CAPITOLO

# 3

# Heroes and Exiles

*"Each of us all must his end abide / in the ways of the world; so win who may / glory ere death!" — Beowulf, ll. 1386–1388 (translation by Francis B. Gummere, 1909)*

**OBIETTIVI**

1. I can describe the warrior society of the Anglo-Saxons — lord and companions, the mead hall, gifts, loyalty and revenge — and explain what the Sutton Hoo ship burial tells us about it.
2. I can recognise the alliterative line, the caesura, kennings, litotes and variation, and read a few lines of Old English aloud.
3. I can summarise the story of *Beowulf*, analyse two passages of it and explain the themes of the Old English elegies.
4. I can make deductions and speculate about the past, and express criticism, regret and missed possibilities, with past modals.
5. I can compare two photos while speculating about them, and write a summary of a narrative text.
6. I can compare Beowulf with Achilles and Aeneas, and find links between the Germanic peoples and Italy.

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A king is buried in a ship on a hill above a river. A monster walks out of the fog towards a hall full of sleeping warriors. A lonely sailor remembers cold nights at the front of a small boat. These three pictures come from the same world: the world of the Anglo-Saxon warriors and of the poets who sang about them. In this chapter you read the beginning of *Beowulf*, the longest poem in Old English, and the first lines of "The Seafarer", a poem of exile. You also visit Sutton Hoo, where archaeologists found a ship full of treasure, and you learn the grammar that archaeologists and readers of old poems use all the time: past modals, to say what *must have*, *might have* or *can't have* happened, and what *could* or *should have* happened but did not.

## 3.1 History and Society: The Warrior's World

In chapter 1 you followed the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes across the North Sea and saw their kingdoms take shape; in chapter 2 you met the Vikings and King Alfred. This section looks inside that society. What did a warrior owe his lord? What did a lord owe his men? And what did both of them believe about fate, death and God? Figura 3.1 places the main dates of this chapter on a timeline.

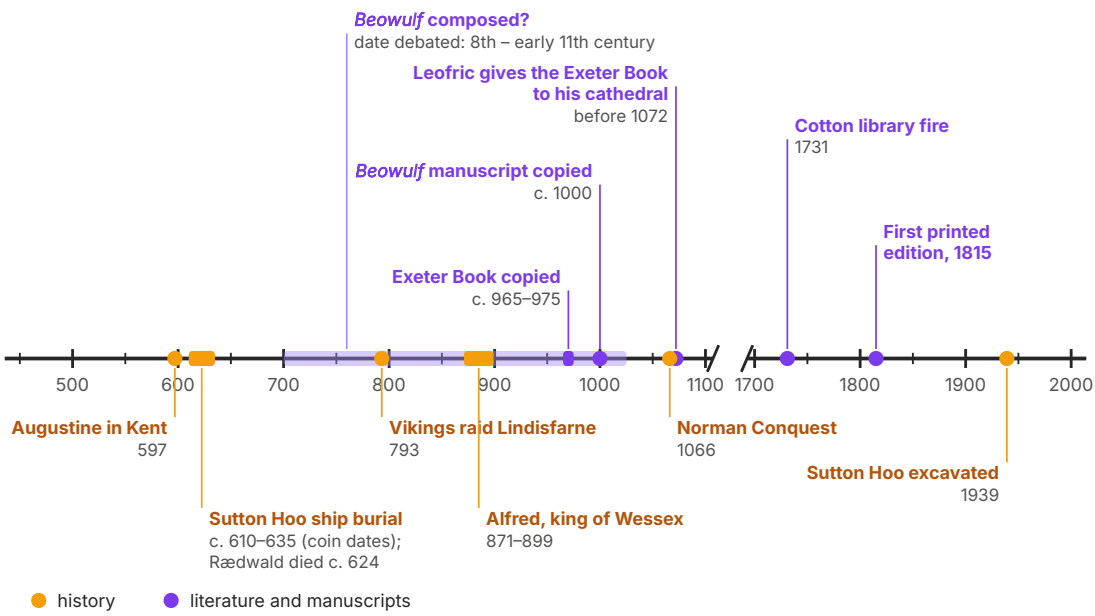



**Figura 3.1** Old English poetry and its manuscripts: a proportional timeline (ticks every 50 years). The axis is broken between 1100 and 1700 but keeps the same scale on both sides. Amber: history; violet: literature and manuscripts; bars show periods, dots single events. The light violet bar is the period in which, according to different scholars, *Beowulf* may have been composed.

### 3.1.1 Lord and companions

At the centre of the Anglo-Saxon warrior world was a simple bond between two people: a **lord** and his **companions**. Historians call this group of fighting men around a leader the **comitatus** (*comitato, seguito armato*), a Latin word that comes from the Roman historian Tacitus. In AD 98 Tacitus described the Germanic peoples of his time, long before the Anglo-Saxons reached Britain, and wrote: *Principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe* — "The chiefs fight for victory, the companions for their chief" (*Germania* 14, translation by the editors). He added that it was a lifelong disgrace for a companion to come back alive from a battle in which his chief had died.

