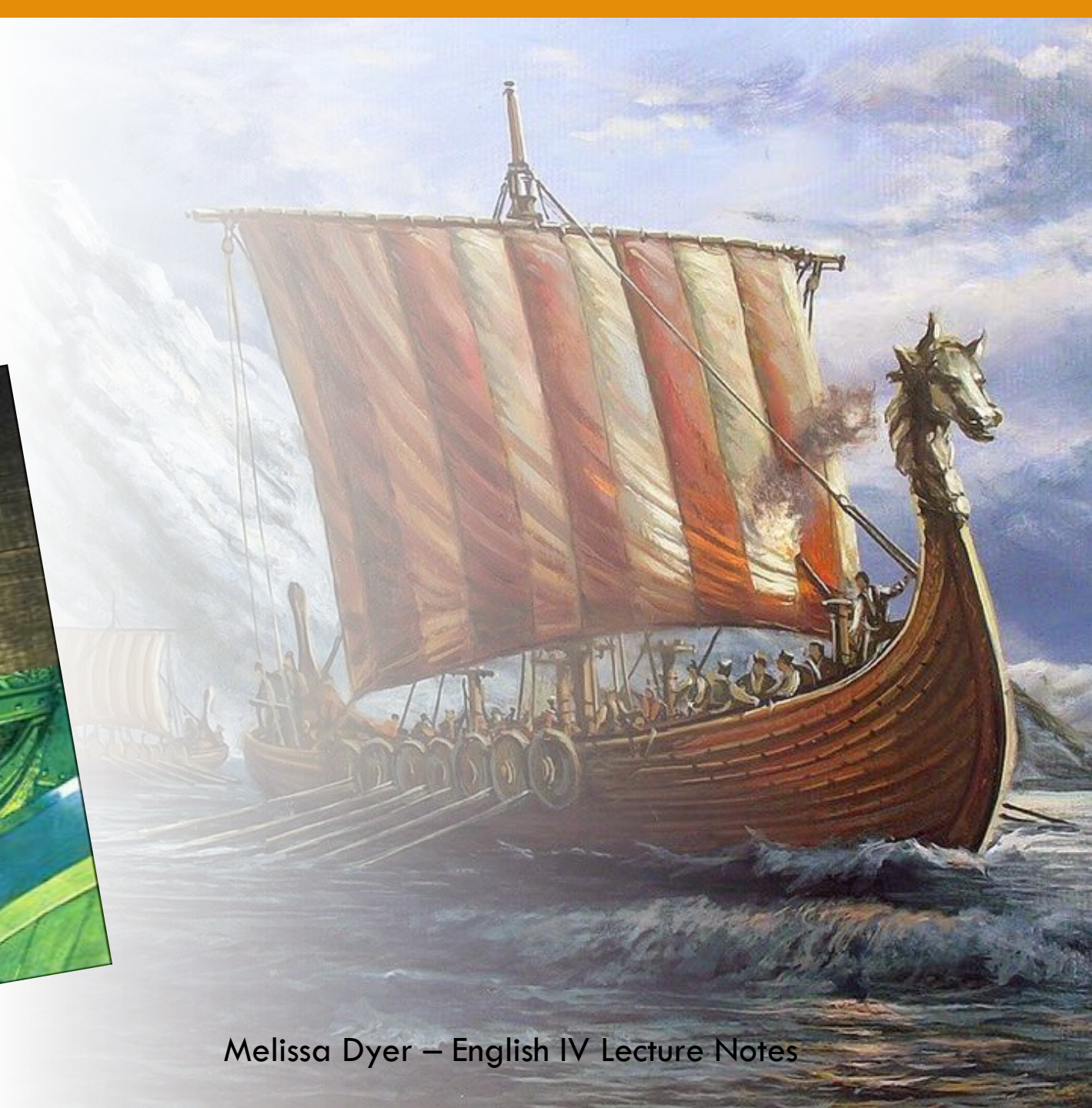
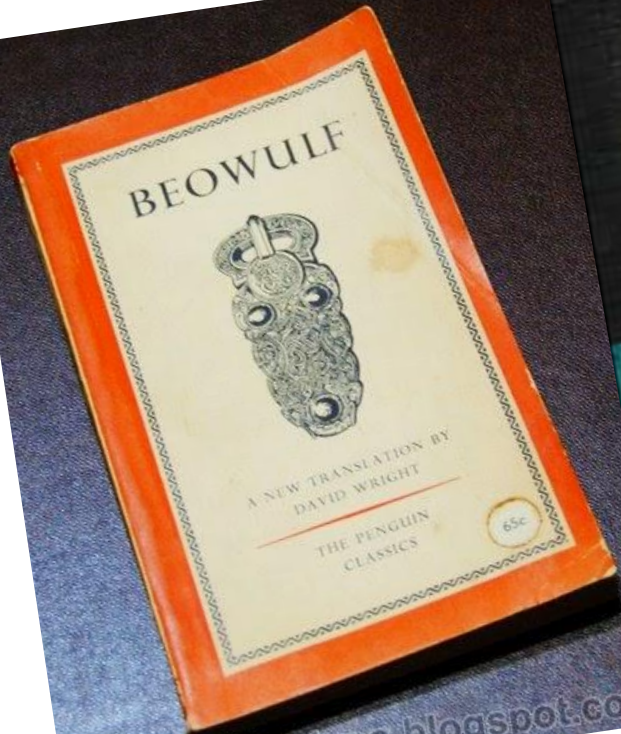


