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*Dramatic Publishing*

# BEOWULF

Book and lyrics by

KEN PICKERING

Music by

KEITH COLE



# BEOWULF

**A Rock Musical**

Book and Lyrics by

**KEN PICKERING**

*Adapted from the Anglo-Saxon Epic*

Music by **Keith Cole**

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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# BEOWULF

## *Characters*

**Hrothgar**, king of the Danes

**His Queen**

**Hygd**, their daughter

**Obe**, a jester

**A Minstrel**

**Beowulf**, a great champion

**Hunferth Hairy Legs**, a wrestler

**Grendel**, a slimy punk in full bondage

**Grendel's Mother**, a she-monster

**Hammerfist**, a blacksmith

**A Priest**

**Brunhilde**

**Hildeburgh** } stable girls

**Wiglaf**, a loyal warrior

**A Dancing Bear**

**Thanes, Earls, Warriors, Wenches, Monks, Water**

**Nymphs, Jugglers, Acrobats, Old Crones,**

**Dancers, Stable Girls**

**Speak/Sing Chorus**, who may also play the above

NOTE: The parts of the Queen, Hammerfist, the Priest, Obe, Hunferth, Brunhilde, Hildeburgh, and Wiglaf also may be played by members of the Chorus.

The action takes place in the world of the Vikings  
in the fifth century AD



This musical BEOWULF was first performed in April, 1981, by the pupils of Chesham High School, Bucks., and in July, 1981, by Performing Arts students of Nonington College, Dover.

## ABOUT THE PLAY

*Beowulf* is part of the heritage of every English-speaking person. It is the oldest surviving work of literature in the language of the common people from the lands which now constitute the European Economic Community. *Beowulf*, says Michael Swanton, “is to English what the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are to Greek.”

The single manuscript now in the British Museum dates from about AD 1000, but the poem itself was probably made in the eighth century—and even then the story was several hundred years old, having been brought to England by the invading Angles. Who the original poet was, who copied the existing manuscript, and why its edges are charred with fire are all unknown to us, but it was obviously a popular story in Anglo-Saxon England as many a boggy place was nicknamed “Grendel’s Pit” after the habitation of the grisly monster in the poem. Since the poem’s rediscovery in the middle of the nineteenth century, the epic struggle between the brave Beowulf and the monsters has once again gripped the imaginations of thousands of people.

*Beowulf* was written in Anglo-Saxon or Old English, which now has to be learned like a foreign language with a good deal of conjecture as to pronunciation. Producers of this musical version are urged to read a modern translation before embarking on a production. Michael Swanton’s *Beowulf* (Manchester University Press, 1978) is a prose translation with many helpful notes. Michael Alexander’s verse translation (Penguin, 1973) is an exciting and accessible version, and Ian Serraillier has made a stimulating verse edition for young people in his *Beowulf the Warrior* that should whet the imagination of any potential cast (Oxford University Press, 1954).

Entertainment in Anglo-Saxon England certainly involved the telling and singing of fantastic stories of adventure and bravery in which humans mixed with heroes of superhuman strength in a world inhabited by giants and monsters. There is an evocative description of how *Beowulf* might first have been performed in the Quennells’ *Everyday Life in Anglo-Saxon Times* (Carousel Books, 1972).

To people today, who regard modesty as a virtue, Beowulf seems to be overly boastful. But we must remember that in his day there were no press agents, no newspapers, no TV or radio to tell the world about its heroes. Beowulf’s boast of his prowess was necessary to persuade Hrothgar to admit him as a champion capable of combating the evil monster Grendel.

### The Setting

Although *Beowulf* is an Anglo-Saxon story, it is set in the fifth century world of the Vikings—the ancestors of the Angles and Saxons who settled in Britain and gave England (Angleland) its name. It was a violent and terrible time in some respects and it is no accident that the word “berserk” was first used to describe the fury of Viking warriors or that



one of their tribes was the Vandals! But the various discoveries of treasure-hoards such as the Sutton Hoo burial and a good deal of recent interest in Viking travel and art have shown that these people had a rich culture—and they placed a great deal of importance on live entertainment: Wrestling, great feats of juggling and gymnastics, lewd limerick-writing competitions, horse fighting, and drinking together with the singing of minstrels passed away the long evenings of the Scandinavian winter.

The age in which the poem is set was, as far as the Vikings were concerned, pre-Christian; but the *Beowulf* poet, obviously a believer himself, makes his characters familiar with the Bible, and it is certainly possible to interpret the whole poem as an allegory.

Reference to maps of Northern Europe in the sixth century will show the various countries involved in the saga, and visits to museums or a study of illustrations of Viking shields, sword-hilts, and brooches will provide interesting ideas for costume design. A particularly colourful picture of Viking life is provided in *The How and Why Wonder Book of Vikings* by Brenda Lewis (Transworld, 1975) and in *The Viking Saga* by Peter Brent (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975). We need hardly stress how helpful it is to acquire a flavour of Viking times and to secure the interest and co-operation of colleagues in History and Art if this show is attempted in a school or college.

#### Words and Music

*Beowulf* is a very long poem; much of its detailed description has to become visual, much of its narrative turned into action, most of its verbal exchanges transformed into dialogue in order to make a stage musical. It also needed extensive pruning to fit the whole into a full-length show. In this script some characters have disappeared and others have been invented in order to achieve the required blend of action, humour, excitement, and romance. Anglo-Saxon verse did not rhyme, but it had strong alliteration and a rich vocabulary: we have attempted to exploit these qualities in this version and we hope, for instance, that producers and performers will respond to the pounding alliterations of the opening lines:

Days of doom and desperate darkness,  
Dismal dawns and terrible nights . . .

To create the lyrics of a modern rock-musical we have also introduced rhyme, but how we have tried to reproduce the spirit of the original can be illustrated by the way in which we have adapted the words which close the poem and given them to the single girl singer to sing as a lament over the body of the dead hero.

The original Anglo-Saxon reads:

cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga  
manna mildust ond monðwærust,  
leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.

Swanton's prose translation: "they said that among the world's kings he was the gentlest of men and the most courteous, the most kindly to his people the most eager for renown."

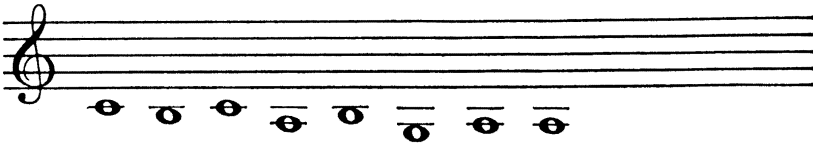
Alexander's verse translation:

"they said that he was of all the world's kings  
the gentlest of men, and the most gracious  
the kindest to his people, the keenest for fame."

Our version for this musical:

Of all this world's kings, this man was the best,  
Kindest to his people's need,  
Gracious, noble, free from greed.  
Sing of his great strength and wisdom,  
But above all else remember if you can—  
He was a kindly man.

Our music too, though in the rock idiom, goes back to very early sources for its inspiration. It is built around the *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath) plainsong melody of the ancient Church, and the cast will enjoy spotting how often and in what guises the tune returns:



### The Rock Musical

*Beowulf* as a rock musical is not, however, simply an exercise in archaeology. Its themes—the struggle against violence, vandalism and darkness; the stupidity in assuming that affluence brings real security or satisfaction—are as relevant today as ever. Furthermore, the story abounds with grotesque characters who translate easily into a modern idiom, tremendous fights, and a type of singing and dancing that pulsate with all the vitality of a disco. The Viking blend of sheer energy and raw humour, hero-worship and action are as familiar to the theatre, the football terraces, or the rock concert as they were to King Hrothgar in his great drinking hall of Heorot—why not join him there?

### Suggestions for Further Reading

"The Monsters and Beowulf" in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Peter Clemoes, (Bowes and Bowes, 1959).

"Beowulf the Headstrong" in *Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Peter Clemoes, (Cambridge, 1972).

*The Saxon Age*. A. F. Scott (Croom Helm, 1979).

*The Vikings in Britain*. H. R. Loyn (Batsford, 1977).

—Ken Pickering

### Publisher's Note

This play was originally published by Samuel French, Ltd. of London in 1982, and has been produced a number of times in England. I. E. Clark, Inc. is pleased to have obtained the rights to offer the play to producers in the United States, Canada, and most of the rest of the world outside of the British Dominion (see the copyright page for details).

The play was extensively revised and reworked for this American edition, but the publisher and the playwright felt that it was wise to retain the British "flavour" since the play is a dramatization of the Anglo-Saxon epic.

I. E. Clark, Inc. is grateful to Samuel French, Ltd. for that firm's cooperation in bringing this American revision into being. Samuel French, Ltd. retains production rights to performances in the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, and most of the territories and nations of the Dominion.

A piano/vocal score, band parts, and a cassette tape of the music for this edition are available from I. E. Clark, Inc.