Tacitus was not describing Anglo-Saxon England, but the same ideal appears again and again in Old English poetry, six or seven centuries later. The lord gives his men food, drink, weapons, horses and, above all, gold. In return the men give him **loyalty**: they fight for him, they protect him, and if he is killed they must avenge him or die at his side. In *Beowulf* a king is called *beaga bryttan*, the "giver of rings" (l. 35): gifts were not simple generosity, but a public contract.

Loyalty had a dark side: **revenge**. If a man was killed, his family had a duty to take revenge, and a killing could start a **feud** (*faida*) that lasted for generations. To stop the circle of violence,

Anglo-Saxon law fixed a price for every person's life, the **wergild** (*guidrigildo*, literally "man-payment"), which the killer's family could pay to the victim's family instead of blood.

### 3.1.2 The mead hall

The lord and his men lived, ate and slept in a great wooden building, the **mead hall** (*sala dell'idromele*), named after *mead*, a drink made from honey and water. The hall was much more than a house. It was the place where the king sat on his gift-seat and rewarded his men, where the *scop* you met in chapter 1 sang about old heroes to the music of a lyre, where guests were welcomed and where warriors made their boasts — public promises of what they would do in the next battle. In the poems the hall is light, warmth and order; outside are the dark, the moors and the monsters.

### 3.1.3 Fate and the new faith

The warriors who arrived in Britain were pagans. They worshipped gods such as Woden and Thunor, whose names survive in *Wednesday* and *Thursday*. They also believed in a force that decided what happened to every person: **wyrd** (*il fato, il destino*), the word that later became *weird*. In *Beowulf*, when Grendel has killed many of the king's men, the king says simply that *hie wyrd forsweop*, "fate swept them away" (l. 477, translation by the editors).

From 597, as you saw in chapter 1, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms slowly became Christian, but the old ideas did not disappear in a day. Bede tells a revealing story about Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who died around 624. Rædwald was baptised, but at home he went back to the old ways and kept, in the same temple, *altare … ad sacrificium Christi, et arulam ad uictimas daemoniorum*, "an altar for the sacrifice of Christ and a small altar for offerings to demons" (*Historia ecclesiastica* II.15, translation by the editors). The surviving poems, copied by Christian monks, show the same mixture: heroes trust in *wyrd* and, a few lines later, thank God.

### 3.1.4 Sutton Hoo: a king's ship under a mound

In 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, a self-taught archaeologist, Basil Brown, began to dig the largest of about twenty burial mounds on the estate of Edith Pretty at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, near the river Deben. After a few days of digging he found the first iron rivets. Under the mound lay the shape of a ship about 27 metres long. The wood had rotted away completely, but the sand kept its form, and the iron rivets that had held the planks together were still in their places, like a ghost of the ship (Figura 3.2).

In the middle of the ship was a wooden burial chamber, and in it one of the richest collections of objects ever found in England: a helmet with a face mask, a sword, a shield, gold and garnet fittings for clothes and weapons, a great gold buckle, a purse with 37 gold coins from different Frankish mints, drinking horns, a lyre, and a large silver dish made in the Eastern Roman Empire, with the stamps of the emperor Anastasius (491–518). This was a **ship burial**

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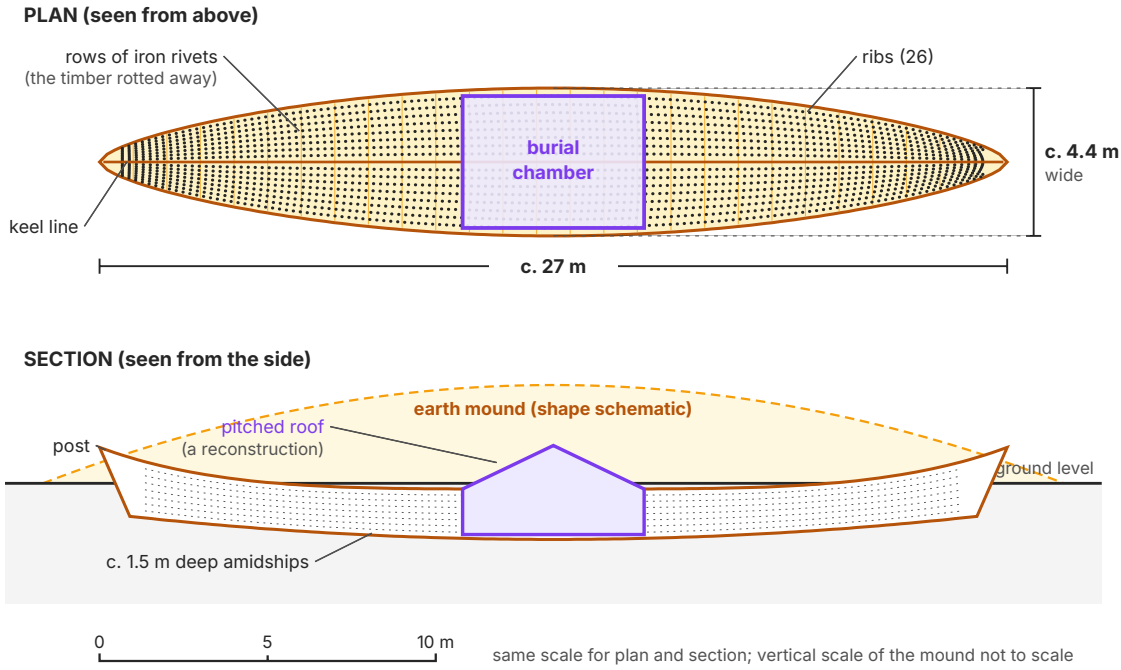