BEOWULF

1st Great Work of English
National Literature





“BOOK-A-MINUTE
CLASSICS: BEOWULF”

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ULTRA-CONDENSED BY SAMUEL STODDARD
AND DAVID J. PARKER

Hrothgar: Let’s build a big old dining hall and call it Herot.

(They do; then Grendel, an ugly guy, takes over Herot and eats people. Beowulf rips his arm off.)

All: You rule, Beowulf.

(Some people make SPEECHES and tell IRRELEVANT STORIES. Beowulf kills some more stuff.)

Beowulf: Wiglaf, I’m dying. See that my funeral pyre fits my greatness.

Wiglaf: Ok.

The End.

FUN FACTS ABOUT *BEOWULF*

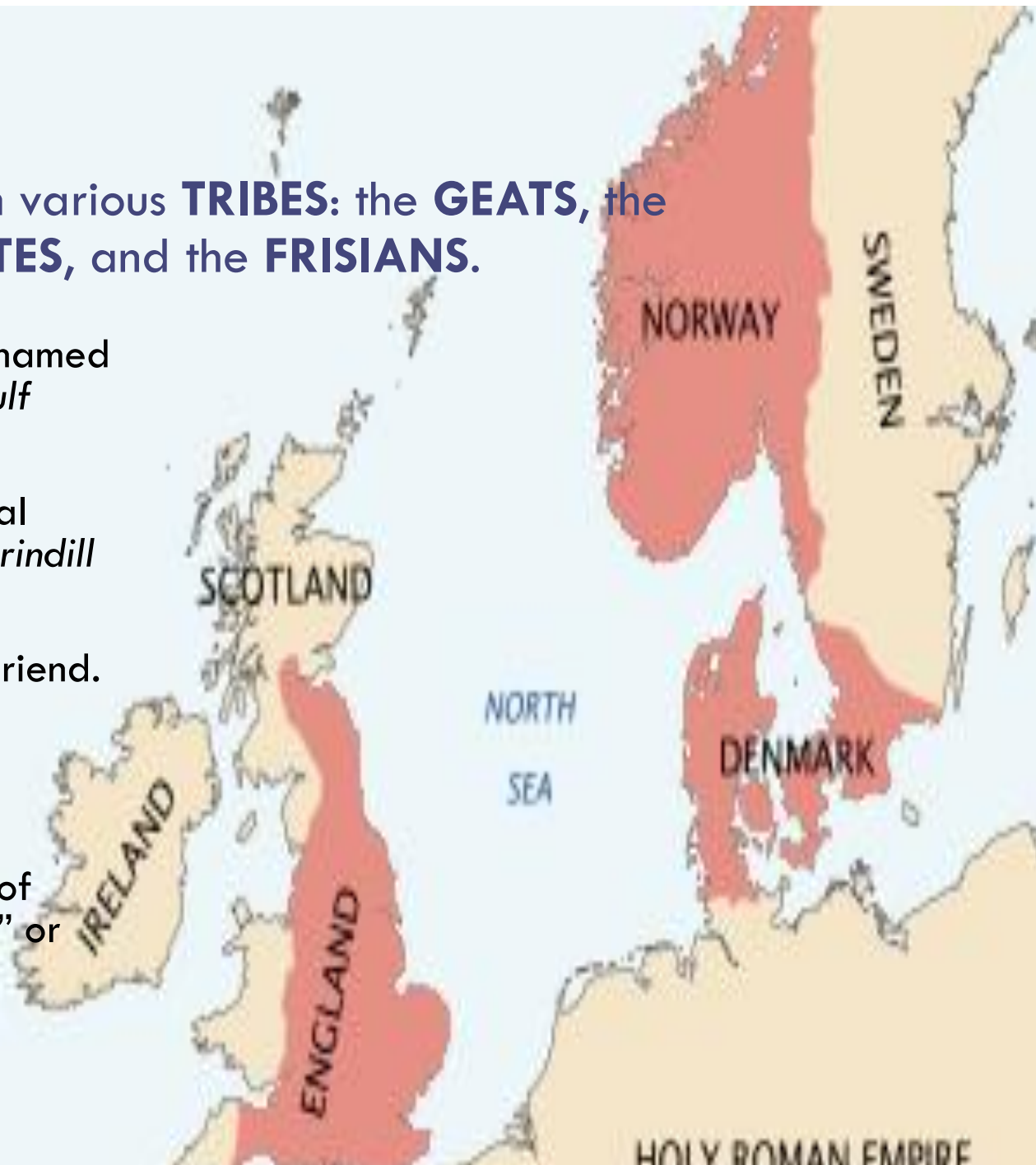
1st Great Work of English National Literature