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### What the Critics Say:

"The whole show was superb . . . I applauded until my hands were sore."—Julie-Ann Ryan, *Chesham Gazette*

"Its overall impact and detail did much to create the impression of what we like to think was happening in England a thousand years ago."—Harvey Crane, *Plymouth Extra*

"A fast moving, lively show to move you, amuse you and set your feet tapping."—*Adscene*

"A stunning rock musical of unusually strong construction . . . The score . . . has some magnificent numbers, almost 'rock-Wagnerian' in concept."—*A amateur Stage*



# BEOWULF

## ACT I

*[The stage has many levels, backed by a plain cyclorama. There are rostra in tiers, with a pit Center. As the OVERTURE music begins, the stage is lit with an unearthly green. Strange and horrible shapes move in the shadows, ungainly silhouettes lope across the high places. There follows a ritual procession of cloaked and helmeted figures carrying great shields and banners. This is the CHORUS, who wind their way to various places, with their backs to the audience. Suddenly they turn and sing:]*

### Music No. 1: "DAYS OF DOOM"

THANES, WARRIORS, & WOMEN. Days of doom and desperate darkness,

Dismal dawns and terrible nights,  
Evil stalks out in the forests,  
Danger lurks on the heights.  
Mighty monsters creep from caverns,  
Giants ravage middle earth,  
Powers of Hell at war with goodness,  
Man must fight from his birth.  
Then a mighty king  
Does a wondrous thing,  
Builds a glorious feasting hall.  
Hrothgar, king of Danes,  
With his mighty Thanes  
Takes his place at table, strong and tall.

*[FANFARE. HROTHGAR and the QUEEN enter. HROTHGAR sings:]*

HROTHGAR. I am granted glory in battle—  
Strong my shield and stout my sword;  
I have made a mighty mead-hall—  
There to share my gifts with all.  
Boldly rear its high-arched gables,  
See its doors of burnished brass,  
Banquets furnish full its tables—  
This the age that ne'er shall pass.

*[The CHORUS repeat the last four lines, then sing:]*

CHORUS. Power brings peace, provisions, plenty,  
 Golden dawns and gentle nights;  
 Mystic songs sound in the forests—  
 Days of dreams and delights.  
 Mighty monsters cower in caverns,  
 Giants smile with milder mirth,  
 Hordes of hell are stemmed by goodness,  
 Peace has come to the Earth.  
 We all know somehow  
 Life's much better now—  
 Hrothgar has restored our pride;  
 Blunt the bitter thorns,  
 Drain the drinking horns—  
 Justice, light, and love go side by side.

HROTHGAR. Call up the musicians and let the feasting begin!

*[The stage is full of activity. Trestle tables are brought in by SERVANTS. WENCHES enter with drinking horns and jugs and pour mead. SERVANTS carry in hogs' heads and joints. OBE enters, followed later by the MINSTREL]*

Music No. 2: "THE FEAST AT THE MEAD-HALL"

CHORUS. Drink well, drink deep life's horn of plenty,  
 Call for life's cup and leave it empty,  
 Hold life's rich horn, so full of flavour—  
 Our days are brief—but sweet to savour.  
 Youth's green estate a passing bloom;  
 Advance we all to death's dark gloom.  
 So come eat and drink all well befriended,  
 Take this good mead and be contented.

*[This drinking song, with slight variations, is repeated after the "acts" which follow]*

OBE. My Lords, Ladies, Thanes, and Earls—make way for Fitela Fast Fingers and his jugglers!

Music No. 2A

*[The JUGGLERS enter to a "dance" tune]*

CHORUS. Drink well, drink deep life's horn of plenty,  
 Call for life's cup and leave it empty,

Come drown your cares, their sting is ended.  
 Troubles forgot are fastest mended.  
 OBE. Make way for the incredible Dancing Bear!

Music No. 2B

*[The DANCING BEAR enters and performs]*

CHORUS. Come try this ale we recommend;  
 Life's simple joys it will extend.  
 Now eat and drink, forget your sorrow,  
 Life's here today but gone tomorrow.  
 OBE. From the land of midnight sun—Offa and the acrobats.

Music No. 2C

*[A GYMNASTIC TEAM enters and performs feats of strength, agility, and daring during the next dance tune. During a further dance the revelry becomes raucous—games of bob apple, trials by ordeal with blindfolds—pigs' bladders, etc. A primitive dance wherein a woman tries to reach the centre of a circle of dancers emerges. OBE stirs them to greater exuberance all the while. OBE and the CHORUS sing:]*

Music No. 2D

OBE. Come one, come all—  
 CHORUS. Join the rev'lers in this hall.  
 OBE. Eat, drink, dance, sing—  
 CHORUS. Now's the time to have a fling.  
 OBE. All your cares are gone  
 CHORUS. As the dance goes on and on.  
 OBE. Let the music play  
 CHORUS. And the she-wolf find her prey—hey, hey, hey, hey.  
 Let us sing, let us sing—hey, hey, hey, hey—  
 Join the ring, join the ring  
 Now.  
 OBE. One two three four  
 CHORUS. Do not open every door,  
 OBE. Five six seven eight  
 CHORUS. Why's your lover always late?  
 BOTH. Can she sew and cook?  
 CHORUS. Wash a jerkin in the brook?  
 BOTH. Hey, hey, hey, got you!

*[This song continues antiphonally]*

OBE. Come now, fill your glass,

CHORUS. Find yourself a comely lass—

Take her on your knee—

With your purse she will be free.

Life's a passing game,

Join the ring and say your name.

Let the she-wolf find her prey—hey, hey . . . (etc. as verse 1)

HROTHGAR. *[Quieting the exhausted company]* Now we have feasted well, we must listen to our Minstrel.

MINSTREL. But, my Lord, what is there left for me to sing about?

HROTHGAR. My Queen shall choose.

QUEEN. Tell us how long, long ago—the Lord made the Earth

And how He made life upon its bright plains.

*[The MINSTREL bows in obedience; the company sit enraptured and still while the MINSTREL sings alone in the spotlight]*

Music No. 3: "Long, Long Ago"

MINSTREL. Long, long ago, before we came,  
God created earth.

It was a void, an empty space.

There was no light in this dark place

He made the sun, the silver moon

Her light to give.

The hills and vales, the ocean deep,

The running rivers, snow and sleet.

He then made plants and trees,

Furnished fair with limbs and leaves—

Cold winds and summer breeze,

The spring, the fall,

All creatures great and small,

Things that creep and things that crawl—

Fish, fowl, and flesh, He made them all, them all.

Man then was made, a perfect creature,

So subtly wrought.

He gave His grace and conscience true

To shape our lives and guide us through.

God gave man next a good companion

So sweet and grave.

With beauty rare and flowing hair



The woman came, his life to share.  
 Who strews the night with stars,  
 Fixes planets' plotted paths,  
 Holds comets in His grasp—we know, we know.  
 Cold winds and rains may blow,  
 Thunder, lightning, winter snow,  
 Here, in our hearts we know—and so, and so  
 So long ago, He made it all, so long ago.

*[By the end of the song, the whole COMPANY is asleep—only HROTHGAR and his QUEEN remain awake]*

HROTHGAR. Your song has woven a web around our minds, Minstrel—we will also sleep now. *[HROTHGAR and the QUEEN exit. The MINSTREL moves to the side of the stage to join the offstage CHORUS]*

MINSTREL. So all men led a carefree life.

But with the coming of the night came EVIL.

*[There is a great explosion of lurid light. GRENDEL enters—a punk-like character who almost crawls on over the rocks. He may have some revolting COMPANIONS. GRENDEL sings:]*

Music No. 4: "GRENDEL"

GRENDEL. Hrothgar—you've got a lesson to learn!

We all have to suffer, and now it's your turn!

You might think you're great, you might think you've won—

But I'll show you your troubles have only just begun.

Because—I'm evil.

I am evil,

Stinking with evil;

I am rotten right to the core.

Evil, evil, I am the devil,

I kick kindness down on the floor,

Out of the door, kill it for sure,

Kick it to death—Yeah!

Evil Grendel

Living in squalor,

All my body covered in slime.

My behaviour fills you with horror,

I'm adept at violent crime,

Won't pay the fine,

Do any time.

Tell them to push off—Yeah!  
 I'm revolting, I'm disgusting,  
 I'm so negative I'll make you sick!  
 I'm inviting your disliking,  
 I am really thick—  
 Da!

*[Shouting]* What am I?

CHORUS. *[Shouting]* Evil!

GRENDEL. Are you positive?

CHORUS. Yes, positive.

GRENDEL. Am I positive?

CHORUS. No! Negative.

GRENDEL. Right. I'm negative and full of hate. When I see pleasure I spoil it; if something's clean I soil it. *[With terrible laughter he paints "Grendel Rules OK" and similar slogans, then dashes out the brains of several warriors. GRENDEL makes off with one of the warriors over his shoulder. The CHORUS and MINSTREL sing together during the action]*

Music No. 5: "DEPARTURE OF GRENDEL"

CHORUS & MINSTREL. Mad with rage the hate-crazed creature,  
 Grim and grisly, grasped his slaughter.

