

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"Accomplish[es] what before now had seemed impossible:
a powerful rendering that is simultaneously an original and gripping poem
in its own right." — *New York Times Book Review*

ed toward the end of the first millennium of our era, *Beowulf* is the
narrative of the adventures of Beowulf, a Scandinavian hero who saves
es from the seemingly invincible monster Grendel and, later, from
s mother. He then returns to his own country and dies in old age in a
nt against a dragon.

The poem is about encountering the monstrous, defeating it, and
ving to live on in the exhausted aftermath. In the contours of this story,
remote and uncannily familiar at the beginning of the twenty-first
Seamus Heaney finds a resonance that summons power to the
om deep beneath its surface.

Drawn to what he has called the "four-squareness of the utterance" in
and its immense emotional credibility, Heaney gives these epic
new and convincing reality for the contemporary reader.

Heaney received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. A resident of
e taught regularly at Harvard University. His many volumes of poetry
Death of a Naturalist, *Opened Ground*, and *Human Chain*.

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BEOWULF



SEAMUS HEANEY

A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION BY



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BILINGUAL EDITION



"[HEANEY] HAS MADE A MASTERPIECE OUT OF A MASTERPIECE"
—ANDREW MOTON, *THE FINANCIAL TIMES*

þāra þe mid Bēowulfe brim-lāde tēah,
 on þære medu-bence mǣþðum gesealde,
 yrfe-lāfe, ond þone ænne heht
 golde forgyldan, þone ðe Grendel ær
 mǣne ācwealde, swā hē hyra mā wolde,
 nefne him wītig God wyrd forstōde
 ond ðæs mannes mōd. Metod eallum wēold
 gumena cynnes, swā hē nū gīt dēð.
 Forþan bið andgit æghwær sēlest,
 ferhðes fore-þanc. Fela sceal gebīdan
 lēofes ond lāpes, sē þe longe hēr
 on ðyssum win-dagum worolde brūceð.

Þær wæs sang ond swēg samod ætgædere
 fore Healfdenes hilde-wīsan,
 gomen-wudu grēted, gid oft wrecen,
 ðonne heal-gamen Hrōpgāres scop
 æfter medo-bence mǣnan scolde:—
 Finnes eaferum, ðā hīe se fār begeat,
 hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga,
 in Frēs-wæle feallan scolde.

Nē hūru Hildeburh herian porfte
 eotena trēowe; unsynnum wearð
 beloren lēofum æt þām lind-plegan
 bearnum ond brōðrum; hīe on gebyrd hruron
 gāre wunde; þæt wæs geōmuru ides.

and risked the voyage received a bounty,
 some treasured possession. And compensation,
 a price in gold, was settled for the Geat
 Grendel had cruelly killed earlier—
 as he would have killed more, had not mindful God
 and one man's daring prevented that doom.
 Past and present, God's will prevails.
 Hence, understanding is always best
 and a prudent mind. Whoever remains
 for long here in this earthly life
 will enjoy and endure more than enough.

They sang then and played to please the hero,
 words and music for their warrior prince,
 harp tunes and tales of adventure:
 there were high times on the hall benches
 and the king's poet performed his part
 with the saga of Finn and his sons, unfolding
 the tale of the fierce attack in Friesland
 where Hnaef, king of the Danes, met death.

Hildeburh

*had little cause
 to credit the Jutes:
 son and brother,
 she lost them both
 on the battlefield.*
*She, bereft
 and blameless, they
 foredoomed, cut down
 and spear-gored. She,
 the woman in shock,
 waylaid by grief,*

*Another performance
 by the minstrel*

*Hildeburh, a Danish
 princess married to
 the Frisian King
 Finn, loses her son
 (unnamed here) and
 her brother Hnaef in
 a fight at Finn's hall*

