



English 313—In Search of *Beowulf*: Fact, Fiction, & Fantasy



Beowulf Language Exercise 1

Old English Text¹

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feasceft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gylðan. þæt wæs god cyning!

(Beowulf, ll. 1-11)

Modern English Transliteration²

Lo! We of the Spear-Danes in bygone days,
of the folk-kings, the glory have heard,
how those princes courage(ous deeds) performed.
Often Scyld, Scaef's progeny from bands of enemies
from many nations of mead-benches deprived,
terrified warriors. After first he was
found destitute, he experienced consolation for that,
he waxed under the welkin, prospered with honors,
until to him each of the neighboring peoples
across the whale-road obey had to,
and yield tribute. That was a good king!

1. Note how the transliteration highlights the structural and grammatical differences between Old English and Modern English. Take special notice of how word order in Modern English is often used to show grammatical relationships among words which might be otherwise indicated in Old English.

¹ All Old English text for *Beowulf* language exercises is drawn from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (ASPR) series: Dobbie, Elliott Van Kirk. *Beowulf and Judith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953.

² All Modern English translations and transliterations are by Christopher R. Fee

2. Underline the subject of each sentence in the Modern English text; find and underline the Old English equivalents.
3. Circle the verb of each sentence in the Modern English text; find and circle the Old English equivalents.
4. Highlight elements of noun phrases (articles, adjectives, etc.) associated with the subject of each sentence in the Modern English text; find and highlight the Old English equivalents.
5. What might this passage emphasize concerning the Beowulf poet's concept of Anglo-Saxon cultural values? How does the specific language involved serve to underscore such concepts?