Far away he's fleeing, leaving the devastation—

*[The LIGHTS fade up. The horizon becomes blue]*

But with daybreak all the horror was seen in light,

Dire and dreadful—no more entertainment, only lamentation—  
 now.

*[Slowly the others awaken and gaze around the scene of desolation in disbelief. They carry out the dead. HROTHGAR, the QUEEN and PRINCESS HYGD enter and survey the chaos in despair. HROTHGAR sings:]*

HROTHGAR. O God—this is a terrible hour;

Evil returns with all its power—

Such murder and death all horror and worse.

Who then will rid us of this dreadful curse?

WARRIORS. *[Muttering and running wildly among the audience]*  
 Who will rid us of this curse, this curse, who will rid us of this curse,  
 curse, curse!

*[A horn sounds. A WATCHMAN from high on the cliff calls out:]*

WATCHMAN. Strangers have landed on our coast and are climbing the cliff path towards us.

ALL. Who are they—find out who they are. [*BEOWULF and his COMPANIONS appear on the horizon*]

WATCHMAN. Strangers, I can see that you are warriors and that you have steered your long ship to our coast—I must now ask who you are.

Music No. 6: “MY NAME IS BEOWULF”

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] Who am I?

CHORUS. Who are you?

BEOWULF. I am the man you’ve been waiting for.

CHORUS. Is he the man we’ve been waiting for?

BEOWULF. Who am I?

CHORUS. Who are you?

BEOWULF. A slayer of ogres and giants galore.

CHORUS. A player of trumpets and little more.

BEOWULF. My name is Beowulf,

Brave and bold, they call me Beowulf;

Young and old, they know me;

Fearless in slaughter,

I give no quarter,

Monsters and demons—I tear them apart.

You see I’m Beowulf.

Full of daring, I’m called Beowulf of the strong arm;

I have fought many a campaign,

And times again

I have vanquished with my sword and stout heart.

True in every battle, men may die like cattle,

Young and old and side by side.

Now I war on evil, darkness and the devil,

Grendel soon will have to hide.

CHORUS. True in every battle, men may die like cattle,

Young and old and side by side.

Now he wars on evil, darkness and the devil,

Grendel soon will have to hide.

[*BEOWULF repeats the song, then adds the following:*]

Yes, I am Beowulf, quick and keen for glory;

Beowulf, just believe my story now, Beo, Beo, Beowulf

CHORUS. *[At the same time]* Yes he is Beo, Beo, Beo, Beo, Beo,  
Beo, Beo, Beowulf,  
Beo, Beo, Beowulf.

*[The WATCHMAN comes down the cliff to HROTHGAR. They consult in whispers, and the WATCHMAN returns to BEOWULF and his WARRIORS who, carrying great shields and spears, form an impressive group on the cliff-top. HROTHGAR organizes his court, and after the following speech there is a solemn ritual in which BEOWULF and COMPANY prop up their shields and spears and enter the presence of Hrothgar after a winding journey from the cliff]*

WATCHMAN. My lord of battles commands me to tell you that he knows of your great deeds and your ancestry—you are most welcome. You may enter his presence in battle-gear and helmed—but your lindenwood shields and battle-shafts must remain here.

BEOWULF. All health to Hrothgar! I am a kinsman of King Hygelac, prince of the Geats. Although I am still young I have achieved many great deeds and am thought of as a champion among my people. Your hall and land are infested with that scourge Grendel, I hear—rumours have already reached us that this splendid hall must stand silent and idle in the hours of dark. That is why I have come, most sovereign lord; these men will tell you that with my grip I have crushed giants, sea-serpents, and monsters—why should I not fight this Grendel single-handed?

HROTHGAR. These are indeed brave words—but how am I to know if your strength is what you boast of?

BEOWULF. I have the grip of thirty men.

ALL. Thirty men!

A WIDE-EYED GIRL. You can grip me any time, darling.

HROTHGAR: Where is our champion Hunferth Hairylegs. Wrestle with this man and try his strength.

BEOWULF. Will you not believe me! *[He snatches up a goblet or similar object and crushes it in one hand]*

GIRL. Oooh, what a crush!

HUNFERTH. *[Obviously preparing for wrestling in his corner]* That doesn't impress me—get ready for a fight.

BEOWULF. I will fight you with one arm only. *[He kneels and puts one arm on the table, ready for "grips"]*

HUNFERTH. You'll regret this. *[He lets out great bellows and groans as he grips Beowulf's hand. The whole Court watches spellbound as*

*BEOWULF forces Hunferth's arm down three times and on the third pins him to the table*] I submit, I submit!

BEOWULF. [*Leaping on to the table*] Now let me show you that I have the grip of thirty men! Come, do not be cowardly—you must learn that Beowulf is no idle boaster. [*Prompted by the WOMEN, the MEN line up opposite Beowulf and behind Hunferth until thirty are in a line or several lines. OBE organizes things and acts as referee. There is a roll of drums and much groaning and gasping but in the end BEOWULF throws the whole line to the floor*]

OBE. [*Holding Beowulf's arm aloft*] The Champion!

ALL. Our Champion!

HROTHGAR. I see, my friend Beowulf, that it is to fight for us and as a mark of kindness that you have come here. Come, sit at the banquet with us and drink a horn of friendship. To Beowulf!

ALL. Beowulf the brave!

HROTHGAR. Never since I became a warrior have I handed over responsibility to any man—but now I give you charge of Heorot—to make safe this house of the Danes. And if you come out alive from this ordeal of courage there will be no want of liberality—and this will be my most precious gift to you—my only daughter, Princess Hygd. [*HROTHGAR takes PRINCESS HYGD's hand and leads her to face BEOWULF. They look into each other's eyes in silence before Beowulf takes and kisses both her hands*]

Music No. 7: "GRENDEL, YOU WILL MEET YOUR MATCH"

CHORUS. [*Dancing and singing*] Grendel, you will meet your match;

This man will your plan dispatch.

Snapping of sinew and bursting of bone—

Yes, this man will take you alone.

Vile Grendel, face the fact—

You approach the final act.

Don't cry for Mother, she'll soon love another.

So now you're all on your own.

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] Fiend from hell they call you,

But this will appall you—

Beowulf will be the bait.

In anticipation of your devastation

I'll be lying here in wait. Hey!

CHORUS. Grendel, foul in filth and slime,

Feel your fate run out of time,

Dare to discover the strength of another,  
 Prepare to be pinioned by pain.  
 No more cause for us to fear  
 When you battle with your peer.  
 We'll celebrate as your bones we hear break  
 And you cry out for mercy in vain.

BEOWULF. No barbiturate  
 Can help to dissipate  
 The awful pain you're going to feel.  
 How it will surprise you when I pulverize you.  
 When I grip you, how you'll squeal. Hey!

HROTHGAR. Brave Beowulf, you have restored laughter to our hall.  
 Now you must bend your mind and body to this task. You must watch  
 over Heorot tonight. *[All exit, BEOWULF and HYGD last. They part  
 reluctantly, and BEOWULF is left alone for a moment before he goes  
 off]*

*[Darkness, during which GRENDEL goes into the pit and mists be-  
 gin to swirl from it. A murky green light and sloshing sounds emerge.  
 The Lights gradually reveal GRENDEL slopping mud and filth over  
 himself and speaking in a deliberately unpleasant voice, like a British  
 punker]*

GRENDEL. Luverly, this is fantastic, the great smell of Brutal, I real-  
 ly pong now. Cooww! My feet stink beautiful. I could stay in this swamp  
 all day—aah!

GRENDEL'S MOTHER. *[Off, in a voice like old bagpipes]* Grendel!  
 How much longer are you going to be in that bog!

GRENDEL. All right, Mum, I'm just finishing me tea!

GRENDEL'S MOTHER. *[Off]* How many times have I told you not  
 to take your meals in the bog—especially when you will insist on hold-  
 ing food between your toes.

GRENDEL. All right, all right! I won't be long. Blimey—my mother—  
 have you see her? *[Sings]*

Music No. 8: "HAVE YOU SEEN MY MOTHER?"

GRENDEL. Well, have you seen my mother?

She's revolting, wiv 'er 'air in curlers  
 And 'er body odour;  
 She's an iron constitution that can change quite quickly  
 If she gets upset or eats raw kidney.

But oh—I love 'er so—she is my ma,  
 She's all I've got—Ah!  
 When it comes to me she'll tell you straight  
 I've got the lot—Yeah!  
 So if she's sometimes hasty  
 Or a trifle vi'lent,  
 It's because she has been snubbed or told  
 Be silent.  
 But for this her temp'rament is plainly  
 What you'd call abrasive or a touch insane.  
 Yes, singin' in the barf—  
 I often do—I like a larf—  
 I slop and splash abart,  
 And when I splash  
 I spill my marf—Yeah!

