

GREAT
CHRISTIAN
CLASSICS

GREAT CHRISTIAN CLASSICS

VOLUME III

Exceptional Works of the Faith

Edited by R. A. SHEATS,
JOSHUA SCHWISOW,
and KEVIN SWANSON



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Printed in Korea.

ISBN: 978-1-954745-90-2

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Cover Design: Justin Turley
Interior Design: Rei Suzuki

Published by:
Generations
19039 Plaza Drive Ste 210
Parker, Colorado 80134
Generations.org

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BEOWULF

Anonymous

PROSE EDITION

TRANSLATION BY CLARK HALL (1901)

*Annotations by R.A. SHEATS
and JOSHUA SCHWISOW*



INTRODUCTION

B*eowulf* is an Anglo-Saxon poem composed around the 8th century AD. The author was an Anglo-Saxon Christian, probably a monk or member of a religious order. He lived in a time of vast missionary activity when the Church was penetrating the very countries mentioned in *Beowulf*. Some Anglo-Saxon missionaries who lived during this time include Wilfrid, Willibrord, and Boniface.

The story of *Beowulf* is placed in the historical setting of the 6th century. Most characters mentioned in the poem are historical, though it appears Beowulf himself may be in part fictitious. The story takes place in Scandinavia. Though its Anglo-Saxon author was Christian and wrote for a Christian audience, the people groups in his poem (Danes, Geats, and Swedes) were heathen. Many pagan beliefs and practices of these people are recorded in the tale and are set in contrast to Christian beliefs.

The present translation is written in prose, but *Beowulf* was originally a poem written in Anglo-Saxon verse. Instead of basing its structure on rhyming words (as does much modern poetry), Old English verse used alliteration to weave its poetry together. Alliteration is a repetition of initial consonantal or vowel sounds in stressed syllables within a line of poetic verse, such as “*Hark! we have heard the history*” or “*Great was the grief of Grendel.*”

In its original language, *Beowulf*'s alliterative verse is a beautiful metrical accomplishment. Unfortunately, as the Venerable Bede noted centuries ago, “It is not possible to translate [poetic] verse, however well composed, literally from one language to another without some loss of beauty and dignity.”¹ Modern translations of *Beowulf* therefore cannot capture the full beauty and majesty of the original.

The present English version of *Beowulf* was translated by John R. Clark Hall and published by Swan

1. Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), 216.

Sonnenschein and Company in 1901. Some corrections and changes have been made to Hall's 1901 translation to clarify obscure or easily misunderstood points in the text. Where this occurs, the updated wording has often been incorporated from a metrical translation published by Hall in 1914.

Beowulf was originally divided into forty-three sections. These sections or chapter breaks have occasionally been altered to aid the flow of text in modern English prose. Chapter titles and explanatory notes have been added.

Prologue:

THE DEATH OF SCYLD

Lo!¹ We have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes' warrior-kings in days of yore—how the princes did valorous deeds! Often Scyld of the Sheaf² took mead-benches³ away from troops of foes, from many tribes. The noble inspired awe from the time that he was first found helpless. Yet he met with comfort, increased under the heavens and prospered in honor until each one of those who sojourned near, across the whale's road,⁴ had to serve him and to pay him tribute. A noble king was he!

⁵Later, a son was born to him, a young child in his castle, whom God had sent the people for their help. He knew of the distress from hostile deeds which they, lacking a lord, long suffered in the past. To him therefore, the Prince of Life, the glorious Ruler, granted worldly honor; Beow the son of Scyld in Scedelands⁶ was renowned, his fame spread widely. So shall a young man act in noble wise by splendid money-gifts amongst his father's friends, that later in life willing companions may stand by him—the folk may do him service when war comes.⁷ By commendable deeds a man may grow in power in any of the tribes!

⁸Then, at the fated hour, Scyld, full of exploits, departed to go into the keeping of the Lord. And they, his beloved comrades, carried his body to the water's edge as he himself had asked when he, protector of the Scyldings, governed by his behests—when, dear ruler of his country, he had long held sway. There at the landing-place the ring-prowed vessel stood, the prince's ship, sheeny and eager to start.

They laid then the beloved chieftain, giver-out of rings, on the ship's bosom—the glorious hero by the mast. There were brought many treasures, ornaments from far-off lands. Never have I known a keel more fairly fitted out with war-weapons and battle-trappings, swords and coats of mail. Upon his breast lay

1. The poet begins by extolling the glory and prowess of the Danish chiefs of the past. Of these chiefs, Scyld is especially mentioned as a successful raider who subjected all the neighboring princes, even those across the sea.

2. Scyld represents the founder of the Scyldings, the royal house of the Danish people. According to legend, this child was found as an infant on the shores of Denmark, where he had landed after being placed in a boat across the sea and set adrift. Where he came from is unknown.

3. mead – an alcoholic beverage consisting of fermented honey and water. Mead-benches were the seats in great halls where warriors would gather to feast. When the poet states that Scyld took these from his foes, he means that Scyld conquered his enemies and took possession of or destroyed their great halls.

4. “Whale's road” is a poetic name for the sea. The author uses many poetic synonyms in his tale. This is a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Such words color the story and make the reading more interesting. These poetic expressions are called kennings. A *kenning* is a metaphor (usually consisting of two or three words) which paints a picture of its object and is used instead of a standard or ordinary noun.

5. Scyld's son Beow became famous in Scedeland, where the Danes lived. His popularity seems to have arisen from his generosity.

6. Scedelands – Scandinavia

7. Beow was renowned for his generosity. The poet notes that a generous person may win friends who will assist him in time of need. Proverbs 18:16 teaches, “A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.” Also, “Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home” (Luke 16:9).

8. After a long reign, King Scyld died. He requested his friends to send his corpse to sea in a ship adorned with costly armor and other treasures. In this way, he asked them to show him honor after his death.

9. Scyld's funeral appears to have been typical of ship burials practiced in the 6th and 7th centuries. One such Anglo-Saxon burial was excavated in 1939 in Sutton Hoo, England. Believed to be the final resting place of King Raedwald (an East Anglian king), the grave contained a ship full of stunning treasures and implements of war. According to archaeological evidence, the poet's description of the treasures that accompanied Scyld's body on the ship is true-to-life. The main difference is that Scyld's ship wasn't buried; it was sent to sea.

10. Here the poet uses a calculated understatement to make a point. In sending their king's body to sea, the warriors loaded his ship with more magnificent and costlier treasure than could be stated. To express this, the poet merely notes that the warriors furnished their dead king "with no less gifts" than he had received when he was set adrift as a destitute infant without a single possession. This type of understatement is common in Old English writing. It is a figure of speech known as *litotes*.

11. *i.e.*, no one knows what became of the treasures Scyld's friends sent to sea in his funeral ship.

many treasures which were to travel far with him into the power of the flood.⁹ Certainly they furnished him with no less of gifts, of tribal-treasures, than those did who in his early days started him over the sea alone, child as he was.¹⁰ Moreover, they set besides a golden banner high above his head and let the flood bear him—gave him to the sea. Their soul was sad, their spirit sorrowful. Who received that load, men, chiefs of councils, heroes under heaven, cannot for certain tell!¹¹

1. THE HALL HEOROT

Then¹ in the strongholds was Beow of the Scyldings, dear king of the nation, long time renowned among warriors—the prince his father had gone elsewhere from the earth—until the noble Healfdene² was born to him. While he lived, old and fierce in battle, he ruled the Scyldings graciously. To him were born into the world four children in succession, Heorogar, captain of armies, and Hrothgar, and Halga the Good. I have been told that [his daughter]³ was the wife of Onela, the cherished consort⁴ of the warrior-Scylfing.

⁵Then was success in war granted to Hrothgar, glory in battle, so that his faithful tribesmen served him willingly till the young warriors increased, a mighty troop of men.

It came into his mind that he would order men to build a hall-building—a festive-chamber greater than the sons of men had ever heard of—and therewithin to give all things to young and old whatever God had given him, except the lands and lives of men.⁶

1. After the death of Scyld, Beow the Dane reigned. When he died, his son Healfdene ruled the Danes. Healfdene had four children. Eventually, his son Hrothgar inherited the throne. Scyld may be a legendary figure, but the other Danish kings mentioned here are historic characters.

