

Beowulf Script

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2016

Introduction

Cast

In order of appearance:

The Bard Narrator

Hrothgar King of the Spear-Danes (Scyldings)*

Grendel An evil monster, descendant of Cain*

Beowulf A hero of the Geatish people

Beowulf's companions 14 Geatish thegns*

Wulfgar Hrothgar's Counsellor*

Unferth Hrothgar's spokesman*

Wealhtheow Queen of the Spear-Danes*

Hrethic & Hrothmund Sons of Hrothgar*

Grendel's Mother A monstrous ogress*

Ashhere Hrothgar's Counsellor*

Hygelac King of the Geats**

Hygd Queen of the Geats**

The Dragon A dragon, awakened from its slumber**

A Slave Who awakens the dragon**

Wiglaf Beowulf's faithful companion**

Beowulf's companions 7(?) Geatish thegns**

Of the cast, most of Beowulf's companions can be omitted as required, and those present at the court of Hrothgar (marked with a *) can be doubled up with those present at the court of Hygelac (marked with a **; characters who cannot be doubled up are unmarked). Hrethic & Hrothmund may also be omitted.

Likewise, additional characters may be present at both courts - councillors, warriors and servants.

Most of the minor roles can be played by men or women, as can Grendel, Grendel's Mother, the Dragon (possibly a two person costume) and the Bard.

In total, the play can be performed by anywhere upwards of 10 people, with an ideal number being around 14-20.

Staging

This play works best when some of the character of the mead-hall, for which the original work was composed, is retained. Staging should be minimal and as far as possible abstracted away. No scene changes should be required, but can be suggested by lighting or simple changes of set.

Lighting by open flame is preferred to lighting by electric light.

Structure of the play

Despite the length of the original poem, which runs to over 3000 lines, the play should be able to be performed straight through, without an interval.

If an interval is desired, it should happen after Act II.

The poem itself is loosely organised in three acts, characterised by the three combats Beowulf takes part in; that with Grendel, with Grendel's Mother, and with the Dragon.

Script

Act 1

Scene 1

A mead hall, somewhere in 6th Century Denmark.

The Bard addresses the audience as if they were guests in the mead hall.

The Bard Listen!

We have heard of the thriving of the throne of Denmark,
how the folk-kings flourished in former days,
how those royal athelings earned that glory.

Was it not Scyld Shefing that shook the halls,
took mead-benches, taught encroaching
foes to fear him who, found in childhood,
lacked clothing? Yet he lived and prospered,
grew in strength and stature under the heavens
until the clans settled in the sea-coasts neighbouring
over the whale-road all must obey him
and give tribute. He was a good king!

A boy child was afterwards born to Scyld,
a young child in hall-yard, a hope for the people,
sent them by God
Through the northern lands the name of Beow,
the son of Scyld, sprang widely.

At the hour shaped for him Scyld departed,
the hero crossed into the keeping of his Lord.
Then for a long space there lodged in the stronghold
Beowulf the Dane, dear king of his people,
when late was born to him
the lord Healfdene, lifelong the ruler
and war-feared patriarch of the proud Scyldings.

He next fathered four children
that leapt into the world, this leader of armies,
Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good and Ursula.

Then to Hrothgar was granted glory in battle,
mastery of the field; so friends and kinsmen
gladly obeyed him, and his band increased
to a great company. It came into his mind
that he would command the construction
of a huge mead-hall, a house greater
than men on earth ever had heard of,
and share the gifts God had bestowed on him
upon its floor with folk young and old
apart from public land and the persons of slaves.

Far and wide (as I heard) the work was given out
in many a tribe over middle earth,
the making of the mead-hall. And, as men reckon,
the day of readiness dawned very soon
for this greatest of houses. Heorot he named it
whose word ruled a wide empire.
He made good his boast, gave out rings,
arm-bands at the banquet. Boldly the hall reared
its arched gables; unkindled the torch-flame
that turned it to ashes. The time was not yet
when the blood-feud should bring out again
sword-hatred in sworn kindred.

It was with pain that the powerful spirit
dwelling in darkness endured that time,
hearing daily the hall filled with loud amusement.
Grendel they called this cruel spirit,
the fell and fen his fastness was, the march his haunt.

With the coming of night came Grendel also,
sought the great house and how the Ring-Danes
held their hall when the horn had gone round.
He found in Heorot the force of nobles
slept after supper, sorrow forgotten,
the condition of men. Maddening with rage,
he struck quickly, creature of evil:
grim and greedy, he grasped on their pallets
thirty warriors, and away he was out of there,
thrilled with his catch: he carried off homeward
his glut of slaughter, sought his own halls.

As the day broke, with the dawns light
Grendels outrage was openly to be seen:
nights table-laughter turned to mornings
lamentation. Lord Hrothgar
sat silent then, the strong man mourned,
glorious king, he grieved for his thegns
as they read the traces of a terrible foe,
a cursed fiend. That was too cruel a feud,
too long, too hard!