*[GRENDEL's MOTHER enters. She is a hideous woman with gaudy clothes and an improbable hairstyle—probably a chiffon head-scarf over curlers—and huge slippers]*

MOTHER. You've been in this flippin' 'ole quite long enough—you're just getting soft, lazing around here: you're supposed to be back down that drinking hall tonight getting me some more tasty, hairy warriors and all you can do is wallow around. And what's this terrible pong in here?

GRENDEL. Mum, stop it, Mum—it's me body lotion.

MOTHER. Body lotion—you wanna toughen yourself up a bit—it's no good stinking like a stagnant pond if you can't keep up your evil deeds, my lad.

GRENDEL. Mum, just cut it out, will you. Please don't send me back down that place again. I got you about thirty blokes the other night.

MOTHER. Thirty! What's wrong with you, do you think I'm losing me appetite? *[She starts belting him]* Evil can only survive on murder and horror—thirty is only a start. We've got to make it so that the night is never safe.

GRENDEL. I've just got this 'orrible feeling.

MOTHER. There's no room for feelings in this game!

GRENDEL. All right, let me have me ears pierced then!

MOTHER. What are you driveling on about now?

GRENDEL. You promised, you promised last Christmas, I could have me ears pierced.

MOTHER. Oh, for cryin' out loud, what's he on about—you're a pansy, mate—you're no son of mine—first you want your hair dyed green and red, and now you want pierced ears.

GRENDEL. Mum, listen, will you, I just wanna look tough. How can I stick safety pins and fings through me ear'oles if I ain't got any 'oles to stick 'em through—I've just gotta *look* tough so I can *feel* tough.

MOTHER. Oh, all right, if it makes you happy—anything for a quiet life. I'll get the blacksmith.

GRENDEL. [*Exploding*] What! I'm not 'aving no blacksmith touching my ear'oles. It's a delicate operation.

MOTHER. Delicate? Since when have you been delicate! I thought you wanted to be tough.

GRENDEL. Yeah, well most of me mates do each other with a bone needle or somefing.

MOTHER. [*Losing patience*] Hammerfist, come 'ere! [*HAMMERFIST enters, a huge burly blacksmith with a horned helmet and an enormous hammer. His voice is like thunder*]

HAMMERFIST. Did I hear you call?

MOTHER. Yes, you did. This son of mine wants his ears pierced—you see to it, will you?

HAMMERFIST. [*Without emotion*] Ears pierced, I see; I'll just get the rest of my tools. [*HAMMERFIST goes off*]

MOTHER. Now get out of that bath. [*She gets Grendel in a "half-Nelson" or some wrestler's hold and pins him, yelling, to the ground*] You can have your heart's desire.

GRENDEL. Ow! Stop it, get off!—(etc.)

MOTHER. And once you've been done, you can get down to Hrothgar's place double quick and get me some men! [*HAMMERFIST enters carrying his hammer and an anvil or block and chisel*]

HAMMERFIST. Right, put his ear on here—left ear first. [*GRENDEL, still struggling, is pushed on to the block. There is a great ringing of steel as the hammer bashes an iron chisel into his ear lobe. He utters suitably horrific yells as the process is repeated*] What's the matter—got earache, sonny? [*HAMMERFIST laughs hideously as he goes off. GRENDEL is left panting on the floor*]

MOTHER. Now, get dressed! [*GRENDEL slowly begins to clutter himself in "punk gear"—a leather jacket with "DAMNATION" or other slogan in metal studs is supplemented by a variety of chains and leather straps*]



VOICE. *[Off]* Grendel, you coming out tonight? We could really rip the place up!

GRENDEL. I'm coming, but I'm coming on me own. I'm just putting on me bondage.

Hrothgar, I'm going to get you tonight—

I'm in the mood for a terrible fight.

See all my bondage of leather and chain,

You'll never live to see freedom again. *[GRENDEL exits]*

*[Darkness. In the darkness the scene changes to the hall where BEOWULF watches with his WARRIORS. The following action may be played in slow motion in silhouette, so that huge shadows are thrown against the cyclorama]*

Music No. 9: "THE APPROACH OF GRENDEL"

*[The MINSTREL and CHORUS speak/sing together]*

MINSTREL & CHORUS. Gliding softly down the darkness

In the shadows, filled with madness—

Are the watchers sleeping,

Silent vigil keeping?

All but one, who waits in silence

Contemplating coming violence

With the foe's arrival,

Fighting for survival.

Down the misty moorland stalking

Glides the Grendel wickedly walking,

Hot with hate his eyes are shining,

Savage soul for sin now pining.

As the monster moves still closer,

Feel the fateful air grow colder.

Beowulf, be ready,

Steel your nerve, be steady.

Foul the air with his corruption

All intent on our destruction.

*[GRENDEL opens the door and appears. Bring up general lighting. He walks round the hall and stretches out his hand to attack. BEOWULF leaps at him but is forced down and drops his sword. GRENDEL lifts his arm to strike him when BEOWULF suddenly grips his arm]*

GRENDEL. [*Struggling*] Agh! [*Gasping*] I never have met on middle earth, a man with a harder hand grip than this. [*BEOWULF now gets up. GRENDEL bellows*] Let me go, back to the darkness—let me go, back to the fen—to my lair. [*Trying to pull away. A terrible fight with hideous noises ensues*]

MINSTREL. Fear entered into the hearts of the listening Danes.

WARRIORS. Quick, we must help our Captain—keep him pinned there, Beowulf. [*They hack at Grendel with their swords*]

GRENDEL. Keep off, you scum; no sword can hurt me.

BEOWULF. [*To the Warriors*] Leave off. [*To Grendel*] Then you must discover that of all men living in this world I am the strongest. Flesh and bone will fail you in the end.

MINSTREL. [*Speaking like a commentator*] A fault in the fiendish frame appeared. Shoulder muscles snapped, tendons tore, bone joints burst apart. [*There is a terrible ripping sound as BEOWULF pulls off Grendel's arm. GRENDEL runs off, bellowing*]

BEOWULF. I have cleansed Heorot. [*He holds up the arm and hangs it above the throne*]

[*Cheers resound as the characters regroup. HROTHGAR enters with his QUEEN and PRINCESS HYGD during the singing of the following chorus. HROTHGAR seats Beowulf on the throne. There is a procession of MEN carrying gifts of shields and other rich treasures, and finally a ceremony in which BEOWULF is joined in marriage to HYGD*]

Music No. 10: "FINALE"

MEN. [*Singing*] Freemen we here stand together,

Free from evil, free from fears,  
Free to eat and sleep in safety,  
Free to live out all our years.  
Now we honour this great champion,  
Drink a toast to Beowulf—  
Beowulf.

WOMEN. [*Singing*] Free to live in peace and harmony,

Free to plant and free to plough,  
Raise our children warm in happiness,  
Kill the goose or fatten the cow.  
We pay homage to this great warrior,  
Drink the health of Beowulf—  
Beowulf.

ALL. [*Singing*] Free to build our land's prosperity,  
 Free to laugh and love and smile,  
 Free to sport and free to make music,  
 Free from stress and free from trial—  
 We salute this mighty hero—  
 Life and health to Beowulf—  
 Beowulf.

[*FANFARE*]

HROTHGAR. Let the marriage begin.

BEOWULF. For such a prize a man would fight a dozen Grendels.

PRIEST. [*Singing*] Do you, Beowulf, nephew of Hygelac,  
 King of all the Geats,

Take Hygd to be your lawful wedded wife?

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] I do, I do, I do.

PRIEST. [*Singing*] And do you, Princess Hygd, daughter of Hrothgar,  
 The lord king of all the Danes,

Take Beowulf to be your lord and lawful wedded husband?

HYGD. [*Singing*] I do, I do, I do, I do.

I love him, yes I do, for all my life through.

Yes, now and for always I will make his dreams come true.

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] I've won her, now she's mine, such beauty  
 rare and fine,

I'll love her and I'll hold her and I'll make her dreams come true.

I love her, yes it's true; I do, I do, I do.

HYGD. [*Speaking over the music*] With this ring, I thee wed. [*HYGD  
 and BEOWULF kiss*]

BEOWULF. And with this ring, I thee wed.

HYGD. [*Singing*] I love you, yes I do, for all my whole life through,  
 I love you now and always and for all my life through,

I love you, yes I do, it's true, I do, I do, I do.

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] I love you, yes I do, for all my whole life  
 through,

Now and always I will keep you my life through,

I love you, yes I do, it's true, I do, I do, I do.

PRIEST. I now pronounce you man and wife.

[*Wedding march as they process*]

CHORUS. Free to live our lives together,

Free to dance and free to learn,

Feel the strength which comes with unity,

Find support at every turn;  
 Now we celebrate this young woman,  
 Married now to Beowulf—  
 Beowulf.

Health to both of them, let them live strong in love.  
 What a lovely day, now let the revels start.  
 Such a lovely day, come let the revels start.  
 Though we'd like to stay  
 The wedding feasts call and we must leave you now.