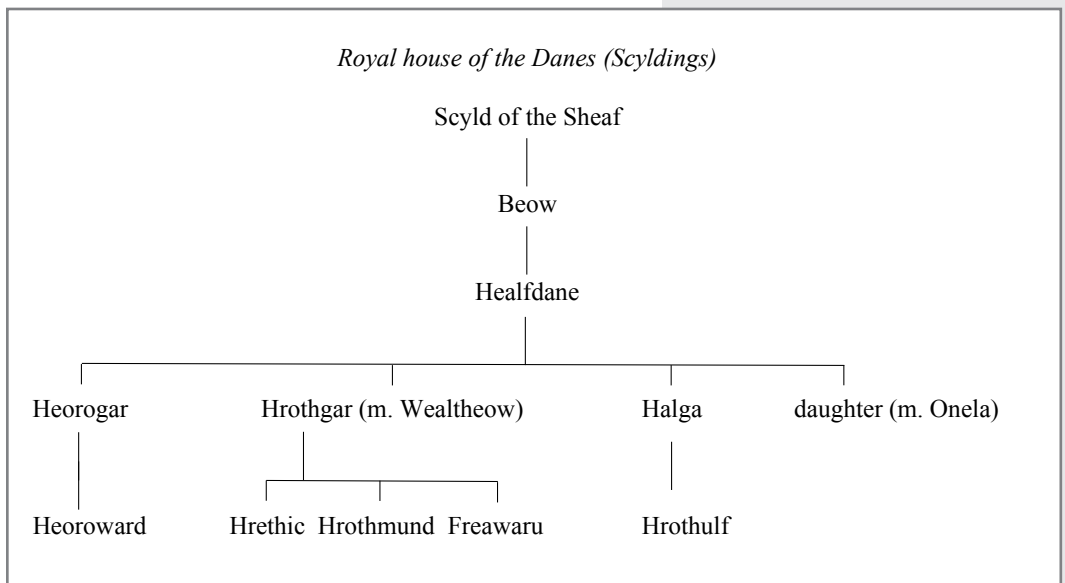
2. Healfdene, a Danish king, ruled during the late 5th and early 6th century.

3. The *Beowulf* manuscript is damaged here; the name of Healfdene's daughter is unreadable.

4. cherished consort – beloved spouse

5. Hrothgar, a Danish king, ruled in the 6th century. A victorious and popular ruler, he built a grand hall which he named Heorot. Hrothgar made the hall a place of banqueting and present-giving.

6. Though a heathen, Hrothgar recognized the sacredness of human life and the inviolable nature of private property. He gave riches and honors to his men, but he would not touch the people's land or their lives. Even though he was king, his people's land and lives were not at his disposal.



7. Middle Earth is an Old English term for the lands inhabited by mankind. This area was called “middle” because it was located between the uninhabited depths of the Earth below and the heavens (or sky) above.

8. The poet alludes to the fire that would one day destroy Heorot. More of this history is included later in the book. The author often mentions an event that will occur at a future time in his tale. Contemporary readers would have been familiar with the history of Heorot and would have understood the poet’s brief mention of its future destruction by fire. This destruction would come by the hand of Hrothgar’s son-in-law.

9. The daily rejoicing in the hall enraged an evil monster, Grendel. The poet informs us that, like all other monsters, Grendel was of the line of Cain. He could not bear to hear the minstrels’ songs praising God’s mighty works.

10. In Heorot, minstrels sang of God’s work of creation.

11. To compass deeds of malice – to plot deeds of hatred or wickedness

12. moors, fen, fastness – swamps, marshes, and wilderness

13. The poet states that God judged Cain’s descendants for Cain’s sin. In Exodus 20:5, the Lord declares that He will “visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.” But God does not judge a person for his parents’ sins. Every person is judged for his own sins, not the sins of another. Because Cain’s descendants continued in their father’s evil ways, God judged them for their own sins. If Cain’s descendants had repented, God would not have judged them in this way. When a wicked person turns from his sin and repents, God will forgive him even if his parents were wicked (Eze. 33:12-16). The Lord promises

14. sea-devils – sea monsters

Then on all sides I heard the work was being put on many a tribe throughout this middle-earth⁷—to adorn the people’s hall. In time—quickly by mortals’ reckoning—it befell that the greatest of palace-halls was quite ready for him. He who by his word had empire far and wide devised for it the name of Heorot. He did not break his promise, but he gave out ornaments and treasure at the banquet.

⁸The hall towered, lofty and wide-gabled—it awaited the hostile surges of malignant fire. Nor was it long time after that the murderous vindictiveness twixt son-in-law and father-in-law was to arise—the sequel to a deadly quarrel.

⁹Then for a time the mighty spirit who dwelt in darkness bore it angrily, in that he heard each day loud revelry in hall—there was the sound of the harp, the bright song of the minstrel.

He who could recount the origin of men from distant ages spoke¹⁰—he said that the Almighty made the earth, the beauteous plain which water belts around and, triumphing in power, appointed the effulgence of the sun and moon as light for the land-dwellers and decked the earth-regions with leaves and branches and fashioned life for all the kinds that live and move.

So then brave men lived prosperously in joys until a certain fiend in hell began to compass deeds of malice.¹¹

The grim stranger was called Grendel, the well-known border-haunter who held the moors, the fen, and fastness;¹² the hapless being occupied awhile the lair of monsters after the Creator had banished them. On Cain’s kindred did the everlasting Lord avenge the murder, for that Cain had slain Abel.¹³ He took no pleasure in that quarrel, but He, the Creator, drove him far from mankind for that misdeed. Thence all evil broods were born, monsters and goblins and sea-devils¹⁴—giants also, who long time fought with God, for which He gave them their reward.

2. GRENDEL STRIKES

So,¹ after night had come, Grendel went to the lofty house to find out in what sort the Ring-Danes² had quartered in it after their beer-carouse.³ Then found he therewithin a band of noble warriors sleeping after the banquet; they knew not sorrow, misery of men.

Soon was the grim and greedy demon of destruction ready, wild and furious, and seized thirty thanes⁴ in their resting-place. Thence started he off again, exulting in plunder, to go home and to seek out his abode with that fill of slaughter.⁵

⁶Then in the morning light, at break of day, was Grendel's war-craft manifest to men; then was a wail, a mighty cry at morn, upraised after the meal. The famous prince, the long-distinguished chieftain, sat downcast, the strong man suffered. He endured sorrow for his lieges⁷ when they surveyed the traces of the foe, the cursed spirit; that anguish was too strong, too loathly and long-lasting.

Nor did he let them rest, for the very next night Grendel again contrived more deeds of murder—had no regret for violence and outrage—he was too fixed on them. Then was the man easy to find who sought elsewhere a more remote resting-place for himself,⁸ a bed among the bowers when the hall-warder's hate had been made known to him and truly related on clear evidence. He who escaped the fiend kept himself afterwards farther and more secure.

So then Grendel was master and strove, opposed to right, one against all, until the best of houses idle stood.

⁹It was a long while, twelve winters' space, the Scyldings' guardian endured distress—all sorts of woes, of ample sorrows—because it was then without concealment known to sons of men—sadly in song—that through wretched years Grendel fought against Hrothgar, kept up hate-begotten feuds, outrage and enmity for many years—continual strife—and would

1. Grendel prowls around Heorot after nightfall.

2. Throughout the tale, the poet uses many names to refer to the Danish people. He calls them Ring-Danes, Scyldings, East or West-Danes, etc. All these names refer to the same people group: the inhabitants of Denmark.

3. beer-carouse – beer-drinking

4. thane – Old English word meaning knight, baron, or lord

5. Grendel kills and eats thirty men.

6. At dawn the foul deed came to light; there was weeping and wailing. King Hrothgar's grief is intense. On the next night, Grendel returns and commits further outrages. Hence the Hall is deserted.

7. liege – vassal; here the word refers to Hrothgar's friends and companions in the Hall.

8. The Danes were afraid to sleep in the Hall after Grendel's attack. To tell the reader this, the poet might have written, "Then all men fled to remote places to sleep." But he instead paints a picture of the men's fear by the very words he uses: "Then was the man easy to find who sought elsewhere a more remote resting-place for himself." In this way, the poet *shows* the reader what happened rather than simply *telling* the reader what happened. This method of writing lends interest to the story and encourages the reader to think more deeply about what is going on.

9. For twelve years Hrothgar suffered, knowing that anyone who slept in Heorot might be murdered. Grendel could neither be fought off by force nor bought off with money.

10. “a brilliant recompense” is a startling *litotes* meant to express its opposite and draw a contrast between Grendel’s actions and the laws then in force in Scandinavian cultures. When a person was killed among the Danes, the murderer could often settle the feud by paying *wergild*, a compensation for murder paid to the victim’s family. This blood-price was supposed to prevent further killing due to revenge. The strong statement “a brilliant recompense” shows the reader that Grendel could not be expected to pay *wergild* for the men he had murdered—to the contrary, he could be expected to pay nothing at all.

11. The text here is difficult. The poet may be saying that Hrothgar, as a heathen, did not understand God’s ways and could not approach His throne to inquire of Him. Or he may be saying that Grendel was not permitted to approach the throne and was incapable of understanding the Lord’s ways.

12. Time passed on, councils were held, offerings were made at the shrines of idols, but the national disaster did not cease.

13. Destroyer of Life – a kenning for the devil

14. The poet here describes the folly of seeking help from idols. These idols could not offer hope. Apart from Christ, mankind has no hope. “At that time you were without Christ, . . . having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). “Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy” (Jon. 2:8).

