

WORLD LITERATURE

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*Social conditions
of Greek drama*

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Hunting

A. France . . . "The law is equal; it forbids
the rich as well as the poor to
sh . . . under the bird . . ."

BEOWULF¹

Translated by Clarence G. Child

*How Hrothgar and Beowulf Went to the Mere
in Which the Monster Dwelt.*

Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow: "Sorrow not, man of wise mind! It is better one should avenge his friend than mourn for him long. Each of us must abide life's end in this world. Let him that may, win fame ere death; that shall be best thereafter for a warrior, when life is no more.

"Arise, warden of the realm, let us go quickly to look upon the track of Grendel's fellow. I promise thee he shall not flee to shelter, not in earth's bosom, or mountain forest, or ocean's bed, go where he will. For this day have patience in thine every woe, as I ween thou wilt."

Then the old man sprang up and gave thanks to God, the mighty Lord, for that the hero had spoken. A horse then, a steed with plaited mane, was bridled for Hrothgar. The wise king went in state; with him fared forth a foot-band of shield-bearers. The tracks were plain to see far along the forest-ways, the path she hath taken across the levels; straight went she over the murky moor, bare away, with his soul gone from him, the best of Hrothgar's kindred that with him governed the homestead.

Then over the steep stone-fells and narrow tracks, in close by-paths, an unknown way, by beetling cliffs and many a nicker's lair, went the son of athelings. With a few wise-minded men, he went before to see the place, till he found suddenly the mountain trees, the joyless wood, leaning over the hoar rock. The water stood beneath, blood-stained and troubled. It was for all the Danes, for the friends of the Scyldings, a sorrow of soul to bear, grief to many a thane and every earl, when they came upon the head of Aeschere on the sea-cliff. The flood boiled, as the people gazed upon it, with blood and hot gore.

The horn at times sang its stirring lay of battle. All the band sat them down. They saw in the water many of the dragon kind, strange sea-drakes making trial of the surge, likewise on the jutting rocks the nickers lying, that oft

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at hour of dawn make foray grief-giving on the sail-road, and dragons and wild beasts beside. In bitter wrath and swollen with fury, these hastened away; they heard the call, the war-horn singing. The prince of the Geats severed the life from one with a bow, as it strove with the sea, so that the stout battle-shaft went home to its life. Slower was it then in swimming the deep, seeing death had gripped it. Then quickly was it hemmed in closely in the waves with boar-spears keen-barbed, assailed with shrewd thrusts, and drawn on the headland, the wondrous wave-lifter. The men gazed on the fearsome unfriendly thing.

Then Beowulf put on him his earl's armor: in no wise had he misgivings for his life. His war-burnie hand-woven, broad and cunningly adorned, that could well shield his body so battle-grip might not harm his breast or the foe's shrewd clasp his life, must needs make trial of the deeps. But his head the white helmet guarded, that must mingle with the sea-depths, seek the coil of the surges, well-dight as it was with treasure-work, bound with lordly chains, as the weapon-smith wrought it in far-off days, decked it with wonders, set it with swine-shapes, that thereafter brand nor battle blade might bite it. Not least of these great helps was that which Hrothgar's spokesman had loaned him in his need; the hafted sword was named Hrunting. It was one of the chiefest of old-time treasures. Its edge was iron, dyed with poison-twigs, hardened with blood; never in battle did it betray any that clasped it in hand, durst tread the ways of terror, the meeting-place of the foe. That was not the first time it should do a deed of prowess. Surely the son of Ecglaf in the might of his strength kept not thought of what he before spake, drunken with wine, when he lent that weapon to a warrior better with the sword than he. He durst not himself hazard his life beneath the waves, striving to do a warrior's duty: thereby he forfeited the honor, the acclaims of prowess. Not so was it with the other after he had arrayed himself for the strife.

*How Beowulf Sought Out and Fought with
the Monster.*

Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow: "Keep thou now in mind, great son of Healfdene, wise

prince, freehand ready for my v ready have spok be shorn of life, gone hence awa thou a guardian rades, if the stri treasures thou g Hygelac; then n son of Hrethel, when he looketh a giver of ring had joy of hi thou let Hunfer his precious wa handed down f for myself with me."