*[The Curtain falls, leaving only the MINSTREL before it. Behind it are sounds of distant revels]*

MINSTREL. *[Speaking]* And Grendel, foul creature, fled to the fens  
 with failing heart,  
 To a den where death awaited him.  
 His strength ebbing, he had staggered slowly,  
 Blood dripping, life oozing,  
 To the dark lake of doom. He dived  
 Into its icy waters. Hell had him!

*[Pause]*

Let us refresh ourselves and meet once more  
 In the great drinking hall!

*[The MINSTREL exits, and LIGHTS fade. GRENDEL reappears and screams:]*

GRENDEL. Revenge, I will have revenge. Sleep not,  
 Beowulf—I will be avenged!

BLACKOUT

## ACT II

*[The drinking hall. Darkness. All the COMPANY except Beowulf, Hygd, Hrothgar, and the Queen are sleeping after their banquet. Shapes are only dimly visible. Suddenly a spotlight comes up on GRENDEL's MOTHER]*

MOTHER. You thought this saga had ended, didn't you—you'd forgotten me, with all that ridiculous mead drinking and celebration—well, I'll tell you what I think of your saga—it stinks—it's Danish blue. My lovely boy is lying dead at the bottom of the lake and all I hear is singing and vile mortals drinking and stuffing themselves! But big Mummy is here for REVENGE! *[The WARRIORS grab their swords, but she sings and moves so violently that they can't really get near her]*

Music No. 11: "GRENDEL'S MOTHER"

MOTHER. *[Singing]* I've a nasty disposition—  
 Evil of my own volition—  
 Spawned in sloth by mutant creatures,  
 Soon you'll see my finer features.  
 Puny weak humans, leave your ablutions,  
 Prepare your clean skin to feel my pollutions.  
 I'll drink your blood and dig out your eyeballs,  
 Tear out your heart and torture your vitals.  
 You beat my baby, but you'll discover  
 All the fury of a forlorn mother.  
 Should you hide or find protection,  
 I'm a dab hand at detection—  
 I'll hunt you through bog or byroad,  
 Soon I'll have your G. P. O. code.  
 Then when you least would like me to visit,  
 I'll just emerge with manners exquisite.  
 I'll break the floors and furniture maybe—  
 Strangle the cat and step on the baby;  
 You killed *my* baby—now you'll discover  
 All the fury of a fuming mother.

*[She holds all at bay and the action freezes]*

MINSTREL. So the monstrous ogress came to Heorot  
 Where the Danes slept in the hall.

MOTHER. *[To the Minstrel]* All right, you can call me names—but

it won't stop me doing what I'm going to do. Here's a strong warrior—noted in battle, are you? One of Hrothgar's favourites—a hero of the hall, eh? You'll do in exchange for the life of my son. [*She falls on a strong warrior and carries him off over her shoulder*]

ALL. [*With great wailing and gasping*] Beowulf! Where is Beowulf? Help us! Hrothgar. [*They run wildly around the stage and into the auditorium*] Evil has returned! [*HROTHGAR enters with QUEEN*]

HROTHGAR. The devil has come for revenge. We are helpless against this terrible scourge—our only hope is to turn to Beowulf—go to his chamber at once.

ALL. [*Chanting*] Doom and disaster, hell and destruction, desolation, DESOLATION! [*BEOWULF enters with HYGD. HROTHGAR sings*]

HROTHGAR. Beowulf, once more to you we turn—  
Our hearts groan with grief—with anger we burn—  
The Mother of Grendel has ravaged the hall.

One of our heroes has been first to fall. [*He almost breaks down with grief*]

BEOWULF. You must bear your grief bravely—and your friend's death must be avenged—where does this monster live?

QUEEN. [*Singing*] She inhabits a strange region  
Of wild fells and windswept moors—  
Tracherous tracks through boggy wastelands  
High upon lonely tors—  
At the bottom of a dark lake, set about with twisted trees.  
At a depth no man can suffer  
Lurks the ogress Grendel's Mother.

HYGD. O Beowulf, you cannot go on such a dreadful journey!

QUEEN. I am sorry at heart for you, daughter—but daring is the food of fighting men and it is best that you accept it.

BEOWULF. [*Tenderly holding Hygd*] Hrothgar, I can promise this: Grendel's Mother will never protect herself by hiding in the darkest depths. For I shall seek and destroy her. But I undertake this with a heavy heart.

HROTHGAR. You must take our finest horse and arms for your great task.

BEOWULF. I shall be glad of your horse.

AN EARL. And you must take this bright and wonderful sword. Hrunting is its name—it has fought many battles and legend has it that it was fashioned on the anvil of the gods.

BEOWULF. [*Taking the very heavy sword*] Thanks, good friends—now I must ask you to leave us alone. [*ALL withdraw slowly until BEOWULF is left alone with HYGD*]

HYGD. You seem determined to undertake this impossible task.

BEOWULF. I'm not sure that it is impossible—someone must be able to follow the monster to the bottom of the lake and kill her.

HYGD. But why you? There are men who call themselves champions who drink mead at Hrothgar's table, and yet it is you alone who must risk his life to make their lives safe.

BEOWULF. A hero must fight alone against evil.

HYGD. Beowulf, I had hoped that you loved me more completely than to pose as a hero to me. It's not your strength or your daring that matter to me. Whatever your achievements in the past, you *are* mortal, and now that you have made promises to me you must not take unnecessary risks.

BEOWULF. You are right to remind me of these things—underneath this veneer of confidence there are many uncertainties.

Music No. 12: "IF YOU COULD BUT KNOW"

BEOWULF. [*Singing*] If you could but know all of my doubts and fears,

How I've struggled down the years,

Often hiding bitter tears.

It's not being strong that matters,

But to oppose wrong and that is

What I do,

And I must see it through.

HYGD. [*Singing*] If I could but know all of the depths of your mind,

What enigmas would I find—

What strange qualities combined?

It's not people's words and chatter

But their real aims that matter

More to you,

And we must see this through.

BEOWULF. There are no strange myst'ries to my mind,

It's not people's words and chatter,

But their *real* aims that matter more to me now,

And I must see this through.

BOTH. And we must see this through.

HYGD. [*After a long pause*] Yes, you *are* right; but *please*, please be careful. I cannot bear to lose you so soon.

BEOWULF. You must come with me to the edge of the dark lake—but first I must select strong horses for our journey. [*They exit*]

*[The Stable Girl, BRUNHILDE, enters carrying a bucket or bag of fodder. She wears a horned riding-helmet and riding-gear]*

BRUNHILDE. Really, the demands of these royal stables are quite horrendous. We've no sooner recovered from a week of horse fighting and now the king sends demands for steeds with braided manes. These Danes and Vikings have disgusting habits—you should go to a horse-fight some day just to be nauseated! They get the fiercest stallions they can find—two of them—then they mark out an area on the ground, tie up a couple of mares so that the stallions start rivalling each other to gain attention—and they prod the creatures with sticks to get their tempers up. It's a revolting spectacle—the stallions rear up on their hind legs and flare their nostrils. And their owners get so excited they fight amongst themselves—all quite bestial. You read any book about the Vikings in future and it will say their principal vices were drinking and horse-fighting—you'll see—I find it very surprising that there's a royal interest in horse ownership these days—it seems to have become utterly debased! Breakfast time, chaps! [*Simultaneously, two or three HOBBY HORSES poke their heads from the wings or are led on by other STABLE GIRLS*]

HILDEBURGH. [*A lispng Stable Girl*] What's the task for today, Brunhilde dear?

BRUNHILDE. Today we have a ROYAL visit. The king is sending his latest champion here to select a horse for some wild exploit. [*Noticing the meaningful glances of the girls*] Hildeburgh, he is coming to look at *horses!*

HILDEBURGH. O, don't be so cross, Brunhilde—you must allow me my fantasies.

ANOTHER STABLE GIRL. We all know about your fantasies, darling—the last time we had a champion here choosing a horse it took you three hours to show him the hayloft.

BRUNHILDE. Girls, that will *do*. We have to get this place ready for a royal guest. You know what importance the royal family attach to their horses and to good grooming—and if this man is a man of quality he will appreciate all the finer points—we must only show him the best



models, none of the clapped out stuff we usually try to sell—now get down to it. [*The GIRLS feed, wash down, and groom the hobby horses; but they actually pay more attention to their own grooming. BRUNHILDE exits. BEOWULF enters behind Hildeburgh*]

BEOWULF. Health to you, fair damsel!

HILDEBURGH. [*Spinning round, flustered*] Oooh, health to you. I am afraid you have taken me unawares—er—who are you?

BEOWULF. My name's Beowulf. You may have heard of me—I believe I'm something of a myth already.

HILDEBURGH. [*Winding one arm around his neck*] My name's Hilde—[*lipping*] and I'm a miss too, you know! [*She simpers and gazes at him. BRUNHILDE enters with a voice like thunder*]

BRUNHILDE. Hildeburgh, put him down! Are you from the royal hall, from the court of King Hrothgar?

BEOWULF. Yes. I have come to select two fine horses.