15. Here the poet describes the ignorance of the heathen. These men prayed to their idols because they did not know the true God, yet they should have worshiped the Creator of the heavens and earth and “the glorious Ruler” of all. The prophet Isaiah echoes these thoughts in Isaiah 40:21-22, 25, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? . . . It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. . . . ‘To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One.” No other god could help the Danes in their distress.

not peaceably avert life’s havoc from one man of Danish stock. Nor would he stay for tribute—nor could any veteran there expect a brilliant recompense from the murderer’s hands.¹⁰

But the demon, the dark death-shadow, kept pursuing young and old; caught and entrapped them. Night after night he held the misty moors. Men know not where such sorcerers go in their wanderings.

So many outrages, severe afflictions, did the foe of man, the fearful solitary, achieve in quick succession. Heorot he held, the gold-bespangled hall, on the dark nights. He might not, however, mount the throne—a precious possession in the Creator’s sight—nor did he know His purpose.¹¹

¹²That was great sorrow, breaking of heart to the guardian of the Scyldings. Many a mighty one sat oft in council, pondered about help—what it were best for brave-minded men to contrive against the sudden terrors. Sometimes they vowed offerings to idols at their heathen temples—prayed aloud that the Destroyer of Life¹³ would provide them help against the national distress. Such was their custom—the hope of the heathen—they bore hell in mind in the thoughts of their hearts.¹⁴ They knew not the Creator, Judge of deeds; they knew not the Lord God, nor verily had they learned to worship the Protector of the heavens, the glorious Ruler.¹⁵

Woe to the man who in direst distress commits his soul into the fire’s embrace, to hope for no comfort, in no wise to change.

But blessed is he who after his death-day may stand before the Lord and obtain a refuge in the Father’s arms!

3. BEOWULF'S JOURNEY AND ARRIVAL

So¹ then the son of Healfdene was constantly disturbed by carking² care; the wise prince could not ward off the trouble, the suffering which had befallen the people. The fiercely grim, enforced distress, greatest of night evils, was too severe, too loathly and long-lasting. These deeds of Grendel had Hygelac's thane, a brave chief of the Geats, heard of in his fatherland.³ He was strongest of mankind in might in this life's-day, noble and stalwart.

⁴He bade make ready for him a good wave-traverser⁵—said he would seek the warrior-king, the noted prince, over the swan's-road⁶ since he had need of men. Prudent folk did not blame him at all for that expedition, though he was dear to them; they egged on the stout-hearted one and looked for favorable omens. The hero had chosen champions from the people of the Geats, from the keenest he could find. As one of fifteen he took ship; a man who was a skillful mariner pointed out the landmarks.

Time passed on; the bark was on the waves, the boat under the lee of the cliff. The warriors, equipped, stepped on to the prow; the currents churned the sea against the sand; men bore into the bosom of the ship bright armor, splendid war-gear. The heroes, the warriors on their willing adventure shoved off the vessel of braced timbers. Then the foamy-necked floater, most bird-like, started off over the billowy sea, urged onwards by the wind until about the same time on the second day the curved prow had journeyed on so far that the voyagers saw the land, the sea-cliffs, glisten—the steep mountains, the huge promontories. Then was the sea traversed, the voyage at an end.

After that the people of the Weders⁷ went quickly up on to dry land, they made fast the ship; their corslets,⁸ their battledress, rattled; they thanked God that for them the sea-paths had been easy.⁹

1. While Hrothgar sat helpless, Beowulf, a young, brave warrior of Hygelac (king of the Geats) heard in his own country of the deeds of Grendel.

2. carking – distressing; perplexing

3. The land of the Geats (southern Sweden) lay to the northeast of King Hrothgar's kingdom (eastern Denmark). The kingdoms were separated by the North Sea.

4. Beowulf decides to sail to Heorot and offer his services to Hrothgar. A band of fourteen men-at-arms go with him.

5. wave-traverser – a kenning for a ship

6. swan's-road – a kenning for the sea. From the viewpoint of someone standing on shore, the sails of the ships of Beowulf's day resembled swan's wings on the water.

7. Weders – Weder-Geats, another name for Beowulf's people, the Geats.

8. corslet – coat of mail

9. Beowulf and his companions recognized that God's mercy had preserved them on their ocean voyage. This truth is beautifully captured by the psalmist in Psalm 107:23-32.

10. The Danish coast-warden sees the party unloading their implements of war. Full of anxiety at sight of these foreign warriors, he hurriedly rides down to the shore and challenges the newcomers, asking the company who they are and what their business is. He sees that they come not as peaceful men but as warriors and that one of them (Beowulf) is to all appearances a person of distinction.

11. tricked – decked, dressed

12. *i.e.*, Beowulf is certainly not a stay-at-home weakling unless his heroic bearing and stature is a deception.

¹⁰Then from the rampart the watchman of the Scyldings who had to guard the sea-cliffs saw them lift bright shields and trim war-harness over the gang-way. In the thoughts of his mind he was struck with anxiety as to who these men were. Then he, Hrothgar's officer, started off on his horse to the shore. Mightily he shook the strong spear-shaft in his hands and asked in words of parley: "Who are ye, clad in the harness of such as bear arms, who have thus come and brought a towering ship over the waterways, a ring-prowed bark hither over the seas? Long have I been acting as coast-guard, keeping watch over the shore so that on Danish land no enemy might do us harm by naval harryings. No shield-bearers have ever begun to land here more openly—nor did ye know at all the password of men at arms, the permission of kinsmen. Never have I seen a mightier noble upon earth, a warrior in armor, than is one of you; that is no stay-at-home tricked¹¹ out with weapons unless his countenance, his peerless form belies him.¹²

"Now I must know your origin ere ye go further, as faithless spies on Danish ground. Now, ye strangers from far, ye sea-traversers, hear my simple opinion—ye had better make haste to inform me from what place you are come!"

4. THE ERRAND TOLD

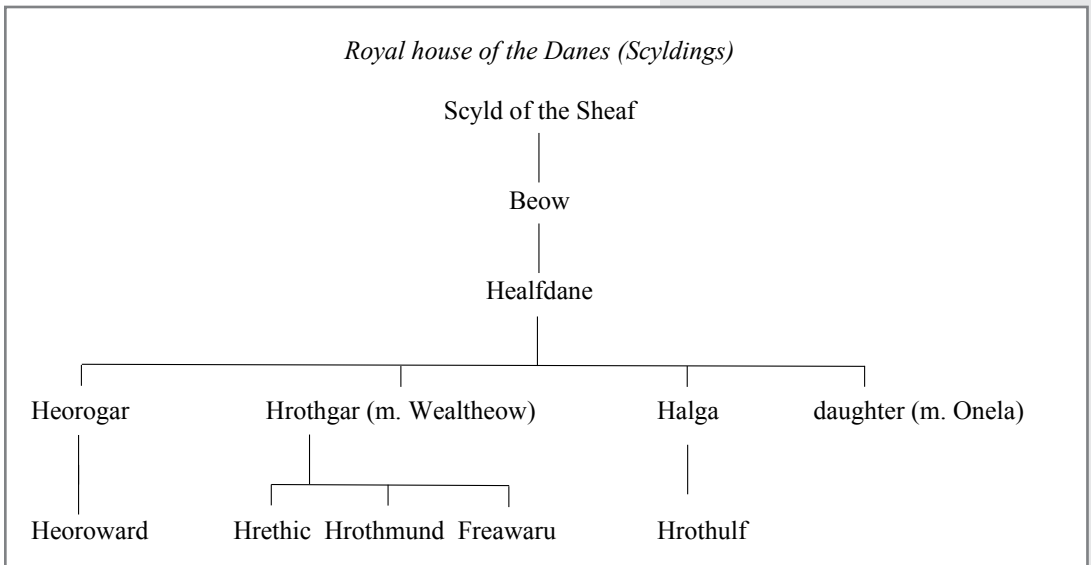
To him answered the chieftain;¹ the leader of the troop unlocked his store of words: “We are people of the Geatish nation and hearth-companions of Hygelac. My father was renowned among the folk, a noble prince named Ecgtheow.² He tarried many winters before he, an old man, passed away from his dwelling; each of the wise men far and wide throughout the earth recalls him readily. We have come to seek thy lord, the son of Healfdene, the protector of the people, with honorable intent; do thou favor us with instructions. We have a great errand to the famous ruler of the Danes, nor shall anything be hid of what I have in mind.

“Thou knowest if it is so, as verily we heard say, that among the Scyldings some foeman, some secret ravager, effects by terrorism in dark nights malignity untold, carnage and crushing shame. I can give Hrothgar good counsel about this with candid mind—how he, the wise and good, may overcome the fiend; whether for him the torment of afflictions should ever cease, salvation come at last, and the seethings of care wax cooler;³ or he should ever hereafter endure the stress

1. Beowulf explains that he and his men are Geats and that they come on a friendly mission to save the Scyldings (or Danes) from Grendel.