Nor did he let them rest
but the next night brought new horrors,
did more murder, manslaughter and outrage
and shrank not from it: he was too set on these things.

So Grendel became ruler; against right he fought,
one against all. Empty then stood
the best of houses, and for no brief space;

for twelve long winters torment sat
on the Friend of the Scyldings, fierce sorrows
and woes of every kind; which was not hidden
from the sons of men, but was made known
in grieving songs, how Grendel warred
long on Hrothgar, the harms he did him
through wretched years of wrong, outrage
and persecution.

A great grief was it for the Guardian of the Scyldings,
crushing to his spirit. The council lords
sat there daily to devise some plan,
what might be best for brave-hearted
Danes to contrive against these terror-raids.

This was heard of at his home by one of Hygelacs followers,
a good man among the Geats, Grendels raidings;
he was for main strength of all men foremost
that trod the earth at that time of day;
build and blood matched.

He bade a seaworthy
wave-cutter be fitted out for him; the warrior king
he would seek, he said, over swans riding,
that lord of great name, needing men.

The prince had already picked his men
from the folks flower, the fiercest among them
that might be found. With fourteen men
he sought sound-wood; sea-wise Beowulf
led them right down to the lands edge.

Away she went over a wavy ocean,
boat like a bird, breaking seas,
wind-whetted, white-throated,
till the curved prow had ploughed so far
the sun standing right on the second day
that they might see land loom on the skyline,
then the shimmer of cliffs, sheer fells behind,
reaching capes.

Then the crossing was at an end;
closed the wake. Weather-Geats
stood on strand, stepped briskly up;
a rope went ashore, ring-mail clashed,
battle-girdings. God they thanked
for the smooth going over the salt trails.

There was stone paving on the path that brought
the war-band on its way. The war-coats shone

and the links of hard hand-locked iron
sang in their harness as they stepped along
in their gear of grim aspect to the hall.

Scene 2

Beowulf & Companions approach the hall.

Loud knocking on the door, which then swings open

They enter. Unferth and Wulfgar stand and walk over to greet/challenge them.

Unferth From whence do you bring these embellished shields,
grey mail-shirts, masked helmets,
this stack of spears? I am spokesman here,
herald to Hrothgar. I have not seen
a body of strangers bear themselves more proudly.

It is not exile but adventure, I think,
boldness of spirit, that brings you to Hrothgar.

Beowulf At Hygelac's table we are sharers in the banquet.
Beowulf is my name.

I shall gladly set out to the son of Healfdene,
most famous of kings, the cause of my journey,
lay it before your lord, if he will allow us kindly,
to greet in person his most gracious self.

Wulfgar The Master of the Danes,
Lord of the Scyldings, shall learn of your request.
I shall gladly ask my honoured chief,
giver of arm-bands, about your undertaking,
and soon bear the answer back again to you,
that my gracious lord shall think to make.

Unferth and Wulfgar walk over to Hrothgar to tell him who the strangers are.

Wulfgar Men have come here from the country of the Geats,
borne from afar over the back of the sea;
these battle-companions call the man who leads them Beowulf.

The boon they ask is, my lord, that they may converse with you.
Do not, kind Hrothgar, refuse them audience in the answer you vouchsafe.
Their war-gear would clearly bespeak them of Earl's rank.
Indeed, the leader who guided them here seems of great account.

Hrothgar I knew him when he was a child!
It was to his old father, Edgetheow, that
Hrethel the Geat gave in marriage
his one daughter. Well does the son
now pay this call on a proven ally!

The seafarers used to say, I remember,

who took our gifts to the Geat people
in token of friendship that this fighting man
in his hands grasp had the strength
of thirty other men. I am thinking that
the Holy God, as a grace to us
Danes in the West, has directed him here
against Grendels oppression. This good man shall be
offered treasures in return for his courage.

Waste no time now but tell them to come in
that they may see this company seated together.
Make sure to say that they are most welcome
to the people of the Danes.

Unferth and Wulfgar walk back to Beowulf and his companions, who have been waiting silently.

Wulfgar The Master of Battles bids me announce,
the Lord of the North Danes, that he knows your ancestry;
I am to tell you all, determined venturers
over the seas, that you are sure of welcome.
You may go in now in your gear of battle,
set eyes on Hrothgar, helmed as you are.

But battle-shafts and shields of linden wood
may here await your words' outcome.

*The Geats hand their weapons to two of their number, who remain to guard them.
The rest follow Beowulf towards the king, now unarmed but still in armour.*

Beowulf Health to Hrothgar! I am Hygelacs kinsman
and serve in his fellowship. Fame-winning deeds
have come early to my hands. The affair of Grendel
has been made known to me on my native turf.

The sailors speak of this splendid hall,
this most stately building, standing idle
and silent of voices, as soon as the evening light
has hidden below the heavens bright edge.