BRUNHILDE. Delighted to meet you. You have a splendid grip, I hear. [*She shakes his hand. BEOWULF makes it obvious that her grip is more than a match for thirty men*] Welcome! Now, we have these . . . [*She reels off various horsey statistics*]

BEOWULF. [*Looking at the horses' teeth, etc.*] These are magnificent steeds. Will you help me to mount? [*The GIRLS fall over each other to help him on to a horse*] And my wife shall ride beside me on this. Perhaps you will bring it behind me.

BRUNHILDE. Gladly. I will do that. [*BEOWULF goes. BRUNHILDE rides out after him*]

STABLE GIRLS. Look at that—not a look backwards! *Men!*

Music No. 12A: "JOURNEY TO THE DARK LAKE"

[*The STABLE GIRLS exit. As the MINSTREL speaks the following over music, a procession winds its way up the cliffs to the edge of the pit: it includes BEOWULF, HYGD, HROTHGAR, and SOLDIERS*]

MINSTREL. So they traversed the tracks of the evil one,

Across the fog-shrouded moorland. Dismounting

Their horses they scrambled up sheer stones and

Rough ridges—through desolate, deserted downs—

Until at last, Beowulf suddenly saw the waters of the cheerless lake.

BEOWULF. The water is turbid with blood. This is where I must dive.

HYGD. Not there, surely. Look at the water snakes and strange shapes which curl in the depths.

BEOWULF. They are not immortal. Watch! [*He takes a bow and fires into the water. The SOLDIERS fish out a strange monster with their boar hooks*] Now I must prepare; bring me my arms. [*The SOLDIERS give Beowulf a mail shirt, helmet, and sword*]

HROTHGAR. This sword has never failed any hero in battle.

BEOWULF. Hrothgar, I dare not look behind in case my heart fails me—but if I do not return you must be father and guardian to all that is precious to me. [*He pauses only to kiss the hand of Hygd, to hold the arm of Hrothgar—then dives into the pit. HYGD turns away. The others go to comfort her, then exit, leaving her alone. She sings:*]

Music No. 13: “WHEN FIRST WE MET”

HYGD. When first we met, I knew at once,

A single glance, then, was enough.

His noble head and clear eye—

I felt my heart take wing and fly.

For such a man, for such a man, for such a man

A girl would die.

So now he’s gone, here I remain,

One simple wish, a burning flame.

God help me now, what can I do?

Without this man my life is through.

To such a man, to such a man, to such a man

A girl is true,

A girl is true.

[*HYGD exits slowly as the LIGHTS fade*]

[*In the gloom the scene changes to represent an underwater cave. The light is green and watery with touches of blue and red—all the movements are slow and laboured or flowing as if being viewed from a glass-sided swimming pool. Strange electronic sounds, like those heard in amusement arcades, fill the air. In the centre is a sort of counter on which glittering Viking-like treasures—e.g. yoghurt cups with glass beads—are set up. Two WATER-NYMPH GIRLS with weed-draped swimming costumes float in wearing sashes which read “Viking Saga Holidays.” They carry and set up a notice: “The Cavern—underwater amusements”*]

## Music No. 14: "SEA-CREATURES DANCE"

*[Watery music begins and there follows dance of WATER CREATURES. Mermaid-like dancers float around intertwined with great coils and tentacles. A group of OLD CRONES with headscarves enter and sit on stools around the center counter. Their chattering entry and awkward movements are in direct contrast to the grace of the previous dance. Words like "Oo, me feet are killing me!" are heard in the hubbub. GRENDEL's MOTHER enters, takes a microphone, and sits at the central counter as if she is about to run a bingo session]*

MOTHER. Right. Now, girls, let's see what fantastic prizes we have to offer today! *[The WATER-NYMPHS come forward and speak like hostesses of a T. V. show]*

1ST NYMPH. We have here a magnificent bowl known as Sutton Hoo ware, encrusted with rich enamel—then we have this charming gold bracelet that once belonged to Eofor, the slayer of Ongentheow, son of Wonred, brother of Wulf, husband of Hygelac's daughter.

AN OLD CRONE. Oh, yes, fancy!

2ND NYMPH. A superb shield, taken from Wulfgar, Prince of the Vandals, by Grendel—our dear departed friend. *[Cheers, sounds of "Shame," "He was a lovely boy," "Ah!," etc.]* Splendid workmanship. And lastly, our top prize for today—a stupendous sword—a giant sword of unknown age shaped in a giant's forge—the wonder of its kind—yet so enormous that no known man can wield it. *[She gasps]*

MOTHER. Now you've seen the prizes, eyes down! *[She sings]*

## Music No. 15: "BINGO SONG"

MOTHER. On the red, Hrothgar's fate—  
 Thirty-eight.  
 On the blue, Danish wench—  
 Twenty-two  
 But what's this on the green?  
 Hrothgar's Queen—seventeen.  
 Oh yes, one day soon I'll smash her little skull.  
 On the red, devil's hive—  
 Nine till five.  
 On the green, Grendel's tricks—  
 Fifty-six.  
 On the blue, well look you,

Thatcher's den—number ten.  
 Yes, she and I are really quite good pals.  
 On the blue, doing fine—  
 Sixty-nine.  
 Still on blue, number two—  
 Sutton Hoo.  
 On the green, sweet sixteen—  
 Viking swine, number nine.  
 Oh dear, how I hate that nasty little lot.  
 On the blue, death to you—eighty-two.  
 Hate, hate, hate—number eight on the red.  
 Number three, look at me, can't you see what I've got?  
 Oh, I've a certain something they have not.

*[She chants into the mike in an even more frenzied way until, by the end of the song, she is completely berserk]*

On the red, stay in bed—sixty-five.  
 On the green, quite untouched—just thirteen.  
 Savage Picts—twenty-six; black and blue—forty-two.  
 And so now we really start to move it by.

*[Faster still]*

Number three—now bad luck always comes  
 Like the wolf at the door—forty-four.  
 Ninety-nine, now you're mine.  
 Forty-three—don't you see  
 I hate your Anglo-Saxon poetry.  
 Now eyes down on the blue—thirty-two.  
 Rape and crime, do your time—twenty-nine.  
 On the make—forty-eight; on the blue—twenty-two—  
 Why we must all make profit from the state.

*[During the following BEOWULF swims in—preferably from above down a huge strand of water weed]*

King of tricks, politics—sixty-six.  
 Take a dive on a bribe—ninety-five.  
 Forty-one—twenty-eight—human kind going straight.  
 I hate, oh how I hate, yes, HATEY HATE!

BEOWULF. Bingo!

MOTHER. Who said that, who said that?

BEOWULF. There is one who is not afraid of you, vile thing! Now bid farewell to your life! *[The OLD CRONES fly at him, but he drives*

*them off with his fist and his sword; they clutch at him but at last he faces Grendel's Mother]*

MOTHER. Come at me, would you? I can tell you now that stupid little sword won't help you. Ha, ha—I'll wrestle with you till there's not a bone left unbroken in your body. *[She laughs mockingly]*

BEOWULF. *[Finding that the sword makes no impression on her]* Very well, I'll fling this useless thing away—my own strength will have to suffice me!

*[They wrestle—first he throws her but then she rolls on top of him and draws a knife. There is a desperate struggle. Focus changes to a group of WARRIORS with HROTHGAR and HYGD gathered anxiously around the "pit"]*

1ST WARRIOR. There is more blood rising and marbling the surface of the water.

2ND WARRIOR. I fear there has been much terrible slaughter.

3RD WARRIOR. It is unlikely that we shall see our master again.

HYGD. No, no, you must be wrong. He is wonderfully strong.

1ST WARRIOR. Dear lady, we are seasoned warriors, experienced men. I am very much afraid that the she-wolf of the deep has done away with him.

HROTHGAR. It is now the ninth hour when darkness comes over the face of the land. All hope of our champion must be given up. I must turn my face homeward. *[There is a movement of some of the WARRIORS, but a few who wear Beowulf's emblem remain with Hygd]*

LOYAL WARRIOR WIGLAF. You may abandon the cliff top—but I will remain, sick at heart to stare into the deep.

ANOTHER LOYAL WARRIOR. I hope to see our beloved captain again—though I believe I shall not.

HYGD. I must stay and watch with you.

*[BEOWULF finally manages to stagger to his feet and look around for some help]*

MINSTREL. *[Watching anxiously]* The sword, Beowulf, the great sword—you can wield it! *[BEOWULF seizes the giant's sword and swings it]*

MOTHER. No, no, not that—ah! *[She dies hideously]*

BEOWULF. *[Gazing at the sword]* All thanks to this wonderful blade. Now I must give it one more task—to hack off the head from Grendel's corpse and take it back for a prize. *[He does this (he steps off-*

*stage where Grendel's body supposedly lies*)] The blade—it is melting like ice—the blood of Grendel is eating into the metal! I must leave this place and take nothing with me except the sword hilt and the head of Grendel. The blood that has been shed here was too hot, the fiend that died too deadly by far. [*BEOWULF exits. Again, focus changes to watchers round the "pit"*]

WIGLAF. A helmet! A horned helmet! Beowulf is swimming to the surface! [*BEOWULF crawls out of the pit. They all rush to him and unfasten his armour. With one arm around Hygd he holds high Grendel's head, which is then stuck on a spear*]

MINSTREL. And they retraced their steps, light-hearted and bold, down familiar paths and entered again Hrothgar's hall. [*This is represented by a procession*]

BEOWULF. Behold, O King—these trophies from the lake mean but one thing—Victory! Now you may sleep in Heorot!