After these w Geats hastened in await an answe hold of the war he might see the ravenous for fo for half a hundr flood, found th from above sea not man-like. S seized him in he she hurt not the him round, so s fingers, reach th battle-sark. The the bottom, ba prince, to her not, brave as though, becaus pressed him clo with its fightin harried their tr

Then the earl not what fearso harm him augh touch him, be saw the light c shining. The w she-wolf of the wife. The full s his battle-axe, the stroke, so th blade sang out

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Fought with

gtheow: "Keep
lealfdene, wise

prince, freehanded friend of men, now I am ready for my venture, that of which we already have spoken, that, should I for thy need be shorn of life, thou wouldst ever be to me, gone hence away, in the place of a father. Be thou a guardian to my thanes, my close comrades, if the strife take me. Likewise send the treasures thou gavest me, dear Hrothgar, to Hygelac; then may the lord of the Geats, the son of Hrethel, know by the gold and see, when he looketh on the treasure, that I found a giver of rings goodly in manly virtues, had joy of him whilst I might. And do thou let Hunferth, warrior famed afar, have his precious war-sword with its tough edge, handed down from old. I shall win fame for myself with Hrunting, or death shall take me."

After these words the prince of the Weder-Geats hasted in his valor, would in no wise await an answer; the coil of the waters laid hold of the warrior. It was a day's while ere he might see the bottom-level. Soon she, that, ravenous for food, grim and greedy, had held for half a hundred winters the stretches of the flood, found that some one of men was there from above searching out the home of beings not man-like. She laid hold then upon him, seized him in her terrible claws. His hale body she hurt not thereby; his mail without shielded him round, so she might not, with her loathly fingers, reach through his war-coat, the linked battle-sark. The sea-wolf, when she came to the bottom, bare him then, the ring-giving prince, to her home, in such wise he might not, brave as he was, wield his weapons, though, because of it, many strange beings pressed him close in the deep, many a sea-beast with its fighting-tushes brake his battle-sark, harried their troubler.

Then the earl was aware he was in one knows not what fearsome hall, where no water might harm him aught, or the quick grip of the flood touch him, because of the roofed hall. He saw the light of fire, a flashing flare brightly shining. The worthy one looked then on the she-wolf of the sea-bottom, the mighty water-wife. The full strength of onset he gave with his battle-axe, his hand held not back from the stroke, so that on her head the ring-decked blade sang out its greedy war-song. The foe

found then that the battle-gleamer would not bite, or harm her life, for its edge betrayed the prince in his need. Erstwhile had it gone through many a close encounter, cloven off the helm and battle-mail of the doomed; for the first time then did the dear treasure lay down its glory. Still was the kinsman of Hygelac, mindful of proud deeds, of one thought, and in no wise lost courage. In wrath the warrior threw aside the chased sword, strong and steel-edged, set with jewels, that it lay on the earth; he trusted to his strength, to the might of his handgrip. So must a man do when he thinketh to reach in battle enduring fame; he careth naught for his life.

Then the lord of the War-Geats—he shrank not at all from the strife—seized Grendel's mother by the shoulders. Strong in battle he hurled his life's foe, for that he was swollen with wrath, so she fell to the ground. Quickly she paid him back his dues to his hand in savage clinchings, and laid hold upon him. Spent in spirit, the fighter on foot, strongest of warriors, tripped so he fell. Then she threw herself on the stranger in her hall, and drew her dagger broad and bright-edged—she thought to avenge her son, her only child. His woven breast-mail lay on his shoulder; it shielded his life, withstood the in-thrust of point and blade. Then had the son of Ecgtheow, foremost fighter of the Geats, gone to his death beneath the broad deeps, had not his battle-burnie, the stout battle-mesh, given him help, and Holy God, the Wise Lord, Ruler of the Heavens, held sway over victory in battle, awarded it aright. Readily thereafter he found his feet.

How Beowulf Slew the Monster, and Returned with Grendel's Head.

He saw then among the war-gear a blade oft victorious, an old sword of the eotens, doughty of edge, one prized by warriors; it was the choicest of weapons, save that it was greater than any other man might bear out to the battle-play, good and brave to see, the work of giants. The warrior of the Scyldings seized it by its chain-bound hilt. Raging and battle-fierce, he drew the ring-marked blade, and despairing of life smote so wrathfully that the hard edge gripped her by the neck, brake

the bone-rings; the sword went clean through her fated body, and she fell to the ground.

