Beowulf and Hiram Donald E. Mosier June 02, 2009

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As many of you may know, I have a fondness for old literature, including classic poetry. Of course I cannot read most classic poetry in its original form, since my literacy is limited to English and mathematics. As a result, I am forced to read translations of such great works as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I even struggle with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which is written in English. OK, it is written in Middle English, which is still truly another animal, despite its similarities to modern English. As a result, I am always on the lookout for outstanding translations of these works. Occasionally, my collection grows when a new translation is recommended, much to the consternation of my wife, who believes that libraries should be in public buildings, not private homes. Of course she is wrong about this, as I am about everything else.

Despite my fondness for all these works, I must admit that one stands high atop my "shelf of admiration". That work is *Beowulf*, a relatively short poem, written in Old English about events in Denmark and Geatland (or southwestern Sweden). The story itself is pretty simple, telling the tale of a young Geat warrior, Beowulf, who seeks fame and fortune by traveling to Denmark with several companions, where he kills a monster, Grendel, which had been terrorizing the Danish King Hrothgar for 12 years. After killing the monster, he is forced to kill yet another monster, identified only as Grendel's mother, who seeks revenge for the death of her son. After collecting a fortune in compensatory gifts, he returns to Geatland, shares the wealth, eventually becomes King, and rules for 50 years. He is then forced to battle a dragon, killing it in its lair, but suffering mortal wounds in the process. Mixed into this violent combination of gore, mayhem, and death are several historical interludes, tying the heroic events of the poem into the context of the late 5th century.

Exciting, huh? Well, if that is all there was, it would be pretty boring. There must be some stronger appeal. After all, this poem has been mandatory reading in many literature classes throughout the years. And I was sufficiently impressed by the poem that I honored my pet Rottweiler with the name Beowulf. But remember, this is a poem, and the power of the story is amplified, perhaps created, by the poetry. While I really wish I could read Old English, I suspect I never will. However, the first time I was exposed to this poem, I was fortunate to read from a translation by Burton Raffel¹, which I still consider the best of the four or five that I have read. And while Raffel's poetry may not be as good as other translations, his word selection and phrasing evoke power and wonder among the death and destruction and violence, making the story real. Based on his translation, I can truly imagine the power and majesty of the original.

Sometimes the simplest and most trivial coincidence can lead a person into fertile fields of possibility. I had read the poem several times, enjoying it simply as escapism. But one day, while rereading a portion of the story, I was struck by one phrase, in which Hrothgar talks about Beowulf:

> And I've heard that when seamen came, Bringing their gifts and presents to the Geats, They wrestled and ran together, and Higlac's Young prince showed them a might battle grip, Hands that moved with thirty men's strength, And courage to match.

A mighty battle grip! Surely this was just a coincidence, the accidental result of a simple word choice by the translator. It is certainly not identical to a "strong grip" or a "lion's paw". But for some reason, this coincidence stuck in my head. I must note that other translators include the reference to "hands with the strength of 30 men", while say nothing about a mighty grip. I did a bit of on-line research using Old-English dictionaries, and came up with the following, very literal, translation of the phrase:

The Geat fire maker there understood (or had skill in) the virtuous craft of 30 men in his finest handgrip.

I must admit, this translation does not really match up with any image of a violent young warrior. But then, I was looking at the Old English words in a very different light than other translators. I was, most certainly, forcing my own slant onto possible meaning. But, never-the-less, this translation worked, and reinforced my initial "ahah" moment. So now, as I reread the poem, I also viewed it with different eyes, with different perspective, and with different purpose. I was now searching for further coincidences. And I found them! I found so many, in fact, that I can hardly believe I hadn't noticed them before. They were hidden in plain sight, right before my unseeing eyes.

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The Hall, and its Fronting Street

Much of the poem's first half takes place in or near Herot, a great meadhall built by Hrothgar, King of the Danes. Raffel's description brings majesty to this structure.

> And he thought of greatness and resolved 66 To build a hall that would hold his mighty Band and reach higher toward Heaven than anything That had ever been known to the sons of men.

...The work73Was ordered, the timbers tied and shapedBy the hosts that Hrothgar ruled. It was quicklyReady, that most beautiful of dwellings, builtAs he'd wanted, and then he whose word was obeyedAll over the earth named it Herot.

More detail is found in the description of Beowulf's approach to Herot.

They marched, Beowulf and his men 306 And their guide, until they could see the gables Of Herot, covered with hammered gold, And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all dwellings, Towering majestic, its glittering roofs Visible far across the land.