**Figura 3.2** The ship burial in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, schematic plan and section, drawn from the published measurements: a ship about 27 m long and 4.4 m wide, nine planks on each side, 26 ribs, with the burial chamber amidships. Rivet rows and the chamber are simplified; the shape of the roof and of the mound are reconstructions.

Who was buried there? No body was found. The sandy soil is very acidic and destroys bones, and chemical tests in the 1960s found traces of phosphate that suggest a body once lay in the chamber. The coins date the burial to about 610–635. Because Rædwald, the most powerful king of the East Angles, died around 624, many scholars think that the man in the ship was probably Rædwald — but this is an **attribution**, not a fact: no inscription names him. The objects are now in the British Museum, a gift of Edith Pretty to the nation.

Sutton Hoo makes the poems real: *Beowulf* begins with a king laid in a ship with treasure all around him, and describes helmets with boar figures and rings given by kings. After 1939 readers could see such objects in a museum case.

### 3.1.5 How the poems survive

Almost all the Old English poetry we have survives in only **four** large manuscripts, all copied in the late 10th or early 11th century: the **Exeter Book**, the **Vercelli Book**, the **Junius manuscript** and the ***Beowulf* manuscript**. Most poems exist in a single copy: if a manuscript had been lost, its poems would have disappeared with it.

The Exeter Book was given to Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter, who died in 1072: a list of his gifts mentions a large book in English, of poems on many subjects. It is still in the cathedral library, and it contains "The Wanderer", "The Seafarer" and nearly a hundred riddles. The *Beowulf* manuscript, copied by two scribes around the year 1000, is now in the British Library with the shelfmark **Cotton Vitellius A.xv**: the name comes from the library of Sir Robert Cotton, where it stood under a bust of the emperor Vitellius. In 1731 a fire burned part of the Cotton library. The *Beowulf* manuscript survived, but its edges were scorched and later crumbled, and some letters were lost. Luckily an Icelandic-Danish scholar, Grímur Thorkelin, had two copies made in 1787, one by a hired copyist and one in his own hand; they preserve letters that are now gone. The first printed edition, by Thorkelin, appeared in 1815.

> DA RICORDARE
>
> **Old English poetry survives in four main manuscripts** (late 10th – early 11th century): the Exeter Book (Exeter), the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Italy), the Junius manuscript (Oxford) and the *Beowulf* manuscript (London, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, damaged in the fire of 1731). Most poems survive in one copy only, and almost all have no title and no author: titles such as "The Seafarer" were given by modern editors.

## 3.2 Literature: Old English Poetry

Old English poems were composed for the ear before they were written down. A *scop* knew hundreds of traditional phrases and could build new lines from them while he sang. The written poems that we have keep the marks of this oral art: a strong rhythm, repeated formulas and, above all, alliteration.

### 3.2.1 The alliterative line

Old English verse does not rhyme and does not count syllables. It is built on **stress** and on **alliteration** (*allitterazione*): the repetition of the same first sound in stressed syllables close together. Each line is divided into two **half-lines** (*emistichi*) by a pause, the **caesura** (*cesura*), which modern editions print as a gap in the middle of the line. Each half-line has **two main stresses**. The first stress of the second half-line decides the alliterating sound, and one or both stresses

of the first half-line repeat it; the last stress of the line normally does not alliterate. All vowels alliterate with each other. Figura 3.3 shows the first four lines of *Beowulf* with their stresses.

| | a-verse (first half-line) | b-verse (second half-line) | alliterates on |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hwæt! we **Gar**-**De**na<br>GAR · DE | in **gear**-**da**gum,<br>GEAR · DA | **g** |
| 2 | **þeod**-**cyn**inga<br>ÞEOD · CYN | **þrym** ge**fru**non,<br>ÞRYM · FRU | **þ** |
| 3 | hu ða **æþel**i**ng**as<br>ÆÞ · ING | **el**len **fre**medon.<br>EL · FRE | **vowels (æ, e)** |
| 4 | Oft **Scyld Scef**ing<br>SCYLD · SCEF | **sceaþ**ena **þreat**um,<br>SCEAÞ · ÞREAT | **sc** |

caesura (pause)

**violet** = stressed syllable that alliterates · **black bold** = stressed, no alliteration · grey = unstressed
Each half-line has two main stresses (in capitals below each half-line). The first stress of the b-verse sets the sound; one or both stresses of the a-verse repeat it; the last stress of the line does not alliterate.