Nalles hōlinga Hōces dohtor
 meotodsceaft bemearn, syþðan morgen cōm,
 1080 ðā hēo under swegle gesēon meahte
 morþor-bealo māga, þær hēo ær mæste hēold
 worolde wyne. Wīg ealle fornam
 Finnes þegnas, nemne fēaum ānum,
 þæt hē ne mehte on þām meðel-stede
 wīg Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,
 nē þā wēa-lāfe wīge forþringan,
 þēodnes ðegne; ac hig him geþingo budon,
 þæt hīe him oðer flet eal gerȳmdon,
 healle ond hēah-setl, þæt hīe healfre geweald
 wið eotena bearn āgan mōston,
 1090 ond æt feoh-gyftum Folcwaldan sunu
 dōgra gehwylce Dene weorþode,
 Hengestes hēap hringum wenede
 efne swā swīðe, sinc-gestrēonum

Hoc's daughter —
 how could she not
 lament her fate
 when morning came
 and the light broke
 on her murdered dears?
 And so farewell
 delight on earth,
 1080 war carried away
 Finn's troop of thanes,
 all but a few.
 How then could Finn
 hold the line
 or fight on
 to the end with Hengest,
 how save
 the rump of his force
 from that enemy chief?
 So a truce was offered
 as follows: first
 separate quarters
 to be cleared for the Danes,
 hall and throne
 to be shared with the Frisians.
 Then, second:
 every day
 at the dole-out of gifts
 Finn, son of Focwald,
 1090 should honour the Danes,
 bestow with an even
 hand to Hengest
 and Hengest's men
 the wrought-gold rings,

The Danish attack is
 bloody but
 indecisive. Hnaef is
 killed, Hengest takes
 charge and makes a
 truce with Finn and
 the Frisians

fættan goldes, swā hē Frēsena cyn
on bēor-sele byldan wolde.
Ðā hīe getruwedon on twā healfa
fæste frioðu-wære. Fin Hengeste
elne unflitme āðum benemde
þæt hē þā wēa-lāfe weotena dōme
ārum hēolde, þæt ðær ænig mon
wordum nē worcum wære ne brāce,
nē þurh inwit-searo æfre gemāenden,
ðeah hīe hira bēag-gyfan banan folgedon
ðēoden-lēase, þā him swā geþearfod wæs;
gyf þonne Frýsna hwylc frēcnen sprāce
ðæs morþor-hetes myndgiend wære,
þonne hit sweordes ecg syððan scolde.
 Åð wæs geæfned, ond icge gold
āhæfen of horde: Here-Scyldinga

1100

bounty to match
the measure he gave
his own Frisians —
to keep morale
in the beer-hall high.
Both sides then
sealed their agreement.
With oaths to Hengest
Finn swore
openly, solemnly,
that the battle survivors
would be guaranteed
honour and status.
No infringement
by word or deed,
no provocation
would be permitted.
Their own ring-giver
after all
was dead and gone,
they were leaderless,
in forced allegiance
to his murderer.
So if any Frisian
stirred up bad blood
with insinuations
or taunts about this,
the blade of the sword
would arbitrate it.
A funeral pyre
was then prepared,
effulgent gold
brought out from the hoard.

1100

The Danish
survivors to be
quartered and given
parity of treatment
with the Frisians
and their allies, the
Jutes

The bodies of the
slain burnt on the
pyre

1110

betst beado-rinca wæs on bæl gearu.
 Æt þæm āde wæs ēþ-gesýne
 swāt-fāh syrce, swȳn eal-gylden,
 eofer īren-heard, æþeling manig
 wundum āwyrdd; sume on wæle crungon.

1120

Hēt ðā Hildeburh æt Hnæfes āde
 hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan,
 bān-fatu bærnān ond on bæl dōn.
 Earme on eaxle ides gnornode,
 geōmrode giddum. Gūð-rinc āstāh;
 wand tō wolcnum wæl-fȳra mæst,
 hlynode for hlāwe; hafelan multon,
 bēn-geato burston, ðonne blōd ætspranc,
 lāð-bite lices. Līg ealle forswealg,
 gæsta gifrost, þāra ðe þær gūð fornam
 bēga folces; wæs hira blæd scacen.

1110

The pride and prince
 of the Shieldings lay
 awaiting the flame.

Everywhere
 there were blood-plastered
 coats of mail.

The pyre was heaped
 with boar-shaped helmets
 forged in gold,
 with the gashed corpses
 of well-born Danes—
 many had fallen.