The majesty of this great hall, as described in these words, evokes images of another great structure, that need not be described further in this paper. However, an expansion of this description of Herot is found in the notes of a translation by Gummere². It says

The building was rectangular, with opposite doors mainly west and east—and a hearth in the middle of the single room. A row of pillars down each side, at some distance from the walls, made a space which was raised a little above the main floor, and was furnished with two rows of seats. On one side ... was the high seat midway between the doors. Opposite this, on the other raised space, was another seat of honor. At the banquet soon to be described, Hrothgar [the king] sat in the chief high seat, and Beowulf opposite to him. Of course, anyone who has spent time in a Lodge room will immediately recognize close parallels to this description. Replace the hearth with an altar, and the image becomes even clearer. Of course, the pillars are on the inside, and obviously they are wooden rather than worked stone. But the parallels are uncanny.

The approach to the great hall was described quite simply

The path he'd shown them was paved, cobbled 320 Like a Roman road.

The translation by Morris and Wyatt³ describes it like this

Stone diverse the street was ...

The notes from the Grummere translation add clarification. "Either merely paved, the strata via of the Romans, or else thought of as a sort of mosaic, an extravagant touch like the reckless waste of gold on the walls and roofs." It is, perhaps, a stretch, but not such a painful one, to see in this a "checkered mosaic pavement" leading to the great hall.

The hall itself was a place of great celebration and remembrance. The unknown poet, who was undoubtedly a Christian writing of pagan times, described it in flowery terms.

As day after day the music rang 88 Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing Call and the poet's clear song, sung Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling The Almighty making the earth, shaping These beautiful plains marked off by oceans, Then proudly setting the Sun and Moon To glow across the land and light it; The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees And leaves, made quick with life, with each Of the nations who now move on its face.

Truly, just as the other great structure with which we are all familiar, Herot was a hall for the celebration or worship of life. And some critics, J.R.R. Tolkien among them, argue that, while Beowulf was clearly a pagan, Hrothgar exhibited regular indications of having been converted to

Christianity. This is partially illustrated in the following lines, describing Hrothgar's actions after the death of Grendel.

Thus that guardian of Denmark's treasures 1046 Had repaid a battle fought for his people By giving noble gifts, had earned praise For himself from those who try to know truth.

But perhaps the seekers of truth were something else.

The Killing of the Monsters

The monsters in this poem are truly monstrous. They are much more than just enemy fighters. A mighty warrior such as Beowulf would gain little fame or fortune from dispatching such puny, insignificant adversaries. In fact, he performs that very killing in some of the historical tidbits buried in the poem, with little fanfare. Such battles are scarce worth mention. But Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon, are evil creatures. Grendel, and by relational reference his mother, is described as the spawn of Cain:

> ...that demon, that fiend 101 Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild Marshes, and made his home in a hell Not Hell, but earth. He was spawned in that slime, Conceived by a pair of those monsters born Of Cain, murderous creatures banished By God, punished forever for the crime Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove Those demons out, and their exile was bitter, Shut away from men; they split Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants, A brood forever opposing the Lord's Will, and again and again defeated.

Giants, of course, were the traditional enemies of Odin and the other Norse Gods. Here the poet casts them in terms more familiar to the Christian listener. But dragons, on the other hand, are ancient creatures of fable and imagination, too terrible even to be compared to any offspring of man. What could be more appropriate for Beowulf's final challenge than battle-royal with a beast evoking the fires of hell. The poet's Christian listeners would contemplate a battle between the brave, virtuous (but pagan) hero and a demon-like creature, spawned in Hell, belching fire and brimstone. Dragons are creatures of our imagination. They need little description; and that is all we get from the poet.

> ... And a stalker 2270 In the night, a flaming dragon, found The treasure unguarded; he whom men fear Came flying through the darkness, wrapped in fire, Seeking caves and stone-split ruins, But finding gold. Then it stayed, buried Itself with heathen silver and jewels It could neither use nor ever abandon. So mankind's enemy, the mighty beast, Slept in those stone walls for hundreds Of years;

These were the monsters that Beowulf faced, faced with courage and determination, and finally destroyed. But how did they die? They died horrible deaths, as perhaps the poet and listener would presume they deserved. There is no sympathy in this poem for the monsters, just as there was no mercy for three other impious, murderous wretches.