- **BEOWULF** is an **EPIC POEM** written in **OLD ENGLISH** between **700 – 750 AD** in **NORTHUMBRIA** (northern England).
- The author is **UNKNOWN**, but possibly thought to be a Christian **MONK**.
- **BEOWULF** is an **HISTORICAL account** of **GERMANIC tribes** who valued **BRAVERY, LOYALTY, GENEROSITY, KINSHIP, and PHYSICAL STRENGTH**.
- The **SETTING** takes place in **SCANDINAVIA** during the **6th CENTURY**.

BEOWULF: CHARACTERS

The story of *Beowulf* includes characters from various **TRIBES**: the **GEATS**, the **WULFINGS**, the **DANES**, the **SWEDES**, the **JUTES**, and the **FRISIANS**.

- **BEOWULF**: Geat hero, son of Ecgtheow & Hrethel's unnamed daughter; nephew of Higlac, King of the Geats; *Beowulf* may mean "bear."
- **GRENDEL**: man-eating monster descended from Biblical CAIN; his name might be related to the OLD NORSE *grindill* meaning "storm" or *grenja*, "to bellow."
- **BRECCA**: chief of the Brondings, a tribe, & Beowulf's friend.
- **UNFERTH**: Danish warrior of Hrothgar
- **WIGLAF**: Geat warrior, servant thane of Beowulf
- **HROTHGAR**: king of the Danes, builder of Herot; son of Healfdane; Hrothgar's name might mean "glory spear" or "spear of triumph."
- **WELTHEOW**: Hrothgar's wife, queen of the Danes.



CHARACTERISTICS OF *BEOWULF*

EPIC Characteristics

- **KEY TERM:** an **EPIC** is a long **NARRATIVE** poem that deals with a **HERO** and the hero's exploits. An epic poem is broken into three parts that make up the **HERO'S JOURNEY:**
 - **DEPARTURE**
 - **INITIATION** (trial or challenge)
 - **RETURN**
- *BEOWULF* opens *in medias res*, or "in the middle of things," as the hero departs from his home, **GEATLAND**, and sails to a new land (**DENMARK**).
- EPIC poems often have a clear **THEME** of "**GOOD vs. EVIL.**"
- **HUBRIS**, or arrogant pride, is the cause of the hero's downfall.