Whereupon it was urged by the ablest men
among our people, men proved in counsel,
that I should seek you out, most sovereign Hrothgar.

These men knew well the weight of my hands.
Had they not seen me come home from fights
where I had bound five Giants?
Had I not crushed on the wave
sea-serpents by night in narrow struggle,
broken the beasts? And shall I not try
a single match with this monster Grendel,

a trial against this troll?

To you I now
put one request, Royal Scylding,
Shield of the South Danes, one sole favour
that you'll not deny me, dear lord of your people,
now that I have come thus far, Fastness of Warriors;
that I alone may be allowed, with my loyal and determined
crew of companions, to cleanse your hall, Heorot.

As I am informed that this unlovely one
is careless enough to carry no weapon,
so that my lord Hygelac, my leader in war,
may take joy in me, I abjure utterly
the bearing of sword or shielding yellow
board in this battle! With bare hands shall I
grapple with the fiend, fight to the death here,
hater and hated! He who is chosen
shall deliver himself to the Lords judgement.

If he can contrive it, we may count upon Grendel
to eat quite fearlessly the flesh of Geats
here in this war-hall; has he not chewed
on the strength of this nation? There will be no need, Sir,
for you to bury my head; he will have me gladly,
if death should take me, though darkened with blood.
He will bear my bloody corpse away, bent on eating it,
make his meal alone, without misgiving,
bespatter his moor-lair. The disposing of my body
need occupy you no further then.

But if the fight should take me, you would forward to Hygelac
this best of battle-shirts, that my breast now wears.
The queen of war-coats, it is the bequest of Hrethel
and from the forge of Wayland.
Fate will take it's course!

Hrothgar So it is to fight in our defence, my friend Beowulf,
and as an office of kindness that you have come to us here!

It is a sorrow in spirit for me to say to any man
what the hatred of Grendel has brought me to in Heorot,
what humiliation, what harrowing pain.
My hall-companions, my war-band, are dwindled;
Weird has swept them into the power of Grendel.

Yet God could easily check the ravages of this reckless fiend!
They often boasted, when the beer was drunk,
and called out over the ale-cup, my captains in battle,
that they would here await, in this wassailing-place,

with deadliness of iron edges, the onset of Grendel.
When morning brought the bright daylight
this mead-hall was seen all stained with blood:
blood had soaked its shining floor,
it was a house of slaughter. More slender grew my
strength of dear warriors; death took them off

Yet sit now to the banquet, where you may soon attend,
should the mood so take you, some tale of victory.

*A bench is cleared for the Geats, and they all sit.
Mead is brought around and laughter is heard. Talking amongst the cast.*

Scene 3

After some time, an increasingly irritated Unferth stands up.

Unferth Is this the Beowulf of Breca's swimming match,
who strove against him on the stretched ocean,
when for pride the pair of you proved the seas
and for a trite boast entrusted your lives
to the deep waters, undissuadable
by effort of friend or foe whatsoever
from that swimming on the sea? A sorry contest!

Your arms embraced the oceans streams,
you beat the wave-way, wove your hand-movements,
and danced on the Spear-Man. The sea boiled with whelming
waves of winter; in the waters power
you laboured seven nights: and then you lost your swimming-match,
his might was the greater; morning found him
cast by the sea on the coast of the Battle-Reams.

He made his way back to the marches of the Brondings,
to his father-land, friend to his people,
and to the city-fastness where he had subjects, treasure
and his own stronghold. The son of Beanstan
performed to the letter what he had promised to you.

I see little hope then of a happier outcome
though in other conflicts elsewhere in the world
you may indeed have prospered if you propose awaiting
Grendel all night, on his own ground, unarmed.

Beowulf I thank my friend Unferth, who unlocks us this tale
of Breca's bragged exploit;
the beer lends eloquence to his tongue.
But the truth is as I've said:
I had more sea-strength, outstaying Brecas,
and endured underwater a much worse struggle.
It was in early manhood that we undertook

with a public boast both of us still
very young men to venture our lives
on the open ocean; which we accordingly did.

Hard in our right hands we held each a sword
as we went through the sea, so to keep off
the whales from us. If he whitened the ocean,
no wider appeared the water between us.
He could not away from me; nor would I from him.
Thus stroke for stroke we stitched the ocean
five nights and days, drawn apart then
by cold storm on the cauldron of waters;
under lowering night the northern wind
fell on us in warspite: the waves were rough!