The sword was bloody; the hero gloried in his deed. The fire flamed forth; light stood within there, even as when the candle of the sky shineth brightly from heaven. He looked about the dwelling, turned him then to the wall. The thane of Hygelac, wrathful and steadfast of thought, raised the hard weapon by the hilt. The edge was not useless to the warrior, for he was minded to requite Grendel speedily for the many onslaughts he had made on the West-Danes far oftener than a single time, when he slew Hygelac's hearth-comrades in their sleep, ate fifteen men as they slept of the Dane-folk, and bare off as many more, a loathly spoil. Beowulf, relentless warrior, so far paid Grendel his dues for that, that he now saw him lying on his bed, battle-weary and lifeless, in such wise as the strife in Heorot had scathed him. The corse sprang far when it underwent a blow after death, a hard sword-stroke, and Beowulf cut off the head.

Soon the men of wise thought, who with Hrothgar looked on the water, saw that the swirl of the wave was all mingled with blood, that the flood was stained with it. The white-haired old men spake together of the goodly atheling, how they looked not he should come again, glorying in victory, to seek their mighty prince, for, because of the blood, it seemed to many that the sea-wolf had slain him. Then came the ninth hour of the day. The brave Scyldings left the cliff; the gold-giving friend of men went him homeward. The strangers sat there, sick at heart, and stared on the mere. They wished and yet trusted not, to see their dear lord's self.

Then the war-brand, the sword, began, because of the monster's blood, to fall away in battle-icicles; a marvel was it how it all melted likest to ice, when the Father, that holdeth sway over times and seasons, freeth the bonds of the frost, unwindeth the flood's fetters. He is the true Lord.

The chief of the Weder-Geats took no more of the treasure-holdings in the dwelling, though he saw many there, but only the head, and with it, the sword's hilt, brave with gold; the sword had already melted, its chased blade burned wholly, so hot was the blood, so

poisonous the demon of strange kind, that met her death there in the hall.

Soon was he swimming, that had borne erstwhile the battle-shock of the foe. He dove up through the water. The moil of the waves was all cleansed, the wide domains where the strange demon had yielded up her life's day and this world that passeth.

The safeguard of seafarers, the strong of heart, came swimming then to land; he joyed in his sea-spoil, the mighty burden he had with him. Then went they to him, his chosen band of thanes; God they thanked, had joy of their lord, for that it was given them to see him safe. Speedily then the helmet and burnie of the unfaltering one were loosed. The pool, the water beneath the clouds, stained with the blood of slaughter, grew still.

Forth thence they fared by the foot-paths, joyful of heart. The men measured the earth-way, the well-known road, bold as kings. The head they bare from the sea-cliff with toil that was heavy for any of them, great of courage though they were; four it took to bear Grendel's head with labor on the shaft of death to the gold-hall, till to the hall came faring forthwith the fourteen Geats, picked men brave in battle. Their liege-lord together with them trod boldly in the midst of them the meadow-stretches.

Then the foremost of the thanes, the man brave of deed, exalted in glory, the warrior bold in strife, came in to greet Hrothgar. Grendel's head, grisly to behold, was borne into the hall, where the men were drinking before the earls and the lady as well. The men looked on that sight strange to see.

THE NIBELUNGENLIED

Translated by Margaret Armour

How Gunther Went to Issland to Woo Brunhild.

A fresh rumor spread beyond the Rhine. It was reported that many maidens dwelt there; and Gunther was minded to woo one of them, whereat his knights and his liegemen were well pleased.

There was a queen high-throned across the sea, that had not her like, beyond measure fair and of mickle strength, and her love was for that knight only that could pass her at the

spear. She hurled to the mark. And damsel's love must win three games. If he head.

And oft had the rumor thereof by the Rhine, with maiden, the which life of many hero.

On a day that they cast to and best take to wife good of his land "I will hence a what will betide body, for I lose."

"Do not so," queen, and he high a stake. Me

But King G was woman born this single hand strife."

But Siegfried her not. Wert match for her counsel thee to thy life, come

"Nay, now, will journey, and take my must adventure and she follow

"Then I ask Siegfried prise. It were of Brunhild."

So the kin most noble Grant me thy for my dear life for thy

Siegfried. "Give me t cess, and I

Said Gun hand. If Br my sister fully with

The no