2. Beowulf’s father Ecgtheow as a young man sought refuge with King Hrothgar and lived with the Scyldings for some time. Beowulf’s family would therefore be familiar to the Danes.

3. whether his seethings of care wax cooler – whether his burning griefs will cool at last. *I.e.*, would a deliverer ever come to relieve or cool Hrothgar’s burning sorrow?



4. The watchman gladly welcomes Beowulf and his men. He shows them the way to Heorot and offers to guard their ship while they are gone.

5. Beowulf and his men, dressed for battle, boldly landed their ship and stepped ashore in broad daylight under the watchful eyes of the coast-warden. They made no attempt to conceal their landing or their warlike purpose. The coast-warden notes that these actions agree with Beowulf's assertion that his purpose in coming was friendly to the Danes. Judging from his words and his deeds, Beowulf appeared to be an honest man.

6. painter – a rope used to fasten a ship to another object.

7. An image of a boar was often placed on helmets among northern tribes. It was connected with the worship of Freyr, a Norse god. Beowulf and his men wore boar helmets.

8. descry – see; catch sight of from a distance

9. The coast-warden returns to the beach.

of trouble—crushing misery, long as the best of houses lasts there in its lofty place.”

⁴The watchman, bold retainer, answered where he sat on his horse: “A keen shield-warrior who judges well must know the meaning both of your words and deeds.⁵ I gather that this is a company friendly to the lord of the Scyldings. Pass forth, bearing your weapons and armor—I will guide you. Moreover, I will bid my comrades honorably guard against all enemies your ship, your fresh-tarred vessel on the beach, until at last the wooden craft with twisted prow bears the beloved man back to the Weders' confines over the eddying seas. To such a well-intentioned man will it be granted that he shall get through the rush of battle whole.”

They set out then to journey on—the vessel remained still, the roomy-breasted ship rode on the painter,⁶ held by its anchor. Above the cheek-guards shone the boar-images; covered with gold, adorned and fire-hardened, the boar watched o'er the warlike men.⁷ The men hastened; bent on the fray, they pushed along; they went downhill together until they could descry⁸ the timbered hall, handsome and gold-adorned, which was for earth-dwellers the most pre-eminent of buildings under heaven—in which the ruler dwelt. Its radiance gleamed o'er many lands. Then did the bold in battle point them out the radiant dwelling of brave men that they might go straight thither.

⁹War hero as he was, he headed his horse round, and then he spake this word: “It is time for me to depart. May the Almighty Father keep you safe in your adventures by His grace. I will to the sea, to keep ward against hostile bands.”

5. BEOWULF ARRIVES AT HEOROT

The road was paved, the path kept the men together.¹ When they went thence to the Hall in their dread armor, each corslet, hard and hand-locked, glistened, each gleaming ring of iron chinked in their harness. Sea-weary, they put their broad shields, their trusty bucklers wondrous hard, against the palace wall; then seated they themselves upon the bench; the corslets, war-dress of the heroes, rang; the spears were piled together, the war-gear of the sea-men—the ashen wood, grey at the tip. The iron-clad troop was well supplied with weapons.

²There then a stately warrior asked the troopers of their race: “Whence have ye brought these plated shields, these hauberks gray and visored helmets, this pile of battle-shafts? I am Hrothgar’s herald and officer. I have never seen so many foreigners more bold. I ween³ you have sought out Hrothgar not from exile

1. Beowulf and his men approach Heorot. Hrothgar’s famous hall is believed to have been located near modern-day Lejre in east Denmark.

2. A Danish warrior asks the foreigners to identify themselves.

3. ween – think; assume



Heorot is believed to have been located near modern-day Lejre

but from valor and from loftiness of soul!”

Then the hero renowned in strength answered him; the proud leader of the Weders, hardy under his helmet, rejoined in speech: “We are Hygelac’s table companions. Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell my errand to the son of Healfdene, the famous prince thy master, if he will grant us that we may speak with his gracious self.”

Wulfgar replied (he was a chief of the Wendels; his courage, prowess, and wisdom were well-known to many): “I will ask the protector of the Danes,⁴ the lord of the Scyldings and giver of rings,⁵ the illustrious prince, as thou makest request, concerning thy expedition and will forthwith announce to thee the answer which the prince thinks fit to give me.”

Then he returned quickly to where Hrothgar sat, old and hoary, with his suite of nobles. The valiant one went on until he stood before the shoulders of the Danish lord—he knew the etiquette of court.⁶ Wulfgar spoke to his beloved lord: “People of the Geats, come from far over the seas, have voyaged hither; the warriors call their chief Beowulf. They make request that they may now exchange words with thee, my ruler. Refuse them not thy conversation, gracious Hrothgar! In their war-trappings they seem worthy of the high esteem of nobles. Assuredly the chief is doughty⁷ who has led these battle heroes hither.”

4. Hrothgar

5. giver of rings (or ring-giver) – a kenning for a ruler, one who bestows wealth and honors on those who serve him.

6. The poet notes that Wulfgar knew court etiquette and showed proper reverence for his king (Prov. 25:6).

7. doughty – brave; persistent

6. HROTHGAR'S WELCOME

Hrothgar,¹ the Scyldings' shield, replied: "I knew him when he was a youth. His ancestor was called Ecgtheow. Hrethel the Geat gave him his only daughter into his household.² His son has now come boldly here and visited a trusty friend. Moreover, seafarers who carried thither costly presents for the goodwill of the Geats used to say this—that he, the famed in battle, had in his grip of hand the force of thirty men. The holy God has sent him to us West-Danes, as I hope, for a support against the plague of Grendel.³ I shall proffer⁴ the chieftain treasures for his bravery. Do thou make haste; bid thou the banded brotherhood come in together for me to see. Tell them besides in words how welcome they are to the Danish people."

Then to the hall-door Wulfgar went, brought out word from within: "My conquering lord, chief of the Eastern Danes, bade me inform you that he knows your noble blood and that ye men of brave intent are welcome to him hither over the sea-billows. Now may ye go and see Hrothgar in your fighting raiment under your war-masks; let your battle-shields and your wooden spear-shafts await here the issue of the parley."⁵

Then the chieftain rose with many a warrior round him—a picked band of followers. Some waited there and guarded the accoutrements as the brave man directed them. Together they hied⁶ them forward under the roof of Heorot as the man guided them. The valiant one advanced, hardy under his helmet, until he stood within the chamber.

Beowulf spake, the corslet on him shone, the armor-net linked by the skill of the smith: "Hail to thee, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman⁷ and tribesman-thane. I have in my youth undertaken many deeds of daring.

"Grendel's doings became plainly known to me in my fatherland. Seafarers say that this hall, this most

1. Hrothgar knew Beowulf as a child and has heard of the young man's bravery. Though still young, Beowulf was already known as one of the strongest of the Geats.

2. Hrethel king of the Geats gave his only daughter as wife to Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father.

3. Hrothgar rightly guesses what has brought Beowulf to Heorot.

4. proffer – offer

5. Wulfgar allows Beowulf and his men to wear their armor while they speak with King Hrothgar, but he asks them to leave their weapons behind. This was proper court etiquette.

6. hie – to hasten; to move with haste

7. Beowulf was a nephew of Hygelac, king of the Geats. Hygelac was Hrethel's son.

noble building, stands empty and useless to every man after the evening light has become hidden under the vault of heaven. Then my people, the best folk, wise men, advised me thus, lord Hrothgar—that I should visit thee because they knew the hugeness of my power. They had themselves observed when, bloodstained from the foes, I passed through hostile snares where I bound five giants, laid low a brood of giants, and slew by night sea-monsters on the waves. I suffered dire extremity and avenged the attacks upon the Weder-Geats—disasters had befallen them. I ground down their oppressors. And now I will decide the matter alone against the wretch, the giant Grendel!

⁸“Now therefore I will beg of thee one boon,⁹ thou ruler of the glorious Danes, protector of the Scyldings. Do not refuse me this, defense of warriors, nation’s kindly ruler, now I am come thus far—that I, with my band of noble warriors, this troop of hardy men, may purge Heorot alone. Moreover, I have learnt that in his rashness the monster recks¹⁰ not of weapons. Hence—so that Hygelac my prince may be glad at heart on my account, I renounce this: that I should bear a sword or ample shield or yellow buckler¹¹ to the fray; but with the fiend I’ll close with grip of hand and struggle about life, foe against foe. He whom death carries off shall rest assured it is God’s will.