**Figura 3.3** The Old English alliterative line: *Beowulf*, ll. 1–4, divided into half-lines (Old English text of A. J. Wyatt's edition, 1894, length marks omitted). Stresses as metrists usually mark them; in *Gar-Dena*, *þeod-cyninga* and *æþelingas* the second stress falls on the second part of a compound or on a heavy suffix (*-ing-*).

The number of unstressed syllables is free, so lines can be short or long, but the four beats give a regular rhythm that is easy to remember and to perform. You will meet this form again in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (chapter 5), and alliteration is still everywhere in English: in proverbs (*through thick and thin*) and headlines.

### 3.2.2 Kennings, litotes and variation

Three devices give Old English poetry its special texture.

- A **kenning** (*kenning*) is a compound metaphor, often of two nouns, that replaces the ordinary word for a thing. The sea is *hronrad*, the "whale-road" (*Beowulf*, l. 10) or *swanrad*, the "swan-road" (l. 200); the body is *banhus*, the "bone-house" (l. 2508); a sword is *beadoleoma*, the "battle-light" (l. 1523). A kenning is a small riddle for the listener.
- **Litotes** (*litote*) is understatement by negation: saying "not small" to mean "huge". When Grendel attacks the hall in T2, the poet says that it was *not the first time* he had come. The effect is grim irony: the listeners know very well how many times he came before.
- **Variation** (*variazione*) is the habit of naming the same thing several times in different words, one after the other, without a linking word: in T2 the hall is "the wine-palace there, /

gold-hall of men". Each phrase adds a new side of the same object.

Litotes is common in Italian too (*non è male*, *non pochi*), and Homer's fixed epithets ("swift-footed Achilles") help a singer to compose, as formulas and variation do.

### 3.2.3 Beowulf: the epic of a Geat

*Beowulf* is an **epic** (*poema epico*): a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero who is important for a whole people. It has **3182 lines** and survives in one manuscript, copied around 1000. When it was composed is one of the great debates of English studies: scholars have proposed dates from the 8th to the early 11th century, and there is no agreement. The poem is in Old English, but it is **not set in England**: all its characters are Scandinavians, and England is never mentioned. The action takes place in Denmark and in the land of the **Geats**, in what is now southern Sweden (Figura 3.4).