Beowulf lay in wait for Grendel in the halls of Herot, awake while his men slept, anticipating the arrival of the monster. He faced Grendel with no armor or weapon save his own great strength. When Grendel came, killing one of Beowulf's men, Beowulf grasped him with his bare hands, with that "strong grip", and ripped the monsters arm from his body.

> ... Then he stepped to another 745 Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws, Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper --And was instantly seized himself, claws Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm. That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime, Knew at once that nowhere on earth Had he met a man whose hands were harder; His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing Could take his talons and himself away from that tight Hard grip.

> ... Suddenly 781 The sounds changed, the Danes started In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible

Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms Of him who of all the men on earth Was the strongest.

... Grendel 811 Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher, But his power had gone. He twisted in pain. And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder Snapped, muscle and bone split And broke. The battle was over.

... No Dane doubted 832 The victory, for the proof, hanging high From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

Grendel was killed, his arm plucked off, a gaping hole left in his chest. His heart was not torn out, but his life's blood most certainly was.

Grendel's mother sought vengeance. She came to the hall the following night, while the warriors were sleeping off the effects of the great celebration ensuing from Grendel's death. She attacked, seized one of Hrothgar's favorite retainers, and carried him off to be devoured in her cave. Beowulf followed, tracked her to her lair, and closed in battle. She fought valiantly and fiercely. His sword could not hurt her. Her strength was perhaps his equal. Only his armor saved him from being stabbed to death. But then he saw his chance.

> Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy 1556 Sword, hammered by giants, strong And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons But so massive that no ordinary man could lift Its carved and decorated length. He drew it From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt, And then, savage now, angry And desperate, lifted it high over his head And struck her with all the strength he had left,

Caught her in the neck and cut it through, Broke bones and all. Her body fell To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.

So now, another monster is dead, her head smote off, a rather severe form of having one's throat cut from ear to ear. But yet another monster awaits. It waits for more than fifty years, while Beowulf assumes the Geatish throne, and rules well. But yet he comes. The dragon, too, seeks vengeance, but not for the death of Grendel, or even his mother. The dragon seeks vengeance for the theft of a cup, a simple jeweled cup. Perhaps one could claim some relationship with another cup of legend, but I will leave that possibility for others to explore. During the fifty year wait, Beowulf fights other battles, battles of note in a historical epic, but not in this poem. Here they are merely a postscript. The monsters are where the significance lies.

> So Edgetho's son survived, no matter 2396 What dangers he met, what battles he fought, Brave and forever triumphant, till the day Fate sent him to the dragon and sent him death.

Oh yes, Beowulf kills the dragon, but he dies in the process, just like another hero who met three ruffians. Beowulf does not meet the dragon alone. He is helped by a young and faithful retainer, Wiglaf. Beowulf strikes the dragon, draws blood, but his sword breaks. The dragon approaches, spewing burning flames while Beowulf and Wiglaf take shelter behind an iron shield, made especially for this fight. Beowulf knew he would die, knew that was his fate, his doom, his wyrd, but he faced the dragon with determination.

> ... His weapon 2583 Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it Most, that excellent sword. Edgetho's Famous son stared at death, Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey Into darkness that all men must make, as death Ends their few hours on earth.

... Then the famous old hero remembering 2676 Days of glory, lifted what was left Of Nagling, his ancient sword, and swung it With all his strength, smashed the gray Blade into the beast's head. But then Nagling Broke to pieces, as iron always Had in Beowulfs hands.

Then the monster charged again, vomiting 2687 Fire, wild with pain, rushed out Fierce and dreadful, its fear forgotten. Watching for its chance, it drove its tusks Into Beowulf's neck; he staggered, the blood Came flooding forth, fell like rain. And then when Beowulf needed him most Wiglaf showed his courage, his strength And skill, and the boldness he was born with. Ignoring The dragon's head, he helped his lord By striking lower down. The sword Sank in: his hand was burned, but the shining Blade had done its work, the dragon's Belching flames began to flicker And die away. And Beowulf drew His battle-sharp dagger; the bloodstained old king Still knew what he was doing. Quickly he cut The beast in half. It fell apart.

So finally, the third monster is dead, its body severed in twain, and Beowulf is dying. A dead hero. And the three monsters he faced, also dead, one with its chest ripped open, one with its throat (and head) cut off, and the third severed in twain, the just deserts for doers of evil.

