

**Beowulf 1492-1540:** Beowulf dives into the monsters' lake

The three texts in this document are (a) MS Cott. Vitellius A.XII, (b) *Bjólfskviða*, Halldóra B. Björnsson íslenskaði (Reykjavík: Fjölvi 1983), (c) *Beowulf*, Translated by Seamus Heaney (Faber 1999)

(a)

Æfter þæm wordum Wedergeata leod  
efste mid elne, nalas ondsware  
bidan wolde; brimwylm onfeng  
1495 hilderince. ða wæs hwil dæges  
ær he þone grundwong ongytan mehte.  
Sona þæt onfunde se ðe floda begong  
heorogifre beheold hund missera,  
grim ond grædig, þæt þær gumena sum  
1500 ælwihta eard ufan cunnode.  
Grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng  
atolan clommum. No þy ær in gescod  
halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh,  
þæt heo þone fyrðhom ðurhfon ne mihte,  
1505 locene leoðosyrca lapan fingrum.  
Bær þa seo brimwylf, þa heo to botme com,  
hringa þengel to hofe sinum,  
swa he ne mihte, no he þæs modig wæs,  
wæpna gewealdan, ac hine wundra þæs fela  
1510 swencte on sunde, sædeor monig  
hildetuxum heresyrcan bræc,  
ehton aglæcan. ða se eorl ongeat  
þæt he in niðsele nathwylcum wæs,  
þær him nænig wæter wihte ne sceþede,  
1515 ne him for hrofsele hrinan ne mehte  
færgripe flodes; fyrleoht geseah,  
blacne leoman, beorhte scinan.  
Ongeat þa se goda grundwyrgegne,  
merewif mihtig; mægenræs forgeaf  
1520 hildebille, hond sweng ne ofteah,  
þæt hire on hafelan hringmæl  
agol grædig guðleoð. ða se gist onfand  
þæt se beadoleoma bitan nolde,  
aldre sceþðan, ac seo ecg geswac  
1525 ðeodne æt þearfe; ðolode ær fela  
hondgemota, helm oft gescær,  
fæges fyrðhrægl; ða wæs forma sið  
deorum madme, þæt his dom alæg.  
Eft wæs anræd, nalas elnes læt,  
1530 mærdða gemyndig mæg Hylaces.  
Wearp ða wundenmæl wrættum gebunden  
yrre oretta, þæt hit on eorðan læg,  
stið ond stylecg; strenge getruwode,  
mundgripe mægenes. Swa sceal man don,  
1535 þonne he æt guðe gegan þenceð  
longsumne lof, na ymb his lif cearað.

Gefeng þa be eaxle    nalas for fæhðe mearn  
Guðgeata leod    Grendles modor;  
brægd þa beadwe heard,    þa he gebolgen wæs,  
1540 feorhgeniðlan,    þæt heo on flet gebeah.

**(b)**

Að töluðum orðum    tók Veðrar-Gauti  
fljótur til fóta,    fékk hann eigi  
andsvara biðið;    öldur gripu  
1495 horskan hildirekk.    Heillengi dags  
leið áður liti    lagarbotn.  
Fann það fljótlega    sú er flæðagöng  
herská vaktaði    hundrað missera,  
grimm og gráðug,    að gumi mennskur  
1500 undirheim óvætta    ofan kannaði.  
Greið þá gráðug    gunnrekk móti  
ötulum klóm,    ei mátti þó skaða  
hraustan líkama,    hringserkur barg,  
hún ei þá brynju    brjóta mætti,  
1505 lokinn limserk    leiðum fingrum.  
Bar þá sæylgur    er hún botni náði,  
hringapengil    til heima sinna,  
mátti hann vart    - þó móðugur væri -  
vopnum valda,    er viðundur mörg  
1510 sótti að í sundi,    sædýra fjöld  
hvössum vígtönnum    hjørserk nístu,  
eltu hann óvættir.    Eigi duldist  
að hann í nauðsal    nokkrum var staddur,  
hvar hann vatn eigi    væta mátti,            [vann að skaða,  
1515 því að þak skýldi    fyrir þungum bylgjum  
og sjávarsogum.    Sá hann eld brenna,  
bleikan loga    bjartan skína.  
Þekkti þá inn góði    grunnvargynju  
maravíf mektugt.    Magnlega hjó  
1520 hildibíldi,    hönd fylgdi eftir,  
henni um höfuð    hringvölur gól  
grimmúðug gunnljóð.    En það gestur fann  
að böðljómi    beit honum eigi  
til aldurskaða,    því egginn sveik  
1525 í þraut þungri;    þoldi áður margt  
á handmótum,    hjálmastí,            hjálmastí,  
feigra verjur;    það var fyrsta sinn  
að dýr málmur    dugði eigi.  
Úrræði fann    og eigi hikaði  
1530 frægðar minnugur    frændi Hagleiks:  
Varp undaveli    vænlegum grip  
fokreiður halur,    á foldu lá [halur fokreiður  
stálegg stinn;    styrkleika treysti,  
máttugum handtökum.    Svo skal maður gera,  
1535 sá er í stríði    stundar að vinna

lofstír langæan; né um líf sitt hirðir.  
Greip þá í bægsli - glímdi ósmeykur -  
Gautaleiðtogi Grendils móður;  
brá þá böðharður, - brími var í skapi -  
1540 fordæðuflagði, uns á fleti hún lá.

(c)

After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly: without more ado, he dived into the heaving depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day before he could see the solid bottom.

Quickly the one who haunted those waters, who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds for a hundred seasons, sensed a human observing her outlandish lair from above. So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him in her brutal grip; but his body, for all that, remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail saved him on the outside. Her savage talons failed to rip the web of his war-shirt. Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish swimmer carried the ring-mailed prince to her court so that for all his courage he could never use the weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail in a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole and yet the water did not work against him because the hall-roofing held off

the force of the current; then he saw firelight,  
a gleam and flare-up, a glimmer of brightness.

The hero observed that swamp-thing from hell,  
the tarn-hag in all her terrible strength,  
then heaved his war-sword and swung his arm:  
the decorated blade came down ringing  
and singing on her head. But he soon found  
his battle-torch extinguished: the shining blade  
refused to bite. It spared her and failed  
the man in his need. It had gone through many  
a hand-to-hand fight, had hewed the armour  
and helmets of the doomed, but here at last  
the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.

Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about  
his name and fame: he never lost heart.  
Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away.  
The keen, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel  
was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely  
on the might of his arm. So must a man do  
who intends to gain enduring glory  
in a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought.  
Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight  
with Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder  
and laid about him in a battle frenzy:  
he pitched his killer opponent to the floor  
but she rose quickly and retaliated,  
grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.  
The sure-footed fighter felt suddenly daunted,  
the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.  
So she pounced upon him and pulled out  
a broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge  
her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail  
on Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,  
turned the edge and tip of the blade.