The unfriendliness was then aroused of the fishes of the deep.
Against sea-beasts my body-armour,
hand-linked and hammered, helped me then,
this forge-knit battleshirt bright with gold,
decking my breast. Down to the bottom
I was plucked in rage by this reptile-fish,
pinned in his grip. But I got the chance
to thrust once at the ugly creature
with my weapons point: war took off then
the mighty monster; mine was the hand did it.
Then loathsome snouts snickered by me,
swarmed at my throat. I served them out
with my good sword, gave them what they asked for:
those scaly flesh-eaters sat not down
to dine on Beowulf, they browsed not on me
in that picnic theyd designed in the dingles of the sea.
Daylight found them dispersed instead
up along the beaches where my blade had laid them
soundly asleep; since then they have never
troubled the passage of travellers over
that deep water-way. Day in the east grew,
Gods bright beacon, and the billows sank
so that I then could see the headlands,
the windy cliffs. Weird saves oft
the man undoomed if he undaunted be!
and it was my part then to put to the sword
nine sea-monsters, in the severest fight
by night I have heard of under heavens vault;
a man more sorely pressed the seas never held.
I came with my life from the compass of my foes,
but tired from the struggle. The tide bore me
away on its currents to the coasts of Norway,
whelms of water.

No whisper has yet reached me

of sword-ambushes survived, nor such scathing perils
in connection with your name! Never has Breca,
nor you Unferth either, in open battle-play
framed such a deed of daring with your
shining swords small as my action was.
You have killed only kindred, kept your blade
for those closest in blood; youre a clever man, Unferth,
but youll endure hells damnation for that.

It speaks for itself, my son of Edgelaf,
that Grendel had never grown such a terror,
this demon had never dealt your lord
such havoc in Heorot, had your hearts intention
been so grim for battle as you give us to believe.
Hes learnt theres in fact not the least need
excessively to respect the spite of this people,
the scathing steel-thresh of the Scylding nation.
He spares not a single sprig of your Danes
in extorting his tribute, but treats himself proud,
butchering and dispatching, and expects no resistance
from the spear-wielding Scyldings.

Ill show him Geatish
strength and stubbornness shortly enough now,
a lesson in war. He who wishes shall go then
blithe to the banquet when the breaking light
of another day shall dawn for men
and the sun shine glorious in the southern sky.

*The partying resumes, and Wealhtheow enters with the ceremonial mead-cup.
She passes it around, starting with Hrothgar, before coming last to Beowulf.*

Wealhtheow GREETINGS ETC ETC - must write

Beowulf takes the cup and drinks.

Beowulf This was my determination in taking to the ocean,
benched in the ship among my band of fellows,
that I should once and for all accomplish the wishes
of your adopted people, or pass to the slaughter,
viced in my foes grip. This vow I shall accomplish,
a deed worthy of an earl; decided otherwise
here in this mead-hall to meet my ending-day!

Wealhtheow retrieves the cup and moves back to sit beside Hrothgar.

The Bard Then at last Heorot heard once more
words of courage, the carousing of a people
singing their victories; till the son of Healfdene
desired at length to leave the feast,

be away to his nights rest; aware of the monster
brooding his attack on the tall-gabled hall
from the time they had seen the suns lightness
to the time when darkness drowns everything
and under its shadow-cover shapes do glide
dark beneath the clouds.
The company came to its feet.

All stand. Hrothgar and Beowulf come together to speak.

Hrothgar Never since I took up shield and sword
have I at any instance to any man beside,
thus handed over Heorot, as I here do to you.
Have and hold now the house of the Danes!
Bend your mind and your body to this task
and wake against the foe! There'll be no want of liberality
if you come out alive from this ordeal of courage.

*Hrothgar and his people leave. The Geats begin to take off their armour.
Mattresses are taken out and the Geats lie down on them. Beowulf addresses the audience.*

Beowulf I fancy my fighting-strength, my performance in combat,
at least as greatly as Grendel does his;
and therefore I shall not cut short his life
with a slashing sword too simple a business.
He has not the art to answer me in kind,
hew at my shield, shrewd though he be
at his nasty catches. No, well at night play
without any weapons if unweaponed he dare
to face me in fight. The Father in His wisdom
shall apportion the honours then, the All-holy Lord,
to whichever side shall seem to Him fit.

The lights fade to darkness

Scene 4

Grendel approaches the hall slowly. The lighting is colder now, as if lit by moonlight.

The Bard Gliding through the shadows came
the walker in the night; the warriors slept
whose task was to hold the horned building,
all except one. It was well-known to men
that the demon could not drag them to the shades
without Gods willing it; yet the one man kept
unblinking watch. He awaited, heart swelling
with anger against his foe, the ordeal of battle.

Down off the moorlands misting fells came
Grendel stalking; Gods brand was on him.
The spoiler meant to snatch away

from the high hall some of human race.
He came on under the clouds, clearly saw at last
the gold-hall of men, the mead-drinking place
nailed with gold plates. That was not the first visit
he had paid to the hall of Hrothgar the Dane:
he never before and never after
harder luck nor hall-guards found.