“I doubt it not that if he may prevail, he will eat fearlessly the Geatish folk in the war-hall, as he has often done the flower of the Hrethmen.¹²

“Thou wilt have no need to cover my head,¹³ for he will have me, blood-bespattered, if death seizes me. He will bear off the bloody corpse, will set his mind upon devouring it. The lonely one will feast un pityingly and stain his swamp-lair. No longer wilt thou need to care about my body’s sustenance. If battle takes me, do thou send Hygelac this best of war-dresses, most excellent of corslets, which protects my breast; it is Hrethel’s legacy, the work of Weland. Wyrd¹⁴ goes ever as it must!”

8. Beowulf asks for the honor of fighting Grendel. He explains that he will use no weapons against the monster.

9. boon – petition; a favor granted to someone

10. reck – care; be concerned about. This archaic word is still visible in the modern word “reckless.”

11. yellow buckler – this buckler or shield was made of a framework of yellow linden wood, over which animal skins were stretched

12. Hrethmen – Danes

13. cover my head – Beowulf explains that if Grendel wins the fight, Hrothgar will have no need to care for Beowulf’s corpse since Grendel will consume it. Preparing a body for cremation (a heathen ritual practiced both by Danes and Geats) was a costly and involved undertaking; Hrothgar would be spared this expense if Beowulf’s body was eaten by Grendel.

14. Wyrd, an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “fate” or “destiny,” was also the name of a Norse god who was believed to be the weaver and disposer of the destinies of mankind. Beowulf states that fate will determine the winner of the battle. But elsewhere (chapter 32), it is made clear, that what will happen is determined by a personal, sovereign God. The use of “Wyrd” in *Beowulf* is a possible syncretistic leftover of Norse religion.

7. HROTHGAR TELLS OF GRENDEL

Then Hrothgar, protector of the Scyldings, spake:¹ “My friend Beowulf, thou hast sought us for defensive fight and for kindly help. Thy father fought a mighty battle; he was the hand-slayer of Heatholaf among the Wylfings. Then the people of the Weder-Geats might not harbor him for fear of harryings. Thence went he to the South Danes’ folk, the honored Scyldings, over the surging of the waves when I first ruled the people of the Danes, held in my younger days the gem-decked treasure-burg of heroes, when Heorogar, my elder brother, the son of Healfdene, was dead and lifeless. He was better than I! I settled afterwards the feud with money. I sent old treasures over the sea’s back to the Wylfings. He swore oaths to me.

“It is a grief for me in my heart to tell any man what humiliation and terrible damage Grendel has framed for me in Heorot with his thoughts of hate. My chamber-guard, my war-band is diminished. Fate swept them off into the awful presence of Grendel. Still, God can easily restrain the mad ravager from his deeds!²

“Full often fighting men, elate with beer, pledged themselves over the ale-cup that they would await in the beer-hall the combat with Grendel with terrible swords.³ Then at morning-time when day shone forth was this mead-hall, this noble chamber, stained with gore; all the bench-boards deluged with blood, the hall with sword-blood. Through that I possessed the fewer trusty followers, dear warriors, by those whom death took off.

“Sit now at the banquet and open thy mind, thy war-fame unto our men, as inclination moves thee.”

Then a bench was cleared in the drinking hall for the Geat-men all together; thither went the bold ones to sit, exulting in strength. A servant did his office, who bare in his hands an overlaid ale-cup and poured

1. Hrothgar summarizes the history of Beowulf’s father Ecgtheow. Because Ecgtheow slew a Wylfing chief, his own people would not allow him to return to Geatland because they feared the Wylfings’ revenge. So he went to Denmark and took refuge with Hrothgar, then a young man. Hrothgar gave presents to the Wylfings and so ended the feud. Now Ecgtheow’s son Beowulf returns to show his gratitude by assisting Hrothgar in his hour of need.

2. Here is an example in *Beowulf* where God’s sovereignty is acknowledged. The Lord God has the ability to stop Grendel.

3. Drunken warriors often vowed to remain in Heorot overnight to fight with Grendel, but their rash boldness was no match for his ferocity. In the morning, all that was left of them were gruesome bloodstains in the Hall.

out the pure liquor. Now and again a minstrel sang,
clear-voiced in Heorot. There was revelry among the
heroes—no slight joy of Danes and Weders.

8. UNFERTH TAUNTS BEOWULF

Then Unferth¹ the son of Ecglaf who sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings spoke and gave vent to secret hatred—the journey of Beowulf the brave seafarer was most galling to him, for he grudged that any other man under heaven should ever obtain more glory on this middle-earth than he himself.²

³“Art thou that Beowulf who strove with Breca, contested with him on the open sea in a swimming contest when ye two for vainglory tried the floods and ventured your lives in deep water for idle boasting? Nor could any man, friend or foe, dissuade you from your sorry enterprise when ye swam on the sea; when ye compassed the flowing stream with your arms, meted out the sea-paths, battled with your hands, and glided over the ocean; when the sea, the winter’s flood, surged with waves. Ye two toiled in the water’s realm seven nights; he overcame you at swimming, he had the greater strength. Then at morning time the ocean cast him up on the Heathoraemas’ land. Thence, dear to his people, he sought his beloved fatherland, the land of the Brondings, his fair stronghold-city where he had subjects and treasures and a borough. The son of Beanstan performed faithfully all that he had pledged himself to. So I expect for thee a worse fatality—though thou hast everywhere prevailed in rush of battle—gruesome war—if thou darest await Grendel at close quarters for the space of a night.”

⁴Beowulf son of Ecgtheow replied: “Well, my friend Unferth, thou hast talked a great deal, drunken with beer, concerning Breca, and hast said much about his adventure! In sooth⁵ I tell it out that I had more strength at sea, more battling with waves, than any other man.

“When we were still boys, we two said this and pledged ourselves—we were both then still in the time of youth—that we would venture our lives

1. Unferth, a Danish courtier, is envious of Beowulf’s bravery and begins to taunt him.

2. Envy is driven by pride. In our desire to have more glory than someone else, we compete with them. The Word of God warns us: “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26).

3. Unferth mocks, “Are you the same Beowulf who ventured on a foolhardy swimming match with Breca on the open sea in winter, for seven days, and got beaten? A worse fate is in store for you when you meet Grendel!”

4. In response to Unferth’s words, Beowulf sets the record straight and boasts of his achievements and his battles with sea monsters. Unferth’s taunt has given Beowulf the opportunity to speak of his own bravery. It has also given Hrothgar and his warriors a chance to learn more about young Beowulf.

5. In sooth – in truth

6. Breca could not outdistance Beowulf, and Beowulf refused to leave Breca.

7. Beowulf uses a humorous word picture to describe his victory over the sea monsters. The monsters hoped to make a feast of Beowulf, but instead Beowulf ‘served’ them with his sword—a feast the monsters did not appreciate.

8. Beowulf doubts Unferth’s courage. While Beowulf killed sea monsters, Unferth used his sword to kill his own family members. Beowulf warns Unferth that he will pay the penalty for such wicked deeds.

out on the sea, and that we did accordingly. When we swam on the sea we had a naked sword rigid in hand—we thought to guard ourselves against whales. He could not by any means float far from me on the flood-waves, swifter on the sea than I. I would not go from him.⁶ Thus we two were together on the sea for the space of five nights till the flood, the tossing seas, the bitter-cold weather, the darkening night, drove us apart and the fierce north wind turned on us—rough were the waves. The wrath of the sea-fishes was aroused. Then my corslet, hard and hand-locked, furnished me help against the foes; the woven shirt of mail, adorned with gold, covered my breast. A spotted deadly brute dragged me to the bottom; the grim beast had me fast in his grip. Still, it was granted to me that I might strike the monster with my sword-point, with my fighting weapon. The force of battle carried off the sea beast by my hand.

“Thus did the miscreants press me hard and often. With my dear sword I served them out, as was befitting.⁷ The base destroyers did not have the pleasure of that feast—that they might eat me—sit round the banquet at the sea-bottom; but at morning they lay wounded by cutlasses, up along the foreshore—dispatched by swords—so that henceforth they could not hinder seafarers of their passage over the deep waterway. The sun, bright beacon of God, came from the east; the waters assuaged so that I could descry sea-headlands, weather-beaten cliffs. Often Wyrð saves an undoomed earl when his courage is good! Well, it was granted me to slay nine sea-monsters with my sword! Never have I been told of harder struggle at night under the vault of heaven, nor of a man in greater straits on ocean streams. Yet I endured the grip of the monsters with my life whole, weary of my enterprise. Then the sea bore me, the flood, by its current, the surging ocean, to the land of the Finns.

⁸“I have never heard such contests, such peril of swords related about *thee*. Never yet did Breca at the battle play, nor either of you, perform so bold a deed

with shining swords, though I do not boast much of that. Thou wast the slaughterer of thy brothers—thy blood relations. For that thou shalt bear punishment in Hell, good though thy wit may be.”

9. Beowulf believes in the reality of eternal punishment in hell. The sin of murder is damnable.

9. HROTHGAR GIVES A FEAST TO HONOR BEOWULF

1. Beowulf concludes his words to Unferth by stating that Grendel may fear no Dane, yet Beowulf vows to kill Grendel and make Heorot a place of safety and rejoicing once again.