The Growth of Beowulf

When we first meet Beowulf, he is a young, brash warrior, hoping to expand upon a growing fame. He does not fear death. He is confident, self assured, full of passion. In fact, the young warrior, were it not for his demonstrated ability, would be viewed a braggart. He heard tales of the terror Grendel was wreaking on Hrothgar and Herot. He gathered a group of men, fifteen warriors in all, and sailed for the land of the Danes. Upon landing on those foreign shores, a watchman demanded a password. The Geats had it not, but Beowulf explained their mission, their goal, the purpose of their voyage from East to West. The watchman listens, allows them to pass, and guides them to Herot.

I believe your words, I trust in

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Your friendship. Go forward on into Denmark. I'll guide you Myself

Beowulf demonstrates his youthful brashness when explaining his mission to Hrothgar.

408 The davs Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's Name has echoed in our land: sailors Have brought us stories of Herot, the best Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon Hangs in skies the sun had lit, Light and life fleeing together. My people have said, the wisest, most knowing And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes Great King. They have seen my strength for themselves, Have watched me rise from the darkness of war, Dripping with my enemies blood. I drove Five great giants into chains, chased All of that race from the earth. I swam In the blackness of night, hunting monsters Out of the ocean, and killing them one By one; death was my errand and the fate They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called Together, and I've come.

Beowulf proved his valor. He killed the evil Grendel. But when Grendel's mother came, wreaking vengeance for her loss, Beowulf persisted. He was still confident, but now he showed a grim determination to finish the job. He now recognized that actions have consequences. He knew that failure was a very real possibility. But still, he persevered.

... Beowulf spoke 1383 "Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all To avenge our friends, not mourn them forever. Each of us will come to the end of his life On earth; he who can earn it should fight For the glory of his name; fame after death Is the noblest of goals."

... Remember 1474 Hrothgar, Oh knowing king, now When my danger is near, the warm words we uttered, And if your enemy should end my life Then be, oh generous prince, forever The father and protector of all whom I leave Behind me, here in your hands, my beloved Comrades left with no leader, their leader Dead.

This was quite a change from his first words in Herot. The brash young warrior learned from his experiences. Before, he was a seeker for glory. Now, he performed a grim duty, with concern for his men. And once again, he learned patience and perseverance, qualities which served him well when he assumed the Kingship of Geatland.

Then came the dragon, a greater evil than Grendel or his mother, a fabulous breather of fire. Beowulf remained confident, but greatly subdued. His life experiences behind him, he went forth to his doom.

l've never known fear; as a youth I fought 2511 In endless battles. I am old, now, But I will fight again, seek fame still, If the dragon hiding in his tower dares To face me.

I'd no use for the sword, no weapon, if this beast 2518 Could be killed without it, crushed to death Like Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning Hot, poison will pour from his tongue, I feel no shame, with shield and sword And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me I mean to stand, not run from his shooting Flames, stand still till fate decides Which of us wins. My heart is firm, My hands calm: I need no hot words.

Just as every candidate, representing the chief architect of Solomon's Temple, faces three ruffians, representing the temptations and trials of youth, manhood, and old age, Beowulf faced three monsters. He learned. He grew from the brash young warrior seeking fame and fortune, to a seasoned, calm, master of men and master of his own passions. He faced his doom, his wyrd and performed his duty. In his own words:

I've worn this crown 2732 For fifty winters: no neighboring people Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers Against us or talked of terror. My days Have gone by as fate willed, waiting For its word to be spoken, ruling as well As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths, Seeking no lying wars. I can leave This life happy; I can die, here Knowing the Lord of all life has never Watched me wash my sword in blood Born of my own family. Beloved Wiglaf, go, quickly, find The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life, But its gold is ours, too. Hurry, Bring me ancient silver, precious Jewels, shining armor and gems, Before I die. Death will be softer, Leaving life and this people I've ruled So long, if I look at this last of all prizes.

The Word

I have twice mentioned that Beowulf faced his doom, his fate, his "wyrd." The Old English "wyrd" means fate, chance, fortune, destiny, Providence, event, fact, or deed. Raffel consistently changes it to fate or doom in his translation, but Gummere leaves it intact. At the end of the feast prior to the battle with Grendel, we find the following

> That was the proudest of feasts; Flowed wine for the warriors. Wyrd they knew not, Destiny dire, and the doom to be seen By many an earl when eve should come

And before Beowulf set off to fight the dragon, we read:

Sat on the headland the hero king, Spake words of hail to his hearth-companions, Gold-friend of the Geats. All gloomy his soul, Wavering, death bound, Wyrd full nigh Stood ready to greet the gray-haired man, To seize his soul-hoard, sunder apart Life and body. Of course in Masonry, we frequent refer to a Word, whether it be one that is lost or a substitute. We are taught that the Word is an allegory, with divine implications. But could it be that it is an allegory to Fate or Destiny. And if so, what destiny was lost? What destiny was substituted. Could the lost wyrd have been the original destiny of the operative Mason to learn and teach the science, math, and geometry, used in the building of great cathedrals? Of course, this field of study was lost to the natural philosophers or scientists of the enlightenment. Could the substitute wyrd be the speculative Mason's destiny to build temples in the hearts of men, the adoption of true philosophy, the transition from operative to speculative Masonry? Your guess is as good as mine.