*Grendel smashes through the doors to the hall, ripping them open.
He stalks inside and grabs a sleeping warrior, killing him.
Beowulf awakes and tackles Grendel before he can kill again.
The two wrestle for a while, but eventually Beowulf pins Grendel, and takes hold of his arm.
The other warriors try to kill Grendel, but their swords are ineffective.
Grendel tries to run, but cannot escape Beowulf's grip.
Eventually, Grendel's shoulder tears, and his whole arm rips off.
Grendel flees back through the doors, and off stage.
Beowulf hangs Grendel's arm above the door, to cheers.*

Scene 5

*The light changes back to warm, once again lit by torchlight.
Hrothgar and company enter. The scene shifts to a banquet, celebrating Grendel's death.
All are amazed at the sight of Grendel's hand. Hrothgar walks over to inspect it.*

Hrothgar Let swift thanks be given to the Governor of All,
seeing this sight! I have suffered a thousand
spites from Grendel: but God works ever
miracle upon miracle, the Master of Heaven.
Until yesterday I doubted whether
our afflictions would find a remedy
in my lifetime, since this loveliest of halls
stood slaughter-painted, spattered with blood.
For all my counsellors this was a cruel sorrow,
for none of them imagined they could mount a defence
of the Scylding stronghold against such enemies
warlocks, demons!

But one man has,
by the Lords power, performed the thing
that all our thought and arts to this day
had failed to do. She may indeed say,
whoever she be that brought into the world
this young man here if yet she lives
that the God of Old was gracious to her
in her child-bearing. Beowulf, I now take you
to my bosom as a son, O best of men,
and cherish you in my heart. Hold yourself well
in this new relation! You will lack for nothing
that lies in my gift of the goods of this world:
lesser offices have elicited reward,
we have honoured from our hoard less heroic men,

far weaker in war. But you have well ensured
by the deeds of your hands an undying honour
for your name for ever. May the Almighty Father
yield you always the success that you yesternight enjoyed!

Beowulf We willingly undertook this test of courage,
risked a match with the might of the stranger,
and performed it all. I would prefer, though,
that you had rather seen the rest of him here,
the whole length of him, lying here dead.
I had meant to catch him, clamp him down
with a cruel lock to his last resting-place;
with my hands upon him, I would have him soon
in the throes of death unless he disappeared!
But I had not a good enough grip to prevent
his getting away, when God did not wish it;
the fiend in his flight was far too violent,
my lifes enemy. But he left his hand
behind him here, so as to have his life,
and his arm and shoulder. And all for nothing:
it bought him no respite, wretched creature.

He lives no longer, laden with sins,
to plague mankind: pain has set
heavy hands on him, and hasped about him
fatal fetters. He is forced to await now,
like a guilty criminal, a greater judgement,
where the Lord in His splendour shall pass sentence upon him.

*While they speak, the other characters prepare the feast. Drinks are passed around.
Hrothgar returns to his throne, and motions for his spokesman Unferth.*

*Hrothgar speaks quietly to Unferth, who takes some others and goes offstage to get gifts.
They come back with a banner, helmet, mail-shirt and sword; all of the highest quality.*

Hrothgar GIVES THE GIFTS TO BEOWULF, AND BIDS HIM TO TAKE
CARE.

*While the gifts are presented, Unferth collects more gifts for Beowulf's companions.
Hrothgar presents the gifts to the companions in turn. He also makes a gift of gold for the dead man.*

Wealhtheow then brings a great golden cup to Hrothgar.

Wealhtheow Accept this cup, my king and lord,
giver of treasure. Let your gaiety be shown,
gold-friend of warriors, and to the Geats speak
in words of friendship, for this well becomes a man.
Be gracious to these Geats, and let the gifts you have had
from near and far, not be forgotten now.

I hear it is your wish to hold this warrior
henceforward as your son. Heorot is cleansed,
the ring-hall bright again: therefore bestow while you may
these blessings liberally, and leave to your kinsmen
the land and its people when your passing is decreed,
your meeting with fate. For may I not count
on my gracious Hrothulf to guard honourably
our young ones here, if you, my lord,
should give over this world earlier than he?

I am sure that he will show to our children
answerable kindness, if he keeps in remembrance
all that we have done to indulge and advance him,
the honours we bestowed on him when he was still a child.

Wealththeow then brings the cup to Beowulf

Wealththeow WORDS LIKE: Entreats him kindly to honour their feast

Unferth returns once more with a necklace and arm-bands. Wealththeow presents them.

Wealththeow Take pride in this jewel, have joy of this mantle
drawn from our treasuries, most dear Beowulf!
May fortune come with them and may you flourish in your youth!
Proclaim your strength; but in counsel to these boys
be a gentle guardian, and my gratitude will be seen.
Already you have so managed that men everywhere
will hold you in honour for all time,
even to the cliffs at the worlds end, washed by the Ocean,
the winds range. All the rest of your life
must be happy, prince; and prosperity I wish you too,
abundance of treasure! But be to my son
a friend in deed, most favoured of men.

You see how open is each earl here with his neighbour,
temperate of heart, and true to his lord.
The nobles are loyal, the lesser people dutiful;
wine mellows the men to move to my bidding.

The celebration continues.

The Bard What a banquet that was!
The men drank their wine: the weird they did not know,
destined from of old, the doom that was to fall
on many of the earls there.