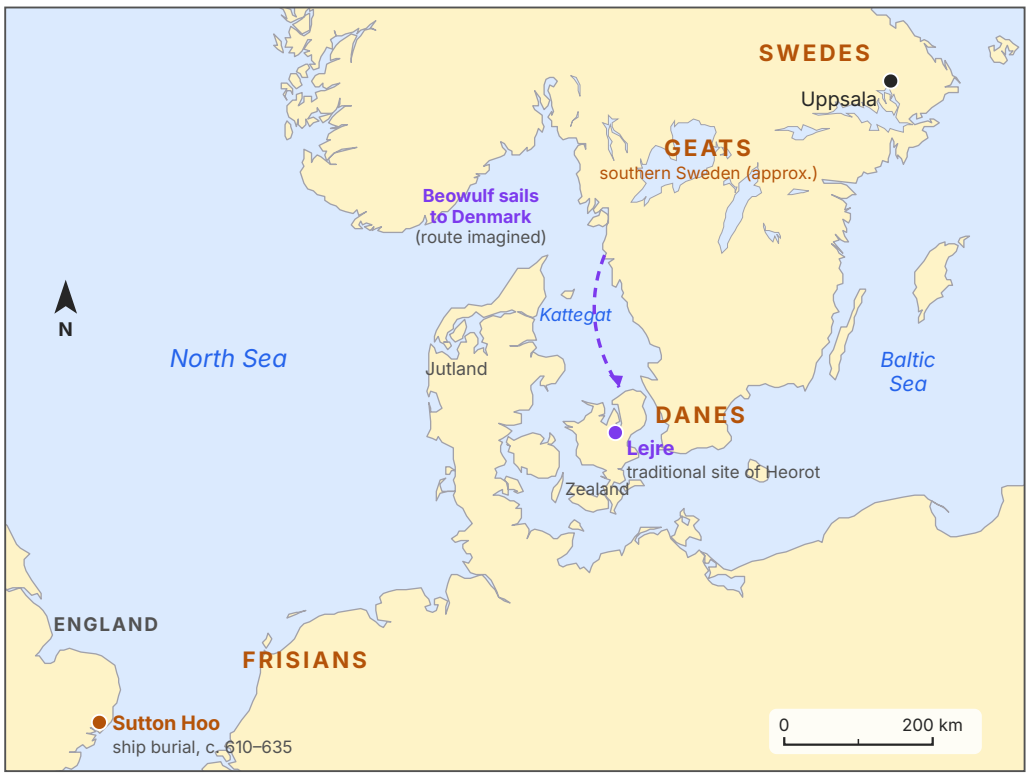



**Figura 3.4** The world of *Beowulf*. The positions of the peoples are approximate; Heorot is placed at Lejre on Zealand, its traditional location, where archaeologists have found the remains of large royal halls. The route of Beowulf's voyage is not described in the poem. Sutton Hoo is shown for comparison. Coastline from Natural Earth (modern).

The story falls into three fights against three monsters.

- **Grendel.** Hrothgar, king of the Danes, has built Heorot, the most splendid hall in the world. For twelve years a monster who lives in the moors, Grendel, a descendant of Cain, comes at night and kills the men who sleep there. A young Geat warrior, Beowulf, nephew of King Hygelac, sails to Denmark with fourteen companions. He waits for Grendel in the hall and fights him without a weapon; he tears off the monster's arm, and Grendel escapes to die.
- **Grendel's mother.** The next night Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son and kills Hrothgar's dearest counsellor. Beowulf follows her to her lake and dives in. Under the water his borrowed sword fails, but he finds an ancient giant's sword in her hall and kills her with it. He returns home with gifts.
- **The dragon.** Fifty years later Beowulf is an old king of the Geats. A thief steals a cup from a dragon's treasure, and the dragon burns the country. Beowulf fights it with a group of men, but they run away in fear, all except the young Wiglaf. Together they kill the dragon, but Beowulf is mortally wounded. The poem ends with his funeral pyre and a great barrow on a cliff by the sea, and with the fear that, without him, the Geats will be destroyed by their enemies.

The values of the *comitatus* are everywhere: Beowulf fights for glory and for his people, and the men who abandon him in the last fight are told that they have lost their honour. But the poem is also a meditation on time: every hall will burn, every king will die, and treasure is "useless to men". The Christian poet looks back at a pagan heroic past with admiration and with sadness.

> ● **ERRORE FREQUENTE**
>
> ✗ «*Beowulf* è un poema danese» / «Beowulf è un eroe danese.» → ✓ È un poema in **inglese antico**, ambientato in Scandinavia; Beowulf è un **Geata** (della Svezia meridionale) che va ad aiutare i Danesi.
>
> ✗ «*Beowulf* fu scritto intorno all'anno 1000.» → ✓ Il **manoscritto** è di circa il 1000; la data di **composizione** è discussa (tra l'VIII e l'inizio dell'XI secolo).
>
> ✗ «La poesia anglosassone è in rima.» → ✓ Si basa su accenti e **allitterazione**, non sulla rima e non sul numero delle sillabe.

### 3.2.4 The elegies: The Wanderer and The Seafarer

The Exeter Book contains a group of short poems that modern critics call **elegies** (*elegie*): first-person poems of loss and exile, in which a lonely speaker remembers a happier past and reflects on the shortness of earthly life. In "The Wanderer" (115 lines) a warrior who has lost his lord travels alone over the icy sea and dreams of the hall where he once received gifts. In "The Seafarer" (124 lines) a man describes the hardship of life at sea — cold, hunger, loneliness — and yet feels an irresistible desire to go back to it; in the second part the poem turns to God and to the eternal life that is worth more than any earthly glory.

Both poems contain the theme of **ubi sunt** (*ubi sunt*), from the Latin question *Ubi sunt…?*, "Where are…?": a list of questions about people and things that have disappeared. In "The Wanderer" the speaker asks: *Hwær cwom mearg? hwær cwom mago? hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?*, "Where has the horse gone? Where the young warrior? Where the giver of treasure?" (l. 92, text of J. W. Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, length marks omitted; translation by the editors). The same questions run through medieval Latin and European poetry.

**APPROFONDIMENTO**

**The monsters and the critics.** For most of the 19th century scholars read *Beowulf* mainly as a historical document: they wanted to find in it information about the early Germanic peoples, and they thought the monsters were a childish distraction from the "serious" parts. In 1936 J. R. R. Tolkien — the future author of *The Lord of the Rings*, then a professor of Old English at Oxford — gave a famous lecture, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics". He argued that the monsters are the centre of the poem, not a defect: they give a body to the enemies that every human being must face, and the hero's defeat by the dragon makes the poem a tragedy of human courage against death. The lecture changed the way the poem is read.

## 3.3 Texts: Beowulf and The Seafarer

The three texts of this section come from the two great kinds of Old English poetry: the heroic epic (T1, T2) and the elegy (T3). Read the Old English aloud before you read the translation: many words are closer to Modern English than they look.