2. Victor-Scyldings, Danes, and Spear-Danes are all terms for the same people group, Hrothgar's people.

3. Hrothgar and his men rejoice that Beowulf has vowed to slay Grendel that very night.

4. shepherd of the people – a kenning for a ruler. This metaphor highlights the protective and caring nature of a good ruler (2 Sam. 5:2; Matt. 2:6).

5. Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's wife, enters the scene as an ideal hostess, greeting her guests and carrying the cup to the older men and then the younger, according to custom.

In truth I tell thee,¹ son of Ecglaf, that Grendel, the frightful demon, would never have done so many dread deeds to thy prince, such havoc in Heorot, if thy heart, thy spirit, were so warlike as thou sayest thyself. But he has found out that he need not too much dread the antagonism, the terrible sword-storm of your men, the Victor-Scyldings. He takes pledges by force, spares none of the Danish people; but he fights for amusement, kills and feasts, and recks not of the opposition of the Spear-Danes.²

“Now, however, I shall quickly show him the strength and courage of the Geats in battle. Afterwards—when the morning-light of another day, the ether-clad sun, shines from the south over the sons of men—let him who may go boldly to the mead-drinking!”

³Then the distributor of treasure, gray-haired and famed in battle, was in joyful mood; the prince of the glorious Danes counted on help; the shepherd of the people⁴ heard from Beowulf his firm resolve.

There was laughter of warriors, song sounded forth, the words were joyous. Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's queen, went forth gold-adorned, mindful of court usage, and greeted the men in hall.⁵ The noble lady first gave the cup to the hereditary ruler of the East-Danes and bade him be joyful at the beer-drinking, kind to his people. He, the victorious king, partook in gladness of the feast and hall-cup.

Then the lady of the Helmings went round every part of the hall to seniors and juniors; proffered the costly goblet until occasion came that she, the diademed queen, ripe in judgment, bore the mead-cup to Beowulf. She greeted the prince of the Geats and thanked God, discreet in speech, in that her desire had been fulfilled, that she might look to some warrior for help from these attacks.

He, the death-dealing fighter, received the cup from Wealhtheow and then spoke, eager for the fray. Beowulf son of Ecgtheow said:

“When I went on the sea and sat in the sea-boat with my company of men, I purposed this: that I would once for all carry out the wish of your people or fall in the field, fast in the clutches of the foe. I will show knightly courage or in this mead-hall pass my last day!”

These words the lady liked full well—the Geat’s defiant speech. The free-born folk-queen, gold-be-decked, went by her lord to sit.

“Then again, as of yore, brave words were spoken in the hall. The people were in gladness; there was the clamor of a conquering tribe—until straightway the son of Healfdene wished to go to his evening-rest. He knew that an attack was purposed against the high Hall by the evil spirit when they could not see the sun’s light and darkening night was over all—when shadowy forms came stalking, dusky beneath the clouds.

The whole company rose. Then Hrothgar saluted Beowulf—one hero the other—and wished him luck, power in the house of wine, and said these words:

“Never yet have I entrusted the noble hall of the Danes to any man since I could lift hand and shield, excepting now to thee. Occupy now and guard this best of houses. Be mindful of thy fame, make known thy mighty valor, watch against the foe. No lack shall be to thee of what thou wilt, if thou dost get through this daring business with thy life.”⁷

6. Amidst the rejoicing, the sun begins to set. All Danes abandon the hall before Grendel makes his nightly raid.

7. Hrothgar vows to reward Beowulf if he survives his encounter with Grendel.

10. THE WATCH FOR GRENDEL

Then Hrothgar, bulwark of the Scyldings, departed out of the Hall with his suite of warriors. The war-chief wished to join Wealhtheow, his queen, as consort. The king of glory had, so men had heard, appointed a hall-guard against Grendel who discharged a special office about the lord of the Danes—kept watch for monsters.

¹Verily the chief of the Geats trusted firmly in his fervid might and in the favor of the Creator when he took off from himself the iron corslet and the helmet from his head and gave his figured sword, choicest of weapons, to his thane and bade him guard the war-harness!

Then spake brave Beowulf of the Geats a boastful word ere he went up to bed: “I count myself no less in fighting power, in battle-deeds, than Grendel, and therefore by the sword I will not kill him—rid him of life—though I might rightly do so. He knows not the use of these noble arts—to strike back at me and hew my shield, brave though he be at feats of brutal force. But we at night shall dispense with the sword if he dare seek a combat without arms; and then may the wise God, the holy Lord, adjudge the victory to whichever side it seemeth meet² to Him!”

³Then the brave-in-battle laid him down, the pillow received the impress of the noble’s face, and around him many a keen sea-warrior sank upon the chamber-couch. Not one of them supposed that thence he would ever revisit his sweet home, his folk and the castle in which he was brought up. Nay, they had learned that in time past murderous death had taken off far too many of them, the Danish people, in the wine-hall. But to them, the people of the Weder-Geats, the Lord⁴ gave weaved fortune of success in war—help and support so that they should all overcome their enemies through the power of one man, through his personal strength. It is known for cer-

1. Beowulf removes his armor, sets aside his weapons, and trusts in his sheer strength and the favor of God to protect him in his fight with Grendel. He wants to prove that he can defeat Grendel without the benefit of sword, shield, or protective armor.

2. meet – suitable, best

3. Beowulf’s men lie down to sleep inside Heorot. They fear they will never see their homes again.

4. This is a potential reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

tain that the mighty God has always ruled over the race of men.⁵

⁶The shadowy visitant came stalking in the dusky night. The warriors who had to guard that pinnacled hall slept—all except one. It was well-known to men that the worker of ill might not hurl them to the shades below when the Creator did not will it.⁷ Still Beowulf, defiantly watching for the foe in rage and in anger, awaited the result of the fray.

5. Even though the heathen Danes and Geats may not have known the true God, yet God still watched over them and ruled them (Ps. 33:13-15).

6. Grendel approaches Heorot. All are asleep except Beowulf, who is awaiting the arrival of the monster.

7. God holds the lives of all people in His hand. He decides the time of their death. "In [His] hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). Grendel could not kill anyone unless the Lord willed it.

PARADISE LOST

John Milton

1674 EDITION

*Annotations by R.A. SHEATS
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INTRODUCTION

P*aradise Lost* is an epic poem written by John Milton (1608-1674). Milton is regarded as one of the greatest English poets of all time. Born in London in 1608, John was raised by Protestant parents and attended the University of Cambridge. He began writing poetry at a young age and also penned many prose works.

Milton lived during a time of great upheaval in his homeland of England. He was thirty-four years old at the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642. Milton did not engage in the war, but he wrote in favor of the Parliamentarians against the Royalists. The war led to the deposing and execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the rise of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector.

In 1642 Milton married Mary Powell. The couple had three daughters (and a son who died in infancy). In 1652 Mary died in childbirth. The same year his wife died, Milton lost his eyesight, a loss he attributed to the many hours he spent writing. In 1656 he married Katherine Woodcock, but she died two years later.

In 1660, the monarchy was restored under Charles II, and Milton found himself in danger of his life. He went into hiding as a warrant was issued for his arrest and his writings were burned. After a general pardon was proclaimed and the danger had passed, Milton married a third time in 1663, this time to Elizabeth Minshull. This marriage would last until Milton's death.

Though blind, Milton had continued to write by dictating his works to an amanuensis. Through this means, *Paradise Lost* slowly began to be written down. Milton was almost sixty years old when the poem was completed and published. The first version appeared in 1667, and an enlarged edition was published in 1674 shortly before Milton's death on November 8 of that year.

Paradise Lost

Paradise Lost was written as epic poetry. Epic poetry is narrative poetry written in epic form. Its theme is a his-

torical (or mythical) event or time. Unlike some shorter poetic forms, epic poetry is not intended to be read with each line or group of lines forming a single unit. Instead, the poem is to be read by paragraphs and books at a time, with each line and every thought drawing the reader forward to the next and the next, each contributing to create a single piece of a much larger whole. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's epic poem is composed of twelve books, each of which builds upon the others to create the masterpiece of the completed whole.

Epic poetry is known for its elevated style and poetic grandeur. Milton's use of slightly unfamiliar words and phrases and the numerous examples he draws from antiquity and various areas of human existence (pagan, Christian, Greek, Roman, Hebrew, etc.) gives his poem a grandeur that lifts the reader above ordinary thoughts to consider the richness and variety of the world God has created.

Epic poetry is also known for its subject matter—wars, battles of cosmic import, godlike heroes, and bigger-than-life imagery. But Milton's poem doesn't contain the usual subject matter of knights, battles, jousting, and feasting one would expect in epic poetry. Unlike Greek and Roman poetry, Milton focuses on a truly epic theme: the wicked schemes of Satan and his demons against God's order and against the race of mankind in the persons of Adam and Eve in Paradise, and the triumph of God's goodness, justice, and mercy over the machinations of the devil. As Milton explains at the beginning of his poem, his subject matter intends to "soar above" other epic tales while he "pursues things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme."

