



# THE MIDDLE AGES

## 1. Medieval heroes

**Beowulf** (8<sup>th</sup> century – uncertain)

The dragon slayer  1

*The passage contains two speeches delivered by Beowulf at Hrothgar's court before the battle with Grendel the monster and the dragon respectively.*

### First Speech

Beowulf spoke:

'I am Hygelac's kinsman and warrior<sup>1</sup>.

I have undertaken<sup>2</sup> many  
glorious deeds. I learned

5 of Grendel<sup>3</sup> in my native land.

Seafarers<sup>4</sup> say this place,  
the best of halls<sup>5</sup>,

stands idle and useless<sup>6</sup>  
after sundown. Hrothgar<sup>7</sup>,

10 the wise men among my people  
advised that I seek you

because they know my strength –  
they saw me come from battles

stained in the blood<sup>8</sup> of my enemies,

15 when I destroyed a family of giants,  
when I endured pain all night,

killing water monsters,  
grinding them to bits<sup>9</sup>,

to avenge<sup>10</sup> for the Geats

20 those who asked for misery.

1. **Hygelac's kinsman and warrior:** it. *parente e guerriero di Hygelac*; Hygelac was the king of the Geats
2. **undertaken:** it. *intrapreso*
3. **Grendel:** the monster's name
4. **Seafarers:** Mariners
5. **halls:** it. *castelli*
6. **idle and useless:** it. *ozioso e inutile (solitario e silenzioso)*
7. **Hrothgar:** the name of the king of Danes that Beowulf is helping
8. **stained in the blood:** it. *macchiato del sangue*
9. **grinding them to bits:** it. *stritolandoli, facendoli a pezzi*
10. **avenge:** it. *vendicare*

- And now I shall, alone,  
fight Grendel. I ask you,  
lord of the Danes,  
protector of this people,  
25 for only one favour:  
that you refuse me not,  
fair friend of the people,  
do not refuse those who  
have come so far the chance  
30 to cleanse Herot<sup>11</sup>.  
I have heard that the monster  
in his recklessness<sup>12</sup> uses no weapons.  
I, therefore, to amuse Hygelac my lord,  
scorn<sup>13</sup> to carry sword or shield,  
35 but I shall seize my enemy  
in my hand grip<sup>14</sup> and fight,  
enemy against enemy,  
and let God<sup>15</sup> decide  
who shall be taken by death.  
40 I expect, if he wins, that  
he will eat fearlessly of  
the Geat people in this hall  
as he often has of yours.  
Nor will you need,  
45 if death takes me,  
worry about a burial<sup>16</sup>  
that solitary one  
will carry my corpse,  
dripping with blood,  
50 to a ruthless feast<sup>17</sup>.  
If battle takes me,  
send this best of war garments,  
this shirt of mail<sup>18</sup>,  
to Hygelac – it is  
55 an inheritance from Hrethel  
and the work of Weland.  
Fate always goes as it will!



11. **cleanse Herot:** it. *per liberare il regno*

12. **recklessness:** it. *temerarietà*

13. **scorn:** it. *disprezzo (non voglio usare)*

14. **my hand grip:** it. *la presa della mia mano*

15. **God:** it. *Dio (chiara manipolazione da parte dei monaci che hanno trascritto l'epica primitiva)*

16. **burial:** it. *sepolitura*

17. **ruthless feast:** it.  *festa spietata*

18. **shirt of mail:** it. *cotta di maglia*

**Last Speech**

Then Beowulf made his last boast<sup>19</sup>:  
 'I ventured many battles  
 in my youth; now, old,  
 I will seek another,  
 5 try again for glorious  
 deeds, if that avenger<sup>20</sup>  
 will come out.'  
 He spoke to each  
 of his brave companions  
 10 for the last time:  
 'I would not use a sword  
 against this monster  
 if I might otherwise fight,  
 as I did with Grendel.  
 15 But how else fight fire?  
 a breath of poison?  
 Therefore I wear shield and mail.  
 I will not back  
 a step away  
 20 from that hoard-guardian<sup>21</sup>.  
 We two shall end  
 as fate<sup>22</sup> decrees.  
 I am brave in mind,  
 so I go against the war-flyer<sup>23</sup>  
 25 in no need  
 of further boasting.  
 You men wait on the hill,  
 protect the war-gear  
 and see which will,  
 30 after the death rush,  
 come away unwounded<sup>24</sup>.

This is not your duty,  
 nor in the power of man.  
 No one but myself  
 35 can fight this monster.  
 Your lord shall either  
 win the treasure  
 or lose his life.'  
 The brave in battle arose then,  
 40 bore his shield and mail,  
 trusting his strength  
 under the stone cliffs.  
 (This is not the coward's way).

(From *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, translated by Seamus Heaney, 2000)

19. **made his last boast**: it. *si vantò per l'ultima volta*

20. **avenger**: it. *vendicatore*

21. **hoard-guardian**: it. *guardiano della grotta*

22. **fate**: it. *destino*

23. **war-flyer**: it. *creatura alata*

24. **unwounded**: it. *illeso*