LEARNING TO LEARN

**Reading a poem aloud: stresses, alliteration, half-lines.** Poems that were made for the voice make sense only when you hear them. Before you analyse a poem, prepare it for reading aloud, in pencil:

1. **Mark the half-lines.** Draw a vertical line at the caesura (in Old English editions it is the gap; in a translation, look for a comma or a natural pause).
2. **Find the stresses.** Say the line slowly and underline the syllables you hit hardest — normally two in each half-line in Old English, five in the lines of Chaucer and Shakespeare later this year.
3. **Circle the repeated sounds.** Which stressed syllables begin with the same sound?
4. **Read it twice**: once slowly, tapping the stresses on the desk, once at a natural speed, as if you were telling the story to an audience.

**Transfer.** The same method works for a Latin hexameter (mark the caesura, find the ictus) and for an Italian hendecasyllable (find the main stresses on the 4th, 6th or 8th syllable and the 10th). It also helps you to learn a text by heart: rhythm is a memory tool, which is exactly why oral poets used it.

### 3.3.1 T1 · Anonymous, *Beowulf* (ll. 1–11)

**Context.** The poem opens with a call to the audience and with the story of Scyld Scefing, the legendary founder of the Danish royal family: a child who arrived alone, as a foundling, and became a great king. Beowulf himself does not appear until line 194.

**Tabella 3.1** T1 — *Beowulf*, ll. 1–11: Old English text (A. J. Wyatt's edition, 1894, length marks omitted; the gap marks the caesura) and the translation by Francis B. Gummere (*The Oldest English Epic*, 1909; reprinted in the Harvard Classics, 1910)

| Old English | Translation by F. B. Gummere | |
|---|---|---|
| *Hwæt! we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum,* | Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings | |
| *þeod-cyninga þrym gefrunon,* | of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped, | |
| *hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.* | we have heard, and what honor the athelings won! | |
| *Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,* | Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes, | |
| *monegum mægþum meodo-setla ofteah.* | from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, | 5 |
| *Egsode eorl, syððan ærest wearð* | awing the earls. Since erst he lay | |
| *fea-sceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,* | friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him: | |
| *weox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þah,* | for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, | |
| *oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb-sittendra* | till before him the folk, both far and near, | |
| *ofer hron-rade hyran scolde,* | who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, | 10 |
| *gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning.* | gave him gifts: a good king he! | |

**Glosses.** *Hwæt!* a call for attention: "Listen!", "So!" · *Gar-Dena* of the Spear-Danes · *gear-dagum* days of old (Modern English *yore* + *days*) · *þrym* glory, power · *ellen* courage · *meodo-setla ofteah* took away the mead-benches (= conquered their halls) · *fea-sceaft funden* found destitute · *hron-rade* the whale-road, the sea · *gomban gyldan* pay tribute. In Gummere: *athelings* princes · *erst* once, at first · *waxed under welkin* grew up under the sky · *throve* prospered · *mandate* command.

### Analysis

**Form.** Every Old English line has two half-lines and four stresses, linked by alliteration (Figura 3.3). Gummere, writing in 1909, chose to imitate the form in Modern English: he keeps the line-by-line order and many alliterations (*praise … prowess … people*; *friendless … foundling … fate*; *waxed … welkin … wealth*; *gave … gifts … good*). To do so he uses words that were already archaic in his time (*athelings, erst, welkin*).

**Language.** Many Old English words are still recognisable: *we*, *in*, *oft*, *under*, *ofer* (over), *god cyning* (good king), *him*, *he*. Line 10 contains a famous **kenning**, *hron-rade*, "whale-road", which Gummere renders as *whale-path*.

**Themes.** The opening shows at once the values of the heroic world. A good king is a king who conquers, who frightens his enemies and who receives tribute from all his neighbours. Scyld's story — from foundling to king, and "fate repaid him" — also introduces *wyrd*. The half-line *þæt wæs god cyning*, "that was a good king", is a short, solemn judgement.

1. Who is speaking in line 1, and to whom? What does the word *we* tell you about the audience?
2. How did Scyld begin his life, and how did he end up? Find the words in Gummere's version.
3. What did the neighbouring peoples have to do for Scyld (ll. 9–11)? What does this tell you about power in the heroic world?
4. Line 11 ends with a judgement. Do you agree with the poet's idea of a "good king"? Why, or why not?

### 3.3.2 T2 · Anonymous, *Beowulf* (ll. 710–727)

**Context.** Beowulf and his companions are sleeping in Heorot, the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar. All the warriors are asleep except one: Beowulf, who is waiting. This is the first attack we see "live" in the poem.