The poem opens with a view of hell, where Satan and the fallen angels bemoan their state and begin to plot how they can strike back against the Lord who cast them out of heaven for their rebellion against Him. Satan then journeys to Earth in the hopes of locating Adam and Eve and tempting them to sin with him. By this wicked deed he hopes to destroy mankind, God's crowning work of creation.

In his poem, Milton doesn't try to surprise us with something new and exciting, some new twist to the Adam and Eve story we've never heard before. His use of poetic license in the portrayal of historic people and events is not intended to make his readers think that the minute details of his poem actually happened in the exact way he describes them. Did Satan really travel to the sun and ask directions from an archangel so he could find the Garden of Eden? Milton does not presume that he did. Instead, he uses this scene and others in the poem to illustrate the true story: Satan's cosmic treason and the subsequent fall of man. Just like a painter paints a backdrop to showcase his beautiful mountain scene, so Milton adds in imaginary details to showcase the marvelous wonder of God's providence and redemption. By doing so, he paints a portrait of what we already know—and have always known—about sin and its consequences, about God and His justice, and about our marvelous Creator's utterly indescribable mercy toward undeserving mankind. These are the epic subjects of *Paradise Lost*.

Within the present edition of the poem, some archaic spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been updated. (The capitalized word *Heaven* refers to the place of God's throne and the residence of angels. The lowercase word *heaven* refers to the sky, the firmament, or the starry expanse which surrounds the earth.) Grave accents have been placed on words to indicate a separate syllable division that does not commonly occur in modern English (e.g., thronèd powers). Section breaks have been added as well as notes for clarification to assist the reader with unfamiliar or archaic language. The poem has also been slightly abridged.¹

On Reading the Poem

The reader may find it helpful to read the poem aloud (either to himself/herself or others). This will assist in catching the rhythm and flow of the words and may also help with comprehension. When the reader encounters

1. The entire scope of this abridgment is 150 lines in total. Lines in various books referencing human sexuality were removed, and a larger section in Book 8 was removed to provide a more readable scope for the student. The rest of Milton's work is unabridged.

a difficult passage, it may be helpful to read all the notes associated with the passage and then reread the passage itself. This will assist in understanding and grasping the meaning of difficult sections.

BOOK ONE

T*his first book briefly sets forth the whole subject: man's disobedience and the loss of Paradise. Then it mentions the cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent. Satan rebelled against God and took many legions of angels with him. By God's command, he and his angels were driven out of heaven and cast into hell.*

Then the poem presents Satan with his angels now fallen into hell, a place of utter darkness and chaos. Here Satan with his angels lie on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished. After a while, Satan discusses his fall with a fellow angel. Then he summons all his legions. The fallen angels gather together, and the names of their chief leaders are given (they are named according to the idols later worshiped in Canaan and the surrounding countries).

Satan comforts his angels and gives them hope of regaining heaven. Then he tells them of a report he heard in heaven that God would create another world (Earth) and another kind of creature (mankind). To find out the truth of this rumor and to devise further schemes of wickedness, Satan calls a council. A palace is built in hell to house the demons, and there they sit in council to conspire together.

1. fruit – a reference to both the forbidden fruit and the consequences of eating that fruit
2. one greater Man – Jesus Christ
3. Heavenly Muse – a reference to the Holy Spirit, who spoke to Moses on Sinai and Horeb. Milton begins his poem by asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance in his writing.
4. that shepherd – Moses (Ex. 19:20; Deut. 4:9-10)
5. Zion hill – Mount Zion, the site of the temple in Jerusalem
6. Siloah's brook – a variation of Siloam, the pool of water Jesus used in curing the blind man (John 9:7)
7. oracle of God – the sanctuary in which the ark of the covenant was kept
8. Aonian mount – a sacred place of the Greek Muses or gods. Milton's work "intends to soar above" or far surpass the work of all the writers of Greek mythology because his subject is infinitely greater than theirs.
9. God values an upright and pure heart more than all temples. "The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). "Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3-5; Matt. 5:8; Job 8:5-6).
10. Milton asks the Holy Spirit to guide his words. The Spirit was present at creation and thus can judge Milton's portrayal of that event.
11. assert – defend
12. Milton's purpose in writing *Paradise Lost* was to explain the merciful goodness and the perfect justice of God's dealings with mankind.
13. grand parents – first parents (Adam and Eve)
14. to fall off – to become estranged (from God); to rebel
15. For one restraint – except for one restraint. Adam and Eve were given dominion over everything on earth. God had exalted them to the position of lords of creation—except in one thing: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
16. what time – when

1. SATAN LANGUISHES IN HELL

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit¹
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man²
 Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
 Sing, Heavenly Muse, that on the secret top³
 Of Horeb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed⁴
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of chaos: or, if Zion hill⁵
 Delight thee more, and Siloah's brook that flowed⁶
 Fast by the oracle of God, I thence⁷
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues⁸
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,⁹
 Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first¹⁰
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread,
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support;
 That to the height of this great argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence,¹¹
 And justify the ways of God to men.¹²

Say first (for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view,
 Nor the deep tract of Hell), say first what cause
 Moved our grand parents in that happy state,¹³
 Favored of Heaven so highly, to fall off¹⁴
 From their Creator and transgress his will
 For one restraint, lords of the world besides?¹⁵
 Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?

Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile,
 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
 The mother of mankind, what time his pride¹⁶
 Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his host
 Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring

To set himself in glory above his peers,
 He trusted to have equaled the Most High,¹⁷
 If he opposed, and with ambitious aim
 Against the throne and monarchy of God,
 Raised impious war in Heav'n and battle proud,
 With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky,¹⁸
 With hideous ruin and combustion, down¹⁹
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
 In adamant chains and penal fire,²⁰
 Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.²¹
 Nine times the space that measures day and night²²
 To mortal men, he with his horrid crew²³
 Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,
 Confounded, though immortal. But his doom
 Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
 Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
 Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes,
 That witnessed huge affliction and dismay,
 Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate.²⁴
 At once, as far as angels' ken, he views²⁵
 The dismal situation waste and wild.
 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
 As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
 No light; but rather darkness visible
 Served only to discover sights of woe,²⁶
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes²⁷
 That comes to all, but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery deluge fed²⁸
 With ever-burning sulfur unconsumed.
 Such place Eternal Justice has prepared
 For those rebellious; here their prison ordain'd
 In utter darkness, and their portion set,²⁹
 As far removed from God and light of Heav'n
 As from the center thrice to th' utmost pole.
 Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!
 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelm'd³⁰
 With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
 He soon discerns; and weltering by his side,

17. Satan aspired to become like God Himself. "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14).

18. hurled from th' ethereal sky – Satan is cast out of heaven

19. combustion – confusion

20. adamant chains – unbreakable chains. Jude 6: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains."

21. durst – dare

22. Satan and his rebel angels languish in hell.

23. his horrid crew – the angels who sinned with Satan

24. obdurate – hard-hearted

25. angels' ken – angels' range of vision

26. discover – reveal

27. hope never comes – In hell, hope cannot exist (Isa. 66:24; Mark 9:43-48)

28. still – always

29. utter darkness – "Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

30. Satan sees a fellow-demon at his side and begins to speak to him.

31. Milton names the demons after false gods. Through these names, the demons would later deceive nations into worshipping them.

32. Satan bewails his fall and the changed nature of himself and the other fallen angels. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isa. 14:12). When he was created, Satan was “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” But he destroyed his natural beauty and glory by rebelling against the One who created him. By his sin he has turned himself into a vile, despicable creature. “You sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” (Eze. 28:12, 16).

33. glorious enterprise – Satan’s rebellion against God. Satan is a deceiver and thus uses a beautiful phrase to refer to his wicked rebellion.

34. He with his thunder – a reference to God

35. Though cast out of heaven, Satan refuses to repent. He is far too proud to admit (even to himself) that what he did was wrong.

36. injured merit – even though God created Satan as an archangel, Satan is hurt because he thinks he deserves a higher position than what God gave him. He thinks he should have been God. Satan can think of no one but himself. This self-focus consumes him and distorts his entire view of reality.

37. me preferring – liking me better. Satan boasts that the rebel angels preferred him to God.

38. Satan has not given up hope of gaining victory over God. He refuses to admit defeat, and he is ashamed to ever repent or seek pardon from God.

39. sue – beg; entreat

40. doubted his empire – In his monstrous pride, Satan overestimates his power and states that God was fearful of losing His kingdom to Satan. This is a blatant lie, but it may be that Satan has become so blind to reality that he has convinced himself that his foolhardy boast is true.