*Hrothgar exits, and his people clear away the feast.
The Geats leave and the other warriors prepare for bed. When finished, the light dims.*

The Bard The Geats sank into sleep. A savage penalty

one paid for his nights rest! It was no new thing for that people
since Grendel had occupied the gold-giving hall,
working his evil, until the end came,
death for his misdeeds. It was declared then to men,
and received by every ear, that for all this time
a survivor had been living, an avenger for their foe
and his grim lifes-leaving: Grendels Mother herself,
a monstrous ogress, ailing for her loss,
now purposed to set out at last savage in her grief
on that wrath-bearing visit of vengeance for her son.

The light fades to darkness

Act 2

Scene 1

Lights up dimly, once again cold. Grendel's mother has made her way onstage in the blackout. She creeps slowly around the hall and removes the hand. As she passes one man, he awakes and cries out.

Everyone in the hall wakes up and grabs their weapons.

Grendel's Mother grabs Ashhere and flees, followed by some of the warriors.

Once they are offstage, the remaining warriors sheath their weapons.

Scene 2

After a short pause, the lights brighten to daylight.

Hrothgar and his advisors enter and survey the scene, talking quietly to the remaining warriors.

Beowulf and his companions enter in full gear. He goes to speak to Hrothgar

Beowulf WORDS LIKE: has the night been quiet, after a call so urgent?

Hrothgar Do not ask about our welfare! Woe has returned
to the Danish people with the death of Ashhere,
the elder brother of Yrmenlaf.
He was my closest counsellor, he was keeper of my thoughts,
he stood at my shoulder when we struck for our lives
at the crashing together of companies of foot,
when blows rained on boar-crests. Men of birth and merit
all should be as Ashhere was!

A bloodthirsty monster has murdered him in Heorot,
a wandering demon; whither this terrible one,
glorying in her prey, glad of her meal,
has returned to, I know not. She has taken vengeance
for the previous night, when you put an end to Grendel
with forceful finger-grasp, and in a fierce manner,
because he had diminished and destroyed my people
for far too long. He fell in that struggle
and forfeited his life; but now is followed by another
most powerful ravager. Revenge is her motive,

and in furthering her sons feud she has gone far enough,
or thanes may be found who will think it so;
in their breasts they will grieve for their giver of rings,
bitter at heart. For the hand is stilled
that would openly have granted your every desire.

I have heard it said by subjects of mine
who live in the country, counsellors in this hall,
that they have seen such a pair
of huge wayfarers haunting the moors,
otherworldly ones; and one of them,
so far as they might make it out,
was in womans shape; but the shape of a man,
though twisted, trod also the tracks of exile
save that he was more huge than any human being.

The country people have called him from of old
by the name of Grendel; they know of no father for him,
nor whether there have been such beings before
among the monster-race.

Mysterious is the region
they live in of wolf-fells, wind-picked moors
and treacherous fen-paths: a torrent of water
pours down dark cliffs and plunges into the earth,
an underground flood. It is not far from here,
in terms of miles, that the Mere lies,
overcast with dark, crag-rooted trees
that hang in groves hoary with frost.

An uncanny sight may be seen at night there
the fire in the water! The wit of living men
is not enough to know its bottom.
The hart that roams the heath, when hounds have pressed him
long and hard, may hide in the forest
his antlered head; but the hart will die there
sooner than swim and save his life;
he will sell it on the brink there, for it is not a safe place.
And the wind can stir up wicked storms there,
whipping the swirling waters up
till they climb the clouds and clog the air,
making the skies weep.

Our sole remedy
is to turn again to you. The treacherous country
where that creature of sin is to be sought out
is strange to you as yet: seek then if you dare!
I shall reward the deed, as I did before,
with wealthy gifts of wreathed ore,
treasures from the hoard, if you return once more.

Beowulf Bear your grief, wise one! It is better for a man
to avenge his friend than to refresh his sorrow.
As we must all expect to leave
our life on this earth, we must earn some renown,
if we can, before death; daring is the thing
for a fighting man to be remembered by.

Let Denmark's lord arise, and we shall rapidly see then
where this kinswoman of Grendel's has gone away to!
I can promise you this, that she'll not protect herself by hiding
in any fold of the field, in any forest of the mountain,
in any dingle of the sea, dive where she will!
For this day, therefore, endure all your woes
with the patience that I may expect of you.

Hrothgar WORDS LIKE: offering thanks to God

Scene 3

As the Bard narrates, the lighting and set change to indicate that they have travelled from the hall.

The Bard A steed with braided mane was bridled then,
a horse for Hrothgar; the hero-patriarch
rode out shining; shieldbearers marched
in troop beside him. The trace of her going
on the woodland paths was plainly to be seen,
stepping onwards; straight across
the fog-bound moor she had fetched away there
the lifeless body of the best man
of all who kept the courts of Hrothgar.
The sons of men then made their way
up steep screes, by scant tracks
where only one might walk, by wall-faced cliffs,
through haunted fens uninhabitable country.