Music No. 16: "YES, ONCE AGAIN WE HAVE CONQUERED"

CHORUS. Yes, once again we have conquered,

Let all the land rejo-oice!  
 We are the ones who will stand strong,  
 Victory raises its vo-o-o-ice.  
 We will stand together,  
 We will fight forever,  
 We will never, never  
 Bow to evil now. No, no, no!  
 Da dada da, etc. [*dancing exultantly*]  
 Beowulf, beloved guest,  
 Triumphed in every test—  
 Bravest and bold and best—  
 Dearly deserving rest—  
 We our pledge renew:  
 It's one for all and all for you.  
 No matter what's in view  
 We will come fighting through  
 And we will all be true;  
 We'd stop the world for you,  
 Let's hear one more call—  
 It's all for one and all for you—  
 We're all for you.

## Music No. 17: "THE PASSING YEARS"

*[The words and actions are timed so that the next scene is ready to begin as the music finishes]*

MINSTREL. *[Speaking as various symbolic actions are carried out]* Many were the gifts that were piled on Beowulf—treasures far more costly than those he left behind in the underwater cavern. And then, of course, they had a great feast—we're not going to show you that because you've seen one already—and you know what these Danes were like—they loved a saga, so Beowulf had to reel off his adventures with all the gory details—he went on and on—and then Hrothgar made a noble speech, and Beowulf made another speech. They concluded all sorts of peace treaties and non-aggression pacts. Then they embraced each other and made solemn vows—and embraced again—and although Beowulf promised to return and Hrothgar begged him to—they both had the uneasy feeling that they would not meet again on middle earth.

*[During this speech, they all make their way to the "cliff top." BEOWULF and his COMPANY embark over the horizon, while HROTHGAR and his COMPANY remain in silhouette. The sky turns from blue to darkness]*

CHORUS. *[Speaking as the stage empties]* Away went the boat over the foam-flecked sea,

Proud, curling prow cutting the waves.

Until they saw the great cliffs of the land of the Geats

And beached the longship safe on familiar shores.

*[In the darkness a throne is set up Center, and BEOWULF, now grey-haired, sits in it. The LIGHTS come up. An EARL enters]*

EARL. Health to Beowulf. For fifty years, bravest of men, you have ruled the kingdom of the Geats after the death of Hygelac. Your people's love is unflinching, and as a token of my loyalty I bring you this gold cup plucked almost from the dragon's mouth.

BEOWULF. *[Taken aback]* Say again, where did you get this cup?

EARL. My lord, I am an adventurer. I took it from the treasure hoard in the long barrow which foolish tradition says is guarded by a dragon.

BEOWULF. Tradition! It is true! That treasure has been watched over by a terrible dragon for the last three hundred years. You young men must learn restraint. The dragon's revenge will be fearful—it may already be too late. *[A red light begins to flicker on the cyclorama. Dis-*

*tant cries of WOMEN become mingled with shouts of "Fire!" From all sides MEN and WOMEN rush in and fall at Beowulf's feet, spluttering out that their homes are on fire. Among them enter a SECOND EARL, WIGLAF, and a PRIEST]*

2ND EARL. Mighty Beowulf, an evil one has come amongst us. Your great hall is on fire.

BEOWULF. Bring me the largest shield in the kingdom. Old as I am, I will fight this creature.

EARLS. No, my lord, you must not.

BEOWULF. Do as I say. I am not so feeble that you can escape my strong right arm. Prepare yourselves, you must come with me to the dragon's lair. *[They cower away]* What is this? Is this my shield ring? Where is your spirit? *[The great shield is brought in]* Now, who will come with me into the fire? *[They all back away]*

WIGLAF. My lord, I waited for you when you slew the she-monster. I will not forsake you now.

BEOWULF. Wiglaf, we will go together.

Music No. 18: "FINALE"

*[The LIGHTS fade until a red light rises from the pit. BEOWULF and WIGLAF approach, with the others trailing. They are driven back—but, hiding behind their shields, they enter the pit. We see their swords whirling. Suddenly there is a terrible cry, and WIGLAF emerges—alone]*

WIGLAF. The dragon is dead—but our master is terribly wounded.

ALL. Look, he comes.

BEOWULF. *[Staggering out of the pit]* I have fought my last battle. Who will take up this sword? *[They flinch away]* Will no one take up the sword? Will no one rid the world of corruption? *[He dies]*

PRIEST. Our great lord is dead. We must honour him as befits a champion. *[Slowly the whole CAST assemble to build a pyre, on which all arms and helmets are placed and around which shields and banners are stood. Hooded MONKS enter and chant. A ring of WARRIORS encircles the pyre, and when everything is in position the body of Beowulf is placed on top]*

CHORUS. *[As the pyre is built]* Now our world returns to darkness,  
Dismal years and dark despair.

Foul corruption stalks unhindered;

Evil leaves its lair.



*[The body is carried very slowly]*

Ignorance and superstition  
 Thirst like wolves at every door.  
 Hawk and crow now fly together,  
 Hunger drives men from the law.  
 Fifty years of peace and plenty  
 Gone with history's closing door.

SUB-CHORUS OF MONKS. Requiem aeternam, requiem aeternam,  
 Dona eis domine et lux perpetua.

CHORUS. Soon will end our cultured nation  
 With the death of him our sage.  
 Now begin your lamentation,  
 History's darkest age.  
 To the east the scourge of reason,  
 Vandals, Goths, and Mongol Horde—  
 Who will stem the great invasion,  
 Who will grasp the warrior's sword?  
 Now an end to civilization,  
 Bloody death soon our new lord.

MONKS. Dark are the days of the deaths of heroes,  
 Strong our lament for this great man—  
 Live now in legend, his strength still with us;  
 Laughter and grief must not sound again.

FULL CHORUS. Brave Beowulf is now at rest,  
 Evil will soon return again.  
 Who then will tread the champion's path?  
 Where shall we find him and what is his name?

*[The chorus is repeated, by which time the body is on the pyre]*

MONKS. Requiem aeternam, dona eis domine  
 Et lux perpetua.

*[A WARRIOR walks forward and lights the pyre. There is a great shout as the pyre flames]*

ALL. Ah!

### Eulogy

*[A single GIRL SINGER comes forward]*

GIRL. Of all this world's kings, this man was the best,  
 Kindest to his people's needs, gracious, noble, free from greed.  
 Sing of his great strength and wisdom,

But above all else, remember if you can—  
He was a kindly man.

*[The CHORUS repeat while the GIRL continues to sing:]*

He was a good and gentle man.  
I used to know him fairly well.  
He had a kind word for everyone he met—  
No matter who—  
He'd make you feel at home  
With just a word or two.  
Remember him as I do—  
That he was a kindly man.

*[WARRIORS do a ritual walk around the pyre as the CHORUS continue]*

CHORUS. Beowulf is dead,  
Darkness comes again:  
Gone is our great Lord,  
Darkness comes again:  
Who'll take up the sword?  
Did he die in vain? Was it in vain?

*[The LIGHTS fade to a BLACKOUT, as—]*

The CURTAIN falls

**PRODUCTION NOTES***Properties***ACT I****On stage:**

Rostra

Central pit (in it is a leather jacket with chains and straps for Grendel)

**Off stage:**

Shields, spears, swords—Chorus, Warriors

Banners—Chorus, Warriors

Trestle tables, hogs' heads, joints, stools—Servants

Drinking horns, jugs of mead—Wenches

Juggling items—Jugglers

Bob-apple games, blindfolds, pigs' bladders—the Company

Paint—Grendel

Large hammer, anvil or block, chisel—Hammerfist

Detachable "arm"—Grendel

Throne (set during action)

Various gifts of shields, rich treasures—Men

Wedding ring—Beowulf

Wedding ring—Hygd

**ACT II****On stage:**

Remains of banquet on tables, etc.

