

# Beowulf - Additions & Omissions

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## Introduction

### Overview

While adapting Michael Alexander's verse translation into a play; I realised that it would be necessary to cut or change a substantial amount of the play. This document aims to explain what was changed, and why.

A poem, by its very nature, has fewer limitations than a stage play. One of these is the ability to gloss over actions or dialogue that in a play must be performed in their entirety. For all of these instances, I have been forced to write dialogue to fill the gaps suggested by the poet. I have tried my best to match the style of the original, and have noted in this document every insertion.

Likewise, poems can contain elements that would be difficult to stage, or severely disrupt the flow of the plot. For the former I have employed the device of a narrator, to describe those events that cannot be staged - for example the journey from Heorot to the Mere. For the latter, I have cut them as much as possible leaving only what is directly relevant to the plot. The account of Scyld Shefing's ship burial has been entirely cut, and the following genealogy reduced to its bare essentials.

Lastly, in a few places I have cut dialogue for brevity. This has been done only in a few scenes, where the character has veered off on a tangent and all dialogue is otherwise faithful to the translation.

The narrator has also been employed to introduce and end scenes, keeping the story moving. I hope that the transition between that which is performed, and that which is narrated will be seamless.

### Notation

Each scene in the play has been given its own section, and within each scene I have listed all the changes which should be easily understandable. Line numbers relate to the line numbers in the *Michael Alexander* translation, not the original.

# **Script - Additions and Omissions**

## **Act 1**

### **Scene 1 - Introduction**

The play opens with a condensed version of the first 324 lines of the poem.

### **Scene 2 - Beowulf's Arrival at Heorot**

There is a bit of a continuity error here - at line 328 the Geats put down their spears and shields. At line 387 Wulfgar tells them to leave their weapons before going to the king. It is unclear whether Wulfgar is telling them to down their weapons, or telling them not to take them up again; since I have omitted the passage which describes them placing them down, I have decided to have the Geats leave their weapons after Wulfgar's instruction.

### **Scene 3 - Feasting and Bragging**

### **Scene 4 - Grendel**

### **Scene 5 - Grendel's Death is Celebrated**

## **Act 2**

### **Scene 1 - Grendel's Mother Attacks Heorot**

### **Scene 2 - The Warriors Take Stock**

### **Scene 3 - Journey to the Mere**

### **Scene 4 - Grendel's Mother**

### **Scene 5 - The Hero Returns**

### **Scene 6 - More Celebrations**

### **Scene 7 - The Geats Take Their Leave**

### **Scene 8 - Return to Hygelac's Court**

## **Interval**

## **Act 3**

### **Scene 1 - The Dragon Awakens**

### **Scene 2 - The Dragon**

### **Scene 3 - Beowulf Dies**

### **Scene 4 - Grief**

The play proper closes with most of lines 2842-3179 of the poem.

Lines 2842-2860 are performed, rather than spoken.

Wiglaf's speech to the cowards (lines 2861-2888) is performed in its entirety, after which the narrator takes over and recites lines 2889-2906, before skipping the poet's predictions of doom for the Geats, which takes up lines 2907- 3003.

The narrator resumes at line 3004, and recites the lines attributed to the messenger up to line 3034. The narration then skips lines 3035-3073 and Wiglaf takes up the story once more.

His speech, covering lines 3074-3106 is included in full, with a brief interjection from the narrator before continuing from lines 3111-3116.

The rest of the play proper, covering lines 3117-3179 of the poem, is entirely narrated without change from the poem.

### **Scene 5 - The Dirge**

Unlike the rest of the text; this scene is performed in the old English, it is sung rather than spoken, and it is taken from a different work.

The song which closes the performance is a fragment of the Old English poem *The Wanderer*.

The original is 119 lines long, and the fragment included covers lines 92-109 inclusive.