Going on ahead with a handful of the
keener men to reconnoitre,
Beowulf suddenly saw where some ash-trees
hung above a hoary rock
a cheerless wood! And the water beneath it
was turbid with blood; bitter distress
was to be endured by the Danes who were there,
a grief for the earls, for everythane
of the Friends of the Scyldings, when they found there
the head of Ashhere by the edge of the cliff.

The men beheld the blood on the water,
its warm upwellings. The war-horn sang
an eager battle-cry. The band of foot-soldiers,
sitting by the water, could see multitudes

of strange sea-drakes swerving through the depths,
and water-snakes lay on the ledges of the cliffs,
such serpents and wild beasts as will sally out
in middle morning to make havoc
in the seas where ships sail.

Unferth unbuckles his sword belt and walks over to Beowulf to present it as a gift

Unferth WORDS LIKE: apology for his earlier actions

Beowulf WORDS LIKE: gracious acceptance

Having strapped on the new sword, Beowulf turns to Hrothgar.

Beowulf I am eager to begin, great son of Healfdene.
Remember well, then, my wise lord,
provider of gold, what we agreed once before,
that if in your service it should so happen
that I am sundered from life, that you would assume the place
of a father towards me when I was gone.
Now extend your protection to the troop of my companions,
my young fellows, if the fight should take me;
convey also the gifts that you have granted to me,
beloved Hrothgar, to my lord Hygelac.
For on seeing this gold, the Geat chieftain,
Hrethels son, will perceive from its value
that I had met with magnificent patronage
from a giver of jewels, and that I had joy of him.

Let Unferth have the blade that I inherited
he is a widely-known man this wave-patterned sword
of rare hardness. With Hrunting shall I
achieve this deed or death shall take me!

Snap blackout. Exit all apart from Beowulf

Scene 4

The lights now should give the impression of being underwater, with as little illumination as possible.

The Bard After these words the Weather-Geat prince
dived into the Mere he did not care
to wait for an answer and the waves closed over
the daring man. It was a days space almost
before he could glimpse ground at the bottom.
The grim and greedy guardian of the flood,
keeping her hungry hundred-season watch,
discovered at once that one from above,
a human, had sounded the home of the monsters.

She felt for the man and fastened upon him
her terrible hooks; but no harm came thereby
to the hale body within the harness so ringed him
that she could not drive her dire fingers
through the mesh of the mail-shirt masking his limbs.
When she came to the bottom she bore him to her lair,
the mere-wolf, pinioning the mail-clad prince.

Not all his courage could enable him
to draw his sword; but swarming through the water,
throngs of sea-beasts threw themselves upon him
with ripping tusks to tear his battle-coat,
tormenting monsters. Then the man found
that he was in some enemy hall
where there was no water to weigh upon him
and the power of the flood could not pluck him away,
sheltered by its roof: a shining light he saw,
a bright fire blazing clearly.

Lights up to reveal Beowulf and Grendel's Mother facing each other.

Beowulf draws Hrunting and strikes, but it fails to do any damage. He throws it to the ground.

He tackles Grendel's Mother, but as they fall she draws a dagger.

She strikes at his back. His mail turns aside the blow.

Beowulf then spots a giant's sword and takes it up.

With one blow, he severs her head, killing her.

At the moment of her death, the light changes to a clearer, brighter colour.

Beowulf takes the sword and goes to find Grendel, then severs his head. Grendel's blood dissolves the blade.

Beowulf disappears offstage.

Scene 5

The Bard And above, the wise men who watched with Hrothgar
the depths of the pool descried soon enough
blood rising in the broken water
and marbling the surface. Seasoned warriors,
grey-headed, experienced, they spoke together,
said it seemed unlikely that they would see once more
the prince returning triumphant to seek out
their famous master. Many were persuaded
the she-wolf of the deep had done away with him.
The ninth hour had come; the keen-hearted Scyldings
abandoned the cliff-head; the kindly gold-giver
turned his face homeward. But the foreigners sat on,
staring at the pool with sickness at heart,
hoping they would look again on their beloved captain,
believing they would not.

The survivor of his enemies onslaught in battle

now set to swimming, and struck up through the water;
both the deep reaches and the rough wave-swirl
were thoroughly cleansed, now the creature from the otherworld
drew breath no longer in this brief worlds space.

Then the seamens Helm came swimming up
strongly to land, delighting in his sea-trove,
those mighty burdens that he bore along with him.
They went to meet him, a manly company,
thanking God, glad of their lord,
seeing him safe and sound once more.

The lakes waters,
sullied with blood, slept beneath the sky.
They turned away from there and retraced their steps,
pacing the familiar paths back again
as bold as kings, carefree at heart.

The carrying of the head from the cliff by the Mere
was no easy task for any of them,
brave as they were. They bore it up,
four of them, on a spear, and transported back
Grendels head to the gold-giving hall.