CHARACTERISTICS OF *BEOWULF*

EPIC Characteristics

- The author uses an **ELEVATED STYLE** of writing that places the hero **ABOVE** all other humans. By using this style, the author **HONORS & PRAISES** the hero. The **ELEVATED STYLE** of writing in *Beowulf* is also used to **EMPHASIZE** the **SIGNIFICANCE** of the story.
- **BEOWULF'S HEROIC QUALITIES:** *brave, loyal, excellent fighter, and true to his word and his people.*
- An epic also involves **SUPERNATURAL** elements that shape the action of the story. The text also attributes **SUPERHUMAN** qualities to the hero, such as *the ability to breathe for days underwater*. These qualities set the hero, Beowulf apart from the other characters.



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BEOWULF

Additional Characteristics of the Narration:

- **PLOT** centers on **MALE** Characters and their **ACTIONS**—no romantic love.
- Author uses **FORESHADOWING** to indicate events that will follow later in the story—**FATE**.
- The narration reflects the importance of **LINEAGE** (**ANCESTRY**) and **FAMILY** ties (**KINSHIP**). It also stresses the importance of **LOYALTY** in the relationship between a **LORD** and his **THANES**, or warriors.
- The story implies the hero's adherence (*loyalty*) to a **WARRIOR CODE**—a set of rules that emphasize **bravery, honor, and loyalty**.
- Story reflects the idea that **HOW** one fights is *more important than* the **OUTCOME** of the battle.

***BEOWULF*: LITERARY DEVICES**

The author of *Beowulf* uses several literary devices to convey **meaning & emotion**.

- **ALLITERATION:** the repetition of initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables.
- **CAESURA:** a pause or break in the middle of a line of poetry.
- **ENJAMBMENT:** when one thought flows into another thought in a line(s) of poetry without a pause (or *punctuation*).



