BEOWULF mortally wounds GRENDEL

Some more features of the epic:

- The style of language is noble.
- Characters pronounce long speeches.

Written task Read «Beowulf mortally wounds Grendel» and explain why it is an epic poem (give examples from the text to prove each point).



BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

COMPREHENSION

- Who made the sword that Beowulf found?
- Why had other men been unable to carry it into battle?
- Which part of Grendel's mother's body did Beowulf strike?
- What happened that made it possible for Beowulf to see the body of Grendel in the cave?
- Why did Beowulf want to take further revenge on Grendel?
- How many of Hrothgar's men had Grendel killed?
- Was Grendel still alive at this point?
- How did Beowulf mutilate the monster's body?

BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

ANALYSIS

- Find examples of alliteration in the text.
- Weapons were an essential part of life in the Historical period in which *Beowulf* is set. Only men who belonged to the higher classes of society could possess a weapon. Slaves and servants were not allowed to have them. They were often personalized with names and handed down from generation to generation.
- Find evidence in the text to suggest that weapons were highly valued by Anglo-Saxon society.

BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

Formulae and **Kennings**

- Another feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry is the formulae. These were widely used compound nouns or short phrases that were synonyms for often repeated words like 'ship', 'sea', 'king' or names.
- As the poems were often composed on the spot about a recent event, formulae gave the poet time to think.

BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

Formulae and **Kennings**

The word 'king' for example could be replaced by:

beaga brytta = the ring giver

sinces brytta = the treasure giver

freowine = a gracious friend



BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

Task 1 What expressions are used in Text B2 to avoid the repetition of:

- **Beowulf:** line 7; line 18; line 29
- **Grendel's mother:** line 12
- **sword:** line 1; line 3

Formulae are not simply synonyms, as each of them stressed a different aspect of the thing described.

BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

Task 2 Look at both the texts you have read so far. Make a list of the formulae you have found for Beowulf. What characteristics of the hero do they emphasize?

The most unusual formulae are known as kennings. These are metaphorical phrases that are used instead of a noun. For example, a ship was a 'sea-wood' or a 'wave-floater', a body was 'bone-house' and blood was 'war-sweat'.

BEOWULF kills Grendel's mother

Task 3 Find a kenning in the texts you have read for:

- body (Text B1, line 25):
  .....
- sun (Text B2, line 16):
  .....




BEOWULF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