41. empyreal – heavenly

One next himself in power, and next in crime,
 Long after known in Palestine, and named
 Beelzebub. To whom th’ Arch-Enemy,³¹
 And thence in Heav’n called Satan, with bold words
 Breaking the horrid silence, thus began:
 “If thou beest he—but O how fall’n! how changed³²
 From him who in the happy realms of light
 Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine
 Myriads, though bright: if he whom mutual league,
 United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
 And hazard in the glorious enterprise³³
 Joined with me once, now misery hath joined
 In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest
 From what height fallen: so much the stronger proved
 He with his thunder; and till then who knew³⁴
 The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,
 Nor what the potent Victor in his rage
 Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,³⁵
 Though changed in outward luster, that fixed mind,
 And high disdain from sense of injured merit,³⁶
 That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,
 And to the fierce contentions brought along
 Innumerable force of spirits armed,
 That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,³⁷
 His utmost power with adverse power opposed
 In dubious battle on the plains of Heav’n,
 And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
 All is not lost; th’ unconquerable will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield:
 And what is else not to be overcome?³⁸
 That glory never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace³⁹
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power
 Who from the terror of this arm so late
 Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,⁴⁰
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall; since, by fate, the strength of gods,
 And this empyreal substance, cannot fail;⁴¹
 Since, through experience of this great event,

In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,
 We may with more successful hope resolve
 To wage by force or guile eternal war,⁴²
 Irreconcilable to our grand Foe,
 Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
 Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven."⁴³

So spake th' apostate angel, though in pain,
 Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair;
 And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:⁴⁴

"O prince, O chief of many thronèd powers⁴⁵
 That led th' embattled seraphim to war
 Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds
 Fearless, endangered Heaven's perpetual King,
 And put to proof his high supremacy,
 Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate,
 Too well I see and rue the dire event
 That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
 Hath lost us Heaven, and all this mighty host
 In horrible destruction laid thus low,
 As far as gods and heav'nly essences
 Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains⁴⁶
 Invincible, and vigor soon returns,
 Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
 Here swallowed up in endless misery.
 But what if he our Conqueror (whom I now
 Of force believe Almighty, since no less
 Than such could have o'erpowered such force as ours)
 Have left us this our spirit and strength entire,
 Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
 That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,⁴⁷
 Or do him mightier service as his thralls⁴⁸
 By right of war, what'er his business be,
 Here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,
 Or do his errands in the gloomy deep?
 What can it then avail though yet we feel
 Strength undiminished or eternal being
 To undergo eternal punishment?"⁴⁹

42. guile – deception. Satan thinks a new tactic might be necessary to continue his war against God.

43. tyranny of Heaven – Because of his sin, Satan views God, the perfect Ruler, as a tyrant.

44. compeer – companion

45. Satan's companion responds by praising Satan's power and deeds. The first sentence is fifteen lines long. Milton uses very long sentences throughout the poem to draw the reader gently from one thought to the next without any abrupt stops or awkward breaks.

46. Though cast into hell, the demons are not obliterated but retain their beings and minds.

47. suffice – satisfy

48. thrall – Anglo-Saxon word for slave

49. *i.e.*, "What good is our eternal nature and our strength if we are to suffer eternal punishment?"

2. SATAN LEAVES THE LAKE OF FIRE AND CALLS THE DEMONS TO ASSEMBLE

Whereto with speedy words th' Arch-Fiend replied:
 "Fall'n cherub, to be weak is miserable,
 Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,
 To do aught good never will be our task,
 But ever to do ill our sole delight,⁵⁰
 As being the contrary to his high will⁵¹
 Whom we resist. If then his providence
 Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
 Our labor must be to pervert that end,
 And out of good still to find means of evil,⁵²
 Which oftentimes may succeed so as perhaps
 Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
 His inmost counsels from their destined aim.
 But see! the angry Victor hath recalled
 His ministers of vengeance and pursuit
 Back to the gates of Heav'n: the sulfurous hail
 Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid
 The fiery surge that from the precipice
 Of Heav'n received us falling; and the thunder
 Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
 Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
 To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.
 Let us not slip th' occasion, whether scorn⁵³
 Or satiate fury yield it from our Foe.
 Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
 The seat of desolation, void of light,
 Save what the glimmering of these livid flames⁵⁴
 Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
 From off the tossing of these fiery waves;
 There rest, if any rest can harbor there;
 And reassembling our afflicted powers,⁵⁵
 Consult how we may henceforth most offend
 Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
 How overcome this dire calamity,
 What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
 If not, what resolution from despair."⁵⁶

Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,

50. Satan's desires are only evil eternally (John 8:44).

51. God's desires are only good and perfect eternally. "His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4). Satan hates God and wants to do the opposite of what God does, so he practices wickedness.

52. Satan declares that his sole purpose is to pervert God's plans. Satan hopes he will be successful in this attempt. He underestimates both God's power and His wisdom.

53. Let us not slip th' occasion – Let us not lose the opportunity

54. save – except

55. afflicted powers – distressed armies

56. Satan recommends that a counsel of demons be held to discuss how they can best destroy God's works and plans.

With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
 That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
 Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
 Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge⁵⁷
 As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
 Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,⁵⁸
 Briareos or Typhon, whom the den
 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
 Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean stream.
 Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
 With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind,⁵⁹
 Moors by his side under the lee, while night
 Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays.⁶⁰
 So stretched out huge in length the Arch-Fiend lay,
 Chained on the burning lake; nor ever thence
 Had ris'n or heaved his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven⁶¹
 Left him at large to his own dark designs,
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought⁶²
 Evil to others, and enraged might see
 How all his malice served but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shewn
 On man by him seduced, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured.⁶³
 Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool⁶⁴
 His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
 Driv'n backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
 In billows, leave i' th' midst a horrid vale.
 Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
 Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,⁶⁵
 That felt unusual weight; till on dry land
 He lights, if it were land that ever burned⁶⁶
 With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,
 And such appeared in hue as when the force
 Of subterranean wind transports a hill
 Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side

57. rood – rod, a measure of six to eight yards

58. Milton describes the vast size of Satan and his demons as similar to that of the mythological Titans who rebelled against the Greek god Jove and were imprisoned in Tartarus, a type of hell.

59. rind – skin (of an animal, here referring to Leviathan)

60. invests – envelops; night covers the sea, and the sailors wait anxiously for daylight

61. high permission – it is only by God's permission that Satan is able to move

62. heap on himself damnation – Satan's repeated crimes merely make his judgment worse. "In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5).

63. Satan hoped to destroy man, but all his wicked schemes will merely reveal the depths of God's goodness, grace, and mercy for His own. "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

64. Satan and his companion escape from the lake of fire and make their way onto the dry land of hell.

65. incumbent – pressing his weight

66. he lights – he lands

67. Pelorus is a cape in Sicily; Etna is a volcano located nearby.

68. sublimed with mineral fury – destroyed by the volcano’s heat

69. involved – enveloped; surrounded

70. ‘scaped – escaped. Stygian refers to the Styx, a mythological river in hell.

71. the sufferance of supernal Power – the permission of heavenly Power (God). Satan and his companion boast that they have escaped the lake of fire by their own power, not because God allowed them to do so.

72. change – exchange

73. Satan desires to be as far from God as possible. In his pride, he believes he can exist without God. Sinful mankind does the same. “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts” (Ps. 10:4).

74. Satan declares that he can create his own reality. By denying God’s reality, he can turn hell into heaven or heaven into hell. As the father of lies, Satan speaks lies and deception. No one can alter God’s reality or change what God has determined. The hosts of heaven declare of God: “You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4:11). The Lord Himself says: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa. 46:9-10).

75. in my choice – in my opinion

76. By contrast, the Christian would rather serve his Lord in the lowest position than rule over all the powers of hell: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10).

77. oblivious pool – pool of forgetfulness or oblivion

Of thundering Etna, whose combustible⁶⁷
 And fuellèd entrails, thence conceiving fire,
 Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,⁶⁸
 And leave a singèd bottom all involved⁶⁹
 With stench and smoke. Such resting found the sole
 Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate;
 Both glorying to have ‘scaped the Stygian flood⁷⁰
 As gods, and by their own recovered strength,
 Not by the sufferance of supernal Power.⁷¹
 “Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,”
 Said then the lost archangel, “this the seat
 That we must change for Heav’n? this mournful gloom⁷²
 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
 Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
 What shall be right: farthest from him is best⁷³
 Whom reason hath equaled, force hath made supreme
 Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,
 Where joy for ever dwells! Hail horrors! hail
 Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
 Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.⁷⁴
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; th’ Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
 Here we may reign secure; and in my choice,⁷⁵
 To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.⁷⁶
 But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
 Th’ associates and copartners of our loss,
 Lie thus astonished on th’ oblivious pool,⁷⁷
 And call them not to share with us their part
 In this unhappy mansion, or once more
 With rallied arms to try what may be yet
 Regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell?”

So Satan spake; and him Beelzebub
 Thus answered: “Leader of those armies bright