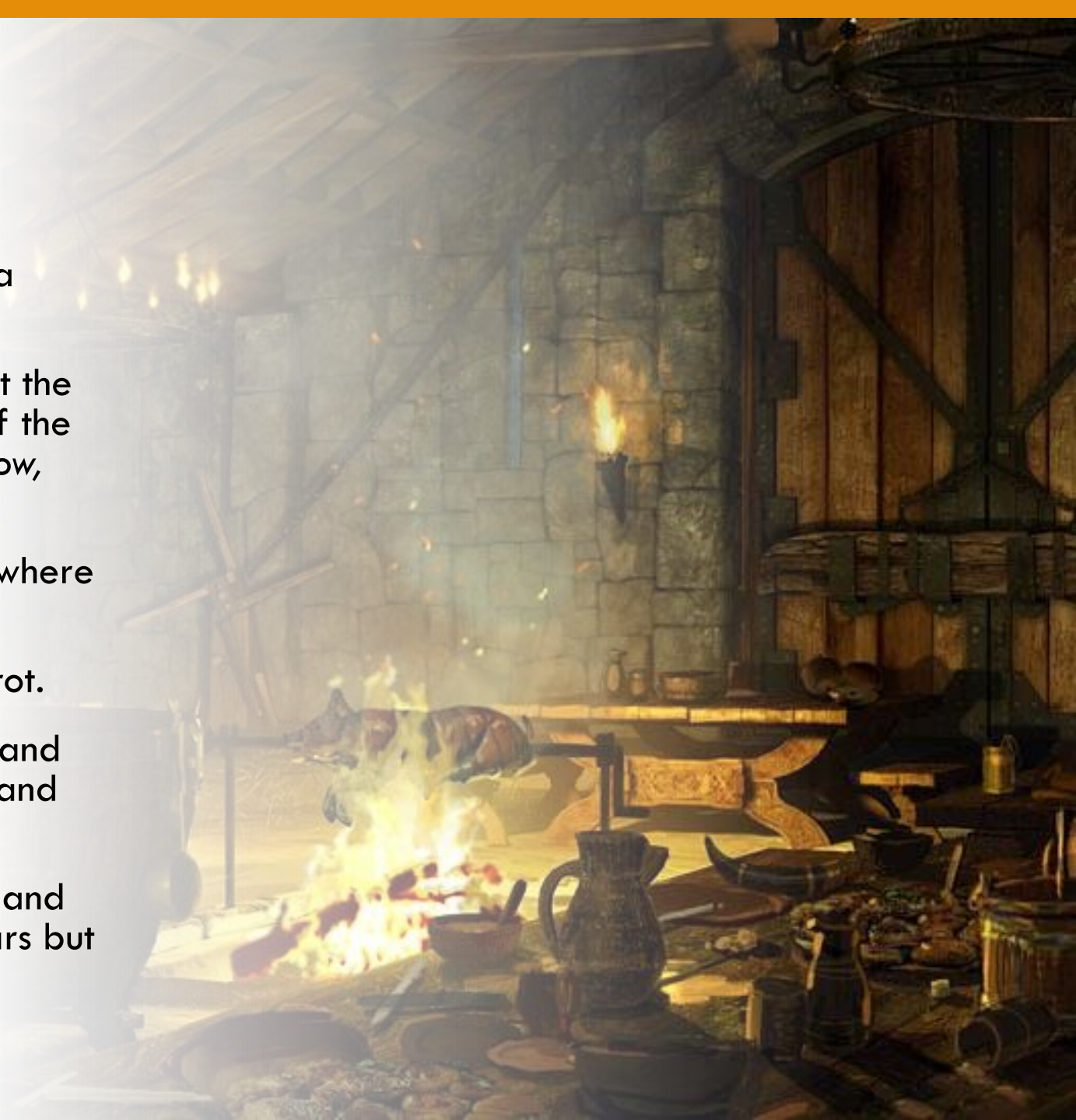
***BEOWULF*: LITERARY DEVICES**

- **KENNING:** compound words that act as metaphors for common objects (*whale road* for sea)
- **EPITHET:** a quality or characteristic of a person or thing, almost a formulaic part of a name, characteristic of epic poetry (“*ring-stemmed*” vessel; “*swift-footed*” Achilles)
- **LITOTES:** a form of understatement that employs a negative with the opposite meaning the author intends to convey (*an edge not dull* = a very sharp sword)
- **SYNECDOCHE:** using a part to represent the whole (*keel* (center of a ship) = the whole ship)
- **Assonance:** repetition of *similar* vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds in words close together (lake and fate; an abbot on an ambling pad)
- **Consonance:** repetition of final consonant sounds after *different* vowel sounds (east & west; struts & frets; add & read)

BEOWULF

PLOT

- Beowulf is a **FOLK EPIC**--about the people of a specific civilization and their commonalities.
- Poem opens with background information about the mythical *Scyld Scefing*, who was the first king of the Danes, then lists *Scyld Scefing's* descendants: *Beow*, *Healfdene*, and *King Hrothgar*.
- Hrothgar builds a grand **mead-hall**, **HEOROT**, where the Danes gather nightly.
- The monster **GRENDEL** begins to terrorize Heorot.
- Beowulf sails to Denmark to defend the Danes and fights two major battles: the first with Grendel and the second with Grendel's mother.
- After returning to his homeland of **GEATLAND** and later becoming king, Beowulf reigns for 50 years but then must fight his final battle with a dragon.



SHRINKLITS: *BEOWULF*

By Maurice Sagoff

Monster Grendel's tastes are plainish.
Breakfast? Just a couple Danish.
King of Danes is frantic, very.
Wait! Here comes the Malmö ferry
Bringing Beowulf, his neighbor,
Mighty swinger with a saber!
Hrothgar's warriors hail the Swede,
Knocking back a lot of mead;
Then, when night engulfs the Hall
And the Monster makes his call,
Beowulf, with body-slam
Wrenches off his arm, Shazam!
Monster's mother finds him slain,
Grabs and eats another Dane!

Down her lair our hero jumps,
Gives old Grendel's dam her lumps.
Later on, as King of Geats
He performed prodigious feats
Till he met a foe too tough
(Non-Beodegradable stuff)
And that scaly-armored dragon
Scooped him up and fixed his wagon.
Sorrow-stricken, half the nation
Flocked to Beowulf's cremation;
Round the pyre, with drums a-muffle
Did a Nordic soft-shoe shuffle.

