

# Beowulf

Beowulf is the oldest epic in English. Drawing from Danish history and folk tales, it was composed, probably in the early 8th century, by a Northumbrian poet.

## PRELUDE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE DANISH HOUSE

Lines 1-21

HWÆT, WE GAR-DENA in geardagum,  
þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,  
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!  
oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,  
monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,  
egsode eorlas, syððanærest wearð  
feasceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,  
weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah,  
oð þæt him æghwylc ymsittendra  
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,  
gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning!  
Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned  
geong in geardum, þone God sende  
folce to frofre; fyrenðearfe ongeat,  
þe hie ær drugon aldorlease  
lange hwile; him þæs Liffrea,  
wuldres Wealdend woroldare forgeaf,  
Beowulf wæs breme --- blæd wide sprang---  
Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.  
Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean,  
fromum feohgiftumon fæder bearne,

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings  
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!  
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since erst he lay  
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gifts: a good king he!  
To him an heir was afterward born,  
a son in his halls, whom heaven sent  
to favor the folk, feeling their woe  
that erst they had lacked an earl for leader  
so long a while; the Lord endowed him,  
the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown.  
Famed was this Beowulf:[1] far flew the boast of him,  
son of Scyld, in the Scandian lands.  
So becomes it a youth to quit him well  
with his father's friends, by fee and gift,  
that to aid him, aged, in after days,  
come warriors willing, should war draw nigh,  
liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds  
shall an earl have honor in every clan.