Heavy, bright sword

Monster, Grendel's "head" (in pit)

Huge strand of seaweed in underwater scene—optional

**Off stage:**

Bucket or bag of fodder—Brunhilde

Hobby horses—Stable Girls

Buckets, horse brushes, fodder—Stable Girls

Bow and arrow—Beowulf

Boar hooks—Soldiers

Mail shirt, helmet, sword—Soldiers (for Beowulf)

Notice: "THE CAVERN—UNDERWATER AMUSEMENTS"—Water Nymphs

Counter with treasures, including ornate bowl, shield, giant sword (set by Company during action)

Stools—Old Crones

Microphone—Grendel's Mother

Knife—Grendel's Mother

Throne (set during action)

Gold cup—Earl

Great shield—Warriors

Materials for pyre—Company

*Lighting Plot***ACT I****To open:** Darkness**Cue 1** (As Overture begins)*Fade up unearthly green light, shadow and silhouette effects*

(Page 1)

<b>Cue 2</b>	<b>Hrothgar and Queen</b> enter <i>Bring up general lighting to full</i>	(Page 1)
<b>Cue 3</b>	At start of <b>Minstrel's</b> song <i>Fade to ½, with spot on Minstrel</i>	(Page 4)
<b>Cue 4</b>	<b>Minstrel:</b> "...coming of the night, came EVIL" <i>Cross-fade to explosion of lurid light</i>	(Page 5)
<b>Cue 5</b>	<b>Chorus/Minstrel:</b> "...leaving the devastation." <i>Cross-fade to general lighting with blue on horizon</i>	(Page 6)
<b>Cue 6</b>	After general exit <i>Fade to Blackout, then bring up green light from pit, followed by general fade up</i>	(Page 10)
<b>Cue 7</b>	<b>Grendel</b> exits <i>Fade to Blackout, bring up silhouette effect on cyclorama</i>	(Page 13)
<b>Cue 8</b>	<b>Chorus/Minstrel:</b> "All intent on our destruction." <i>Bring up general lighting</i>	(Page 13)
<b>Cue 9</b>	As CURTAIN falls <i>Fade to spot on Minstrel</i>	(Page 16)
<b>Cue 10</b>	<b>Minstrel:</b> "In the great drinking hall!" <i>Fade to Blackout</i>	(Page 16)

**ACT II**

<b>To open:</b>	Very dim shadowy lighting	
<b>Cue 11</b>	After CURTAIN up <i>Bring up spot on Grendel's Mother</i>	(Page 17)
<b>Cue 12</b>	<b>Mother:</b> "...big Mummy is here for revenge!" <i>Increase general lighting</i>	(Page 17)
<b>Cue 13</b>	As <b>Mother</b> exits <i>Increase general lighting further</i>	(Page 18)
<b>Cue 14</b>	<b>Stable Girls</b> exit <i>Cross-fade to sinister lighting, favouring pit</i>	(Page 21)
<b>Cue 15</b>	<b>Hygd</b> exits <i>Fade to Blackout. Bring up underwater cave lighting of watery green, shot with blue and red</i>	(Page 22)
<b>Cue 16</b>	<b>Beowulf</b> exits <i>Fade to Blackout, then up to pit lighting</i>	(Page 26)
<b>Cue 17</b>	<b>Minstrel:</b> "And they retraced their steps..." <i>Fade up general lighting to full</i>	(Page 26)
<b>Cue 18</b>	<b>Beowulf and Company</b> embark over horizon <i>Silhouette effect: sky turns from blue to darkness</i>	(Page 27)
<b>Cue 19</b>	After <b>Beowulf</b> sits on throne <i>Bring up general lighting</i>	(Page 27)
<b>Cue 20</b>	<b>Beowulf:</b> "...may already be too late." <i>Reduce general lighting: red fire effect on cyclorama</i>	(Page 27)
<b>Cue 21</b>	<b>Second Earl:</b> "Your great hall is on fire." <i>Lurid light upstage</i>	(Page 28)
<b>Cue 22</b>	<b>Beowulf:</b> "We will go together." <i>Cross-fade to red light from pit</i>	(Page 28)
<b>Cue 23</b>	<b>Beowulf</b> emerges from pit <i>Gradual increase of general lighting</i>	(Page 28)
<b>Cue 24</b>	<b>Warrior</b> lights pyre <i>Red glow effect from pyre</i>	(Page 29)

**Cue 25**    **Chorus:** "Was it in vain?" (Page 30)  
*Fade to Blackout for CURTAIN*

#### *Effects Plot*

**Cue 1**    After **Grendel** enters pit (Page 10)  
*Mists swirl from pit: "sloshing" sounds*

**Cue 2**    Scene changes to underwater cave (Page 22)  
*Strange electronic sounds*

#### *Casting Suggestions*

A large man with a frightening female wig and make-up can effectively play Grendel's Mother.

The cast can be greatly reduced in number with much double-casting. Crowd scenes can be suggested; for example, three or four warriors standing near a side curtain or exit can give the impression of the 30 warriors with whom Beowulf grapples. By position and gesture, the few warriors onstage can give the illusion that many more are just offstage.

#### **A NOTE FROM KEN PICKERING**

*Beowulf* does not demand elaborate staging or scenery: indeed it benefits from an open and uncluttered stage with a few stage blocks or platforms to provide a variety of levels and to create the illusion of a central "pit." Very successful productions have been staged in small studios "in the round" whereas others have simply used a flat stage with a large wooden table. A more ambitious design, of which we have included the initial sketches (see next page), utilized builder's scaffolding and provided an exciting combination of levels, ramps, and pits. The important factor is to have a few raised levels on which characters can be silhouetted if possible; but above all, to try to create the atmosphere of a Saxon hall.

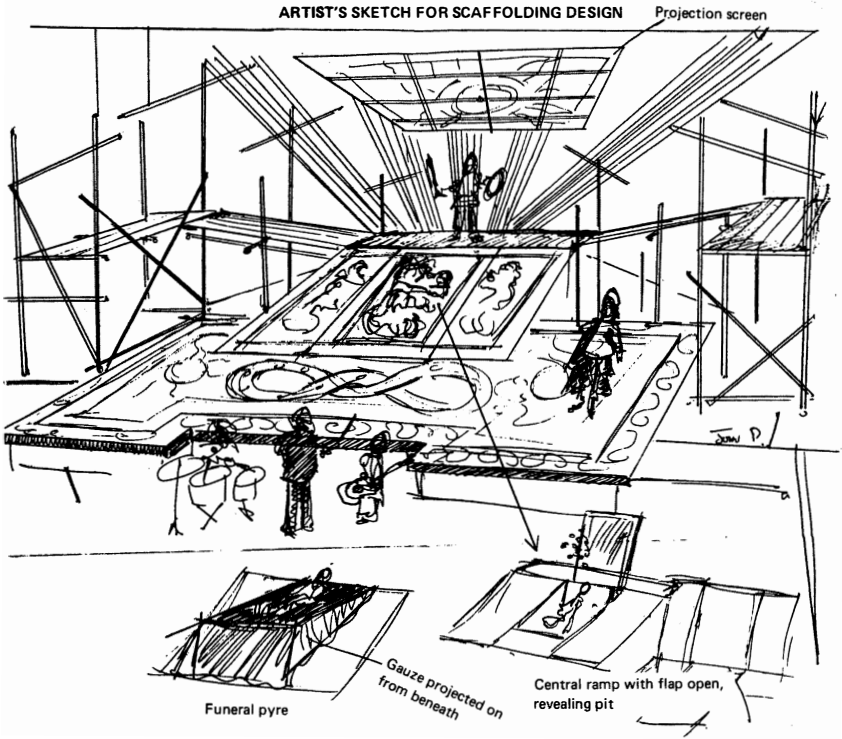
To this end, by far the most effective part of the design is the stage props, which should include shields, swords, horned helmets, jewelery, drinking horns, and other items adorned with striking and bold motifs taken from books on Saxon or Viking history. Superb results can be obtained from wire, string, and papier-mache sprayed with metallic paint. There are many good books which provide instructions for making such items and for creating imitation food for the feasting.

Costumes need simple, flowing lines of heavy cloth—the cheaper and coarser the better; and it is amazing how modern T-shirts can be dyed and adapted to give the impression of antiquity. Colours should be rich and mellow with motifs painted on and trimmings made of rope or thick string. Hairstyles must, if possible, be simple, braided, and long.

The smoky atmosphere of the hall and the ominous chill of the moors can be captured by clever lighting effects. Smoke machines are relatively cheap to hire from theatrical suppliers and can create stunning effects if used carefully. Dry ice in a pot of hot water produces a wonderful ground mist. Deep pools of light will help to establish the mood, and hidden floodlights at stage level can greatly enhance the idea of warm firelight.

The ending should be dynamic: After the thunderous chorus and the chanting of the Monks there is a quiet moment when the Girl Singer sings the Eulogy alone. This superb tune is then taken up by the Chorus while she sings the rather personal words over the top as a counterpoint. Finally, the great final stanza "Beowulf is dead" surges over everything; it usually leaves the audience spellbound.

The show needs pace and energy throughout. It must be a gripping story in its telling and retelling. Where the authors have found modern equivalents for some of the events and characters in the saga, they invite you to do the same!



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## NOTES

## NOTES

# BEOWULF

*Beowulf* is part of the heritage of every English-speaking person—the oldest literary work in our language. Ken Pickering, who lives in the shadow of Canterbury Cathedral, follows the epic poem closely, but with amusing anachronisms to make it meaningful and entertaining for modern theatregoers of all ages.

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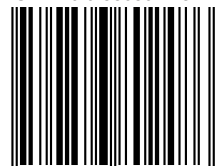
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