



The hero comes to Heorot

The passage you are going to read is from the modern translation by Seamus Heaney (2001). It deals with Beowulf's voyage from Geatland (the south coast of what is now Sweden) to the Danish island of Zealand, where Heorot was located.

Anonymous
Beowulf
(ca 11th century)
Lines 189-223

So that troubled time continued, woe¹
that never stopped, steady affliction²
for Halfdane³'s son, too hard an ordeal⁴.
There was panic after dark, people endured
5 raids⁵ in the night, riven⁶ by the terror.
When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane⁷
was on home ground, over in Geatland.
There was no one else like him alive.
In his day, he was the mightiest⁸ man on earth,
10 highborn⁹ and powerful. He ordered a boat
that would ply¹⁰ the waves. He announced his plan:
to sail the swan's road¹¹ and seek out that king,
the famous prince who needed defenders.
Nobody tried to keep him from going¹²,
15 no elder¹³ denied him, dear as he was to them.
Instead, they inspected omens¹⁴ and spurred¹⁵
his ambition to go, whilst he moved about
like the leader he was, enlisting¹⁶ men,

the best he could find; with fourteen others
20 the warrior boarded¹⁷ the boat as captain,
a canny¹⁸ pilot along coast and currents.
Time went by, the boat was on water,
in close¹⁹ under the cliffs.
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank²⁰,
25 sand churned in surf²¹, warriors loaded
a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear²²
in the vessel's hold²³, then heaved out²⁴,
away with a will in their wood-wreathed²⁵ ship.
Over the waves, with the wind behind her
30 and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird
until her curved prow²⁶ had covered the distance,
and on the following day, at the due hour,
those seafarers sighted²⁷ land,
sunlit cliffs, sheer crags²⁸
35 and looming headlands²⁹, the landfall³⁰ they sought.

1 woe. Dolore.

2 steady affliction. Continua sofferenza.

3 Halfdane. Padre di Hrothgar.

4 ordeal. Traversia.

5 raids. Incursioni.

6 riven. Spaccata in due.

7 Hygelac's thane. Guerriero di Hygelac, re dei Geats e signore di Beowulf; *qui*: Beowulf.

8 mightiest. Il più forte.

9 highborn. Nobile di nascita.

10 would ply. Avrebbe solcato.

11 the swan's road. La strada dei cigni; *qui*: il mare.

12 keep ... going. Trattenerlo.

13 elder. Anziano.

14 omens. Auspici.

15 spurred. Spronavano.

16 enlisting. Reclutando.

17 boarded. Sali a bordo.

18 canny. Astuto, esperto.

19 in close. Vicino.

20 gangplank. Passerella.

21 sand ... surf. La risacca sul greto.

22 shining war-gear. Brillante equipaggiamento da guerra.

23 hold. Stiva.

24 heaved out. Salparono (l'ancora).

25 wood-wreathed. Di legno rinforzato.

26 prow. Prua.

27 sighted. Videro.

28 sheer crags. Rocce a strapiombo.

29 looming headlands. Incombenti promontori.

30 landfall. Approdo.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and find the words which mean the following.

- 1 worried
- 2 underwent hardship
- 3 search hard for
- 4 while
- 5 steep, high rocks
- 6 tiny bubbles on the surface of a liquid

2 READ the text again and do the following activities.

1 The text refers to

- A Geatland.
- B the hero's setting out for Heorot.
- C enlisting men for the hero's army.
- D the hero's appraisal.

2 Underline words and phrases linked to sorrow and fear in lines 1-5.



3 The word 'riven' in line 5 means

- A broken.
- B closed.
- C fixed.
- D preserved.

4 Describe the cause and effect relationship in lines 1-13.

- Cause:
- Effect:

5 Decide whether the following statements referred to the hero are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- 1 He is referred to with his real name. **T F**
- 2 He and his warriors are the strongest among their people. **T F**
- 3 He is a clever pilot. **T F**

6 What words or phrases refer to the hero's warriors in lines 18-27?

7 Find all the words and phrases linked to the sea in lines 22-30. What idea do they convey?

8 The phrase 'the swan's road' in line 12 is

- A a personification of the ship.
- B a kenning for the sea.
- C a symbol of war.
- D a simile for the ship.

9 What function does this literary technique serve? Tick as appropriate.

- It increases musicality.
- It creates a particular rhythm.
- It sounds different from ordinary language thanks to use of descriptive words.
- It characterises something more effectively.

10 Write down the lines where the ship is described. What is it like? What is it compared to?

11 Re-order the main events of the text.

- Beowulf hears tales about the Danish King Hrothgar's problems with Grendel.
- Beowulf reaches the land of the Danes to offer his services to Hrothgar.
- Beowulf lives in Geatland, a realm not far from Denmark, in what is now southern Sweden.
- Beowulf gathers the bravest soldiers.
- Beowulf, thane of the Geats' king, Hygelac, is the greatest hero in the world.
- Beowulf voyages across the sea with them.
- Beowulf decides to help Hrothgar defeat Grendel.

12 Identify the line that justifies the title of the text.