Then Hildeburh
 ordered her own
 son's body
 be burnt with Hnaef's,
 the flesh on his bones
 to sputter and blaze
 beside his uncle's.

The woman wailed
 and sang keens,
 the warrior went up.

1120

Carcass flame
 swirled and fumed,
 they stood round the burial
 mound and howled
 as heads melted,
 crusted gashes
 spattered and ran
 bloody matter.

The glutton element
 flamed and consumed
 the dead of both sides.

Gewiton him ðā wīgend wīca nēosian
 frēondum befeallen, Frȳs-land gesēon,
 hāmas ond hēa-burh. Hengest ðā gýt
 wæl-fāgne winter wunode mid Finne
 eal unhlitme; eard gemunde,
 1130 þēah þe ne meahte on mere drīfan
 hringed-stefnan; holm storme wēol,
 won wið winde; winter ype belēac
 īs-gebinde, opðæt oþer cōm
 gēar in geardas, swā nū gýt dēð,
 þā ðe syngāles sēle bewitiað,
 wuldor-torhtan weder. Ðā wæs winter scacen,
 fāger foldan bearm; fundode wrecca,
 gist of geardum; hē tō gyrn-wræce
 1140 swīðor þōhte þonne tō sǣ-lāde,
 gif hē torn-gemōt þurhtēon mihte,
 þæt hē eotena bearm inne gemunde.

Their great days were gone.
 Warriors scattered
 to homes and forts
 all over Friesland,
 fewer now, feeling
 loss of friends.
 Hengest stayed,
 lived out that whole
 resentful, blood-sullen
 1130 winter with Finn,
 homesick and helpless.
 No ring-whorled prow
 could up then
 and away on the sea.
 Wind and water
 raged with storms,
 wave and shingle
 were shackled in ice
 until another year
 appeared in the yard
 as it does to this day,
 the seasons constant,
 the wonder of light
 coming over us.
 Then winter was gone,
 earth's lap grew lovely,
 longing woke
 in the cooped-up exile
 for a voyage home —
 1140 but more for vengeance,
 some way of bringing
 things to a head:
 his sword arm hankered

The Danes, homesick
 and resentful, spend
 a winter in exile

Spring comes

Swā hē ne forwyrnde worold-rædenne,
 þonne him Hūnlāfing hilde-lēoman,
 billa sēlest, on bearm dyde,
 þæs wæron mid eotenum ecge cūðe.
 Swylce ferhð-frecan Fin eft begeat
 sweord-bealo slīðen æt his selfes hām,
 siþðan grimne gripe Gūðlāf ond Ōslāf
 æfter sǣ-sīðe sorge mǣndon,
 1150 ætwiton wēana dæl; ne meahte wǣfre mōd
 forhabban in hrepre. Ðā wæs heal roden
 fēonda fēorum, swilce Fin slāgen,
 cyning on corpre, ond sēo cwēn numen.
 Scēotend Scyldinga tō scypon feredon
 eal in-gesteald eorð-cyninges,
 swylce hīe æt Finnes hām findan meahton
 sigla, searo-gimma. Hīe on sǣ-lāde
 drihtlice wif tō Denum feredon,
 læddon tō lēodum.

to greet the Jutes.

So he did not balk

once Hunlafing

placed on his lap

Dazzle-the-Duel,

the best sword of all,

whose edges Jutes

knew only too well.

Thus blood was spilled,

the gallant Finn

slain in his home

after Guthlaf and Oslaf

back from their voyage

made old accusation:

the brutal ambush,

the fate they had suffered,

1150 all blamed on Finn.

The wildness in them

had to brim over.

The hall ran red

with blood of enemies.

Finn was cut down,

the queen brought away

and everything

the Shieldings could find

inside Finn's walls—

the Frisian king's

gold collars and gemstones—

swept off to the ship.

Over sea-lanes then

back to Daneland

the warrior troop

bore that lady home.

Danish warriors
 spur themselves to
 renew the feud. Finn
 is killed, his
 stronghold looted,
 his widow,
 Hildeburh, carried
 back to Denmark