Historical Context⁴

The original poem *Beowulf* exists in a single manuscript, written somewhere between the 8th and early 11th centuries. The first known owner is the 16th century scholar, Lawrence Nowell. It was damaged by fire in 1731, and has since crumbled extensively. Significant effort has been made to recover illegible sections. However, it is unclear if this was the original, as some critics claim, or whether it was actually the transcription of a poem written much earlier. Some critics believe the themes and story are much older, formed through oral traditions and passed down to later ages by scops (Old English poets).

For the purpose of speculation, let us assume that it was available, in some form, in the early 10th century, around the time of King Athelstan, who ruled from 924 to 939 A.D. We have in our possession another document, the Regius (or Halliwell) Manuscript, written about 1390, which describes some interesting activities happening during Athelstan's reign.

In time of good King Athelstane's day; He made then both hall and even bower, And high temples of great honour, To disport him in both day and night, And to worship his God with all his might. This good lord loved this craft full well, And purposed to strengthen it every del, (part) For divers faults that in the craft he found; He sent about into the land After all the masons of the craft, To come to him full even straghfte, (straight) For to amend these defaults all By good counsel, if it might fall. An assembly then he could let make Of divers lords in their state, Dukes, earls, and barons also, Knights, squires and many mo, (more) And the great burgesses of that city, They were there all in their degree; There were there each one algate, (always) To ordain for these masons' estate, There they sought by their wit, How they might govern it; Fifteen articles they there sought, And fifteen points there they wrought,

Legend, or history if you prefer, documents this as the first official sanction of the Mason's right to congregate and to govern their own affairs.

It is known that Athelstan, and his grandfather, Alfred the Great, had contact with what I will call Viking bands. They fought; they intermarried, and, without doubt, traded traditions. Certain of the pagans were converted to Christianity, not always willingly. Certainly, the oral traditions of these Viking warriors would have entered into the lore of the English. And it is not unbelievable that these early Masons could have adopted aspects of this tale, and made them their own.

Of course, we do not know where or how the single extant manuscript of Beowulf was written or preserved. But it was first identified in the late 17th century. Masonic scholars also claim that the third degree, as we know it, did not exist when the First Grand Lodge was formed in 1717. But within 30 years, it was strongly present. Could it be that the early modern Masonic authors, working in the early 18th century, took a piece of ancient Masonic lore, expanded upon in a newly rediscovered document, and recast it as our third degree, substituting King Solomon's Temple for an ancient Danish mead-hall, thereby making it more familiar and meaningful to men of that day.

Of course, the manuscript was nearly destroyed by fire in 1731. The conspiracy theorists would instantly claim this was an attempt by those same authors to eliminate all trace of the True Source of the Hiramic Legend.

But perhaps we have it backwards. Perhaps the Hiramic Legend, as we know it, already existed in some form during the time of Athelstan. And perhaps the poem *Beowulf* was nothing more than an allegorical retelling of the story, the first (and previously unidentified) expose of Freemasonry.

In his article, "*Beowulf*, The Monsters and the Critics"⁵, J.R.R. Tolkien takes to task the critics who dismissed the poem as lacking in historical context, filled with unnecessary monsters. He argued against the critics who said the poem put the important historical references on the edge and the useless monsters in the center. He claimed that the monsters were critical, were, in fact, central to the entire poem, that they were the foil against which Beowulf proved himself and became a man, and that the growth of Beowulf was the entire point of the poem. I likewise contend that the ruffians in the third degree hold a similar place of significance. What they purposed, that they performed. And against their purpose, Hiram, though losing his life, overcame their evil purpose.

