



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



### Beowulf Language Exercise 6

#### Old English Text<sup>1</sup>

He gefeng þa fetelhilt,      freca Scyldinga  
hreoh ond heorogrim      hringmæl gebrægd,  
aldres orwena,      yrringa sloh,  
þæt hire wið halse      heard grapode,  
banhringas bræc.      Bil eal ðurhwod  
fægne flæschoman;      heo on flet gecrong.  
Sweord wæs swatig,      secg weorce gefeh.  
Lixte se leoma,      leoht inne stod,  
efne swa of hefene      hadre scineð  
rodores candel.      He æfter recede wlat;  
hwearf þa be wealle,      wæpen hafenade  
heard be hiltum      Higelaces ðegn,  
yrre ond anræd.      Næs seo ecg fracod  
hilderince,      ac he hraþe wolde  
Grendle forgyldan      guðræsa fela  
ðara þe he geworhte      to Westdenum  
oftor micle      ðonne on ænne sið,  
þonne he Hroðgares      heorðgeneatas  
sloh on sweofote,      slæpende fræt  
folces Denigea      fyftyne men  
ond oðer swylc      ut offerede,  
laðlicu lac.      He him þæs lean forgeald,  
repe cempa,      to ðæs þe he on ræste geseah  
guðwerigne      Grendel licgan  
aldorleasne,      swa him ær gescod  
hild æt Heorote.      Hra wide sprong,  
syþðan he æfter deaðe      drepe þrowade,  
heorosweng heardne,      ond hine þa heafde becearf.

(*Beowulf*, ll. 1563-1590)

#### Modern English Transliteration<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> All Modern English translations and transliterations are by Christopher R. Fee

He seized those belted hilts, warrior of the Scyldings,  
 fierce and deadly-grim, ring-patterned-blade drew,  
 of life without hope, angrily struck  
 so that her on the neck (the) hard (weapon) caught,  
 bone-rings broke. [Complete this transliteration.]

1. Note how the above transliteration of the first sentence 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.
2. Offer your own transliteration of the rest of the passage, making editorial choices as necessary, but trying insofar as possible to offer a word-for-word rendering which is as faithful as possible to the original language.
3. Using the below examples from the first sentence as your guide, parse out each clause of the remainder of the Old English passage, ensuring that you know the part of speech and function of each word, and how the words work together in the sentence. Don't worry if you can't find every bit of information for every word; just do your best! The point is to start thinking about how these structures function in Old English. Eventually one begins to recognize common forms. Use the transliteration to help you in this task; if necessary, diagram the Modern English sentences as you did last week in order to determine the function of each Old English word. Start to rely more heavily, however, on the glossary in the back of Jack's edition of the poem, as well as on Jack's footnotes and marginal glosses. If you take your time and work carefully, you will begin to understand how the forms of the words can guide you in your understanding of Old English syntax and grammar.
4. Offer your own smooth and idiomatically correct Modern English translation of this passage; this translation may certainly draw upon the work of earlier translators and editors, but it should reflect your own reading of the passage, your editorial choices, and your sense of the significance and relevance of those choices to the passage as a whole and indeed to the poem. Be prepared to defend your choices.
5. For the rest of the term, you should treat each assigned passage in Jack as you have in this exercise: Offer a precise, word-for-word transliteration, parse out each term as fully as possible, and offer a smooth and idiomatically correct Modern English translation which reflects accurately your editorial choices.

He: He

(MNS 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Personal Pronoun)

gefeng: seized

(Preterite 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of gefon, which takes an accusative object: to seize, to grasp)

þa: those

(NAP Demonstrative Pronoun)

fetelhilt: belted-hilts, linked-hilts, ringed-hilts

(NAP Noun often read as singular: "those belted hilts" might thus be rendered "that belted hilt")

freca: warrior

(MNS Noun)

Scyldinga: of the Scyldings

(MGP Noun)

hreoh: fierce

(MNS Adjective)

ond: and

(Conjunction)

heorogrim: deadly-grim

(MNS Adjective)

hringmæl: ring-patterned(-blade)

(NAS Adjective used as Substantive Noun)

gebrægd: drew

(Preterite 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of Class 3 Strong Verb gebregdan, to draw)

aldres: of life

(NGS noun aldor=ealdor)

orwena: without hope(of)

(MNS Weak Adjective with Genitive: despairing of, without hope of)

yrringa: angrily

(Adverb)

sloh: struck

(Preterite 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of Class 6 Strong Verb slean, to strike)

þæt: (so) that

(Conjunction expressing result)

hire: her

(FDS 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Personal Pronoun)

wið: on, against

(Preposition )

halse: neck

(MDS Noun; see heals, “neck”)

heard: hard (weapon)

(NNS Adjective used as Substantive Noun)

grapode: caught

(Preterite 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of Class 2 Weak Verb grapian, to grasp, to catch)

banhringas: bone-rings

(MAP Noun)

bræc: broke

(Preterite 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of Class 4 Strong Verb brecan, to break)