Warrior-like they went, and it was not long
before they came, the fourteen bold Geats,
marching to the hall, and, among the company
walking across the land, their lord the tallest.

Scene 6

*Beowulf & Companions enter and walk up to the hall, carrying the head. They enter.
Inside are all Hrothgar's people, talking. Beowulf walks up to address him.*

Beowulf Behold! What you see here, O son of Healfdene,
prince of the Scyldings, was pleasant freight for us:
these trophies from the lake betoken victory!

Not easily did I survive
the fight under water; I performed this deed
not without a struggle. Our strife had ended
at its very beginning if God had not saved me.

Nothing could I perform in that fight with Hrunting,
it had no effect, fine weapon though it be.
But the Guide of mankind granted me the sight
of a huge Giant-sword hanging on the wall,
ancient and shining and I snatched up the weapon.

When the hour afforded, in that fight I slew

the keepers of the hall. The coiling-patterned
blade burnt all away, as the blood sprang forth,
the hottest ever shed; the hilt I took from them.

So I avenged the violent slaughter
and outrages against the Danes; indeed it was fitting.

Now, I say, you may sleep in Heorot
free from care your company of warriors
and every man of your entire people,
both the young men and the guard. Gone is the need
to fear those fell attacks of former times
on the lives of your earls, my lord of the Scyldings.

He presents the hilt to Hrothgar, who studies it carefully. The hall falls silent

Hrothgar One who has tendered justice and truth to his people,
their shepherd from of old, surely may say this,
remembering all that's gone that this man was born
to be the best of men. Beowulf, my friend,
your name shall resound in the nations of the earth
that are furthest away.

How wise you are to bear
your great strength so peaceably! I shall perform my vows
agreed in our forewords. It is granted to your people
that you shall live to be a long-standing comfort
and bulwark to the heroes.

Heremod was not so
for the honoured Scyldings, the sons of Edgewela:
his manhood brought not pleasure but a plague upon us,
death and destruction to the Danish tribes.
In his fits he would cut down his comrade in war
and his table-companion until he turned away
from the feastings of men, that famous prince.

This though the Almighty had exalted him in the bliss
of strength and vigour, advancing him far
above all other men. Yet inwardly his heart-hoard
grew raw and blood-thirsty; no rings did he give
to the Danes for his honour. And he dwelt an outcast,
paid the penalty for his persecution of them
by a life of sorrow. Learn from this, Beowulf:
study openhandedness! It is for your ears that I relate this,
and I am old in winters.

It is wonderful to recount
how in his magnanimity the Almighty God
deals out wisdom, dominion and lordship

among mankind. The Master of all things
will sometimes allow to the soul of a man
of well-known kindred to wander in delight:
He will grant him earth's bliss in his own homeland,
the sway of the fortress-city of his people,
and will give him to rule regions of the world,
wide kingdoms: he cannot imagine,
in his unwisdom, that an end will come.
His life of bounty is not blighted by hint
of age or ailment; no evil care
darkens his mind, malice nowhere
bares the sword-edge, but sweetly the world
swings to his will; worse is not looked for.

At last his part of pride within him
waxes and climbs, the watchman of the soul
slumbering the while. That sleep is too deep,
tangled in its cares! Too close is the slayer
who shoots the wicked shaft from his bow!
For all his armour he is unable to protect himself:
the insidious bolt buries in his chest,
the crooked counsels of the accursed one.
What he has so long enjoyed he rejects as too little;
in niggardly anger renounces his lordly
gifts of gilt torques, forgets and misprizes
his fore-ordained part, endowed thus by God,
the Master of Glory, with these great bounties.

And ultimately the end must come,
the frail house of flesh must crumble
and fall at its hour. Another then takes
the earl's inheritance; open-handedly
he gives out its treasure, regardless of fear.

Beloved Beowulf, best of warriors,
resist this deadly taint, take what is better,
ETC ETC ETC ETC

Celebration. Beowulf sits and they begin to drink and feast again.

During the Bard's monologue, the lights fade through black, and come back up to daylight at the correct time.

The Bard Quite as before, the famous men,
guests of the hall, were handsomely feasted
on this new occasion. ETC ETC ETC

Scene 7

Lights up. Beowulf and his companions are now stood facing Hrothgar and his people.

Beowulf We wish now to say, seafarers who
are come from afar, how keenly we desire ETC ETC ETC ETC

Hrothgar These words you have delivered,
the Lord in his wisdom
put in your heart. I have heard no man
ETC ETC ETC ETC

*Hrothgar embraces Beowulf, and the Geats turn to leave.
As the Bard speaks, the Geats exit and the light dims away from the Bard*

The Bard Beowulf went from him then,
ETC ETC ETC ETC
FINISHING ON
urged by the breeze, and beached on the shore.

Blackout

Interval

If an interval is desired, this is the time to have it.

Act 3