Vidar and Fenrir

Other Norse stories seems to have relevance to our Masonic traditions. We are told that the candidate wears a single shoe because of an ancient Israelitish custom, described in the book of Ruth. This explanation has always left me unsatisfied. I think a more appropriate parallel can be found in the story of Ragnaroek, the final battle between the Norse Gods and all the forces of evil. For years, Odin had been having his ravens bring scrap leather to Vidar, his son. The following tale is told in The Children of Odin⁶:

Odin, speaking to Vidar, told him,

"And I shall tell why my ravens fly to thee, carrying in their beaks scraps of leather. It is that thou mayst make for thyself a sandal; with that sandal on thou mayest put thy foot on the lower jaw of a mighty wolf and rend him. All the shoemakers of the earth throw on the ground scraps of the leather they use so that thou mayst be able to make the sandal for thy wolf-rending foot."

Later, during the final battle between the Gods and the forces of evil, the following was related.

By Fenrir the Wolf, Odin was slain. But the younger Gods were now advancing to the battle; and Vidar, the Silent God, came face to face with Fenrir. He laid his foot on the Wolf's lower jaw, that foot that had on the sandal made of all the scraps of leather that shoemakers had laid by for him, and with his hands he seized the upper jaw and tore his gullet. Thus died Fenrir, the fiercest of all the enemies of the Gods.

Somehow, the use of a single sandal to ensure that Good would triumph over evil in the last days, seems much more relevant than the explanation we are given. Odin had sacrificed an eye for wisdom. But due to his sacrifice, he saw much. Again from the Children of Odin:

> But he saw, too, why the sorrow and troubles had to fall, and he saw how they might be borne so that Gods and Men, by being noble in the days of sorrow and trouble, would leave in the world a force that one day, a day that was far off indeed, would destroy the evil that brought terror and sorrow and despair into the world.

If ever more Masonic sentiments were uttered, I know not where it could have been.

The Final Dirge

When I started this paper, my good friend and Brother, John Klaus, cautioned me with the following Latin words, "Si post hoc ergo propter hoc." (If after this, therefore because of this.) This was good advice. We should never read too much into our own speculations, because coincidence does not causality make. But sometimes, imagination supersedes reality, wishes really do come true, and what could be, is. With that in mind, let us close with one final scene from the great unknown poet. And as you hear it, remember in your mind's eye the concluding moments of the Third Degree.

In this scene, Beowulf was dead, slain by the fire-spewing dragon. Nothing remained but for his retainers to honor his life, honor his death, and build a monument to commemorate his accomplishments.

> The bearers brought 3140 Their beloved lord, their glorious king, And weeping laid him high on the wood. Then the warriors began to kindle that greatest Of funeral fires; smoke rose

Above the flames, black and thick, And while the wind blew and the fire Roared, they wept, and Beowulf's body Crumbled and was gone.

A gnarled old woman, hair wound 3150 Tight and gray on her head, groaned A song of misery, of infinite sadness And days of mourning, or fear and sorrow To come, slaughter and terror and captivity.

Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf 3156 Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors Could find it from far and wide; working For ten longs days they made his monument, Sealed his ashes in walls as straight And high as wise and willing hands Could raise them.

And then twelve of the bravest Geats3169Rode their horses around the tower,Telling their sorrow, telling storiesOf their dead king and his greatness, his glory,Praising him for heroic deeds, for a lifeAs noble as his name.

... And so Beowulf's followers 3178 Rode, mourning their beloved leader, Crying that no better king had ever Lived, no prince so mild, no man So open to his people, so deserving of praise.

Let us honor our heroes. Let us emulate them. As above, so below. As with Hiram, so with Beowulf.

Note and References

¹ Raffel, Burton, <u>Beowulf</u>. Penguin Books, 1963. All Beowulf quotations are from Raffel's translation unless otherwise noted.

² Grumerre, <u>Beowulf</u>. Prepared by Robin Kaysuya-Corbet from scanner output provided by Internet Wiretap, amazon.com Kindle edition, Incorrectly attributed as a translation by Niles and Heaney

³ Morris, William and Wyatt, A.J., <u>The Story of Beowulf</u>, Mobile Reference, amazon.com Kindle edition

⁴ <u>www.wikipedia.org</u>, Beowulf (epic poem article)

⁵ Tolkien, J.R.R., *Beowulf*, The Monsters and the Critics

⁶ Colum, Padraic, The Children of Odin, The Book of Northern Myths,

Appendix—A literal translation of the lines describing the "strong grip".

Geata fyredon Geat fire-make/do/perform

Thyderto thance,thaethe thritigesThither/whitheras skill/purpose/understandthat/until he 30 or 30foldMannamaegen-craeftonhismund-gripe

Man power/virtue-art/force/trade into/onto his handgrip

Heatho-rof haebbe Brave-top/roof get/have