

Beowulf Notes

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Plot

Introduction & Omissions

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic poem, probably written at some point between the 6th and 8th centuries and set in 6th century Denmark. The original is some 3000 lines long, and is written in a primarily West Saxon (IE from Wessex) dialect of Old English.

To adapt such a poem for the stage requires a good deal of changes to be made to the script, changes which are detailed in the accompanying document 'Beowulf - Additions and Omissions'. This document aims to provide a set of 'director's notes' to accompany the script, linking the actions in the script with the passages describing them and providing hints or explanations of details.

Notation

Parts of the play are referenced by their scene, while lines from the poem are numbered from the Michael Alexander translation rather than the original.

Act 1: Grendel

The poem opens with a story about Scyld Shefing, founder of the royal house of the Spear-Danes, of which *Hrothgar* is a member. *The Bard* goes through much of the back story of the Sylding dynasty, the building of Heorot and introduces Grendel and Beowulf before the play proper begins.

The introduction is taken almost verbatim from the poem, merely missing out sections for brevity; such as the passage describing Scyld's burial.

While most of the contemporary audience would have been familiar with the story described (hence the Bard's use of the phrase 'you have heard'), it serves as a useful introduction to the culture for a modern audience.

The play itself opens with *Beowulf's* arrival at Heorot (his departure from Geatland and subsequent arrival in Denmark having been narrated, while his conversation with the lookout has been omitted).

Act 2: Grendel's Mother

Beowulf kills Grendel's Mother.

Act 3: The Dragon

Beowulf kills the dragon, but in the process is himself killed.