**Tabella 3.2** T2 — *Beowulf*, ll. 710–727, in the translation by Francis B. Gummere (*The Oldest English Epic*, 1909; reprinted in the Harvard Classics, 1910). Gummere follows the original line by line

| | |
|---|---|
| Then from the moorland, by misty crags, | 710 |
| with God's wrath laden, Grendel came. | |
| The monster was minded of mankind now | |
| sundry to seize in the stately house. | |
| Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there, | |
| gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned, | 715 |
| flashing with fretwork. Not first time, this, | |
| that he the home of Hrothgar sought,— | |
| yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early, | |
| such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found! | |
| To the house the warrior walked apace, | 720 |
| parted from peace; the portal opened, | |
| though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had struck it, | |
| and baleful he burst in his blatant rage, | |
| the house's mouth. All hastily, then, | |
| o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on, | 725 |
| ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes | |
| fearful flashes, like flame to see. | |

**Glosses.** *crags* rocks, cliffs · *minded* intending · *sundry to seize* to seize one or another (of men) · *welkin* sky · *discerned* saw · *fretwork* decorated metal plates · *hall-thanes* warriors of the hall · *apace* fast · *parted from peace* without joy (Old English *dreamum bedæled*, "deprived of joys") · *baleful* evil, deadly · *blatant* loud · *fiend* enemy, devil · *ireful* angry.

### Analysis

**Form.** Look at how Gummere's alliteration falls on the key words: *moorland … misty*, *God's … Grendel*, *hardy heroes … hall-thanes*, *fearful flashes … flame*. The passage also shows **variation**: the hall is *the stately house*, *the wine-palace*, *gold-hall of men*, *the home of Hrothgar*, *the house*; its door is *the portal* and then *the house's mouth*. And it contains a clear **litotes**: *Not first time, this* — a dry understatement for twelve years of killings.

**Narrative technique.** The poet builds suspense like a film director. The camera follows Grendel from far away (*the moorland*) to the hall, then to the door, then onto the floor, and finally to his eyes. In the Old English, lines 702, 710 and 720 all begin his approach with the same verb, *com*, "came".

**Themes.** Grendel is the enemy of the hall and of everything it means: light, joy, community. He is *parted from peace*, an exile who carries *God's wrath*, and the light *like flame* in his eyes is the opposite of the warm light of the hall.

1. List all the places Grendel passes through, from the first line to the last. Why does the poet show his journey step by step?
2. Find all the words and phrases that name the hall. What different idea does each one add?
3. Explain the litotes in line 716 (*Not first time, this*). What do the listeners know that makes it ironic?
4. Light and darkness: find two images of light in the passage. Why is the light in Grendel's eyes frightening?

**ESEMPIO SVOLTO**

**Analysing two lines step by step.** Take lines 714–715: *Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there, / gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned*.

1. **Read for meaning.** Paraphrase: *He walked under the sky until he saw clearly the hall where wine was drunk, the golden hall of the warriors.* (*Gladly* here translates Old English *gearwost*, "most clearly": Gummere chose it for the alliteration.)
2. **Mark the half-lines and stresses.** *UN-der WEL-kin he WALKED, | till the WINE-pa-lace THERE* — four stresses, with the caesura after *walked*.
3. **Find the alliteration.** *welkin – walked – wine-palace*: the w sound links the two half-lines, as in the Old English (*Wod under wolcnum … winreced*).
4. **Find the devices.** *wine-palace* and *gold-hall of men* are two names for the same hall, one after the other: **variation**.
5. **Say what the device does.** The two names show the hall at its richest — wine, gold, men — at the moment when the monster is about to destroy its peace. The beauty of the hall makes the threat stronger.

Now write the five steps as a paragraph: *In lines 714–715 the poet…*

### 3.3.3 T3 · Anonymous, "The Seafarer" (ll. 1–8a)

**Context.** "The Seafarer" is copied in the Exeter Book. The speaker, an old sailor, begins by telling the truth about his life at sea. This translation is ours, close to the Old English; we print the first seven lines and the first half of the eighth, where the sentence ends.

**Tabella 3.3** T3 — "The Seafarer", ll. 1–8a (Old English text and translation by the editors). Old English text of F. Kluge, *Angelsächsisches Lesebuch* (3rd ed., 1902), from the Exeter Book; length marks omitted

| Old English | Modern English (translation by the editors) |
|---|---|
| *Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,* | I can make a true song about myself, |
| *siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum* | tell of my journeys, how in days of toil |
| *earfoðhwile oft þrowade,* | I often suffered times of hardship, |
| *bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,* | how I have endured bitter sorrow in my breast, |
| *gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,* | have come to know on a ship many halls of care, 5 |
| *atol yþa gewealc; þær mec oft bigeat* | the terrible rolling of the waves. There the anxious |
| *nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,* | night-watch often held me at the prow of the boat |
| *þonne he be clifum cnossað;* | when it crashed along beside the cliffs… |

**Glosses.** *soðgied* a true song (*soð* = true, as in *forsooth*) · *wrecan* to utter, to perform · *siþas* journeys · *geswincdagum* days of toil · *breostceare* care in the breast · *ceole* ship (Modern English *keel*) · *cearselda* of halls of care, a kenning for the ship or the hard places of the sea · *yþa gewealc* rolling of the waves · *nihtwaco* night-watch · *nacan stefnan* the prow (stem) of the boat · *cnossað* dashes, crashes.

### Analysis

**Form.** The alliteration links the half-lines as in *Beowulf*: *sylfum – soðgied* (l. 1), *siþas secgan – geswincdagum* (l. 2: the stress in *geswincdagum* falls on *-swinc-*), *bitre breostceare – gebiden* (l. 4), *nearo nihtwaco – nacan* (l. 7). Line 5 contains a kenning, *cearselda*, "halls of care": a ship should be a home, but for this sailor it is a hall of sorrow — the opposite of the warm mead hall.

**Voice.** Unlike *Beowulf*, this is a **first-person** poem: *ic*, "I", appears in the first two lines. The speaker announces a *true* song: not the story of a famous hero, but his own experience of pain.

**Themes.** The sea is hostile — cold, dark, dangerous — and the sailor suffers both in his body and in his *breast*. Later in the poem he longs to go back to sea, and the voyage becomes a symbol of life as an exile on earth; scholars still debate whether to read it as a real sailor's experience, a Christian allegory, or both.

1. Which words in the Old English are still close to Modern English? Find at least four (think of *me, oft, bitter*…).
2. What has the speaker suffered? Make a list of the physical and the emotional pains.
3. Compare the sea in T1 (*whale-path*) and in T3. Is it the same sea?
4. Why do you think the speaker insists that his song is "true"?

## 3.4 Language: Past Modals — Deduction, Speculation and Criticism

Archaeologists and literary scholars spend much of their time reasoning about the past from incomplete evidence: *The ship **must have been** dragged up from the river. The body **may have dissolved** in the acid soil. The poet **can't have seen** Sutton Hoo.* In English 2 you met *must have, might have* and *can't have* (Unit 6) and *should have* (Unit 11). This section completes the system: all the past modals, their continuous and passive forms, *could have* for possibilities that did not happen, and *ought to have*.

### 3.4.1 Deduction and speculation about the past

The form is always the same: **modal + *have* + past participle**. *Have* never changes, and the modal shows how sure you are (Figura 3.5).

**Tabella 3.4** Past modals of deduction and speculation

| Modal + *have* + past participle | How sure? | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **must have** | I'm sure it happened (logical conclusion). | *Whoever was buried here **must have been** very rich.* |
| **may / might / could have** | Perhaps it happened. | *The man in the ship **may have been** Rædwald.* |
| **may not / might not have** | Perhaps it didn't happen. | *The poet **might not have known** the real Heorot.* |
| **can't / couldn't have** | I'm sure it didn't happen (it's impossible). | *Grendel **can't have opened** the door with a key.* |

Two forms are new this year.

- **Continuous: modal + *have been* + *-ing***, for an action in progress at a past moment, or for a long activity: *The guards **must have been sleeping** when Grendel came in. The scribe **might have been working** by candlelight. Beowulf **can't have been sleeping**: he was waiting.*
- **Passive: modal + *have been* + past participle**, when the subject is the thing that receives the action: *The ship **must have been dragged** up the hill. The treasure **might have been buried** as a gift for the next world. The Beowulf manuscript **could have been destroyed** in 1731.*

*Couldn't have* works like *can't have* in deductions: *He **couldn't have seen** the dragon — he was in Denmark.* But affirmative *could have* has two meanings: a **possibility** that we are not sure about (*The body **could have dissolved**.* = perhaps it dissolved) or a possibility that existed but **did not happen** (see below). The context tells you which.

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

**Modali di deduzione al passato (forma completa).** Modale + *have* + participio passato: *must have* = *deve aver...* (sicuramente); *may / might / could have* = *può aver... / forse ha...*; *can't / couldn't have* = *non può aver...* (sicuramente no). Forma progressiva: *must have been sleeping* = *dovevano star dormendo*. Passiva: *must have been buried* = *deve essere stato sepolto*.

**Confronto con l'italiano.** In italiano il modale si coniuga e cambia tempo (*dev'essere stato, poteva essere*); spesso si usa anche il futuro anteriore (*sarà stato Rædwald = it must have been / it may have been Rædwald*). In inglese il modale resta sempre uguale e il passato si esprime solo con *have* + participio.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ *He mustn't have seen the dragon.* → ✓ *He* ***can't have*** *seen the dragon.* (la deduzione negativa usa *can't / couldn't*)

✗ *The ship must be dragged up the hill in 625.* → ✓ *The ship* ***must have been dragged****...* (passato + passivo: *have been* + participio)

✗ *When Grendel came in, they must sleep.* → ✓ *When Grendel came in, they* ***must have been sleeping****.* (deduzione su un'azione in corso nel passato)

✗ *The scribe must had made a mistake.* → ✓ *The scribe must* ***have made*** *a mistake.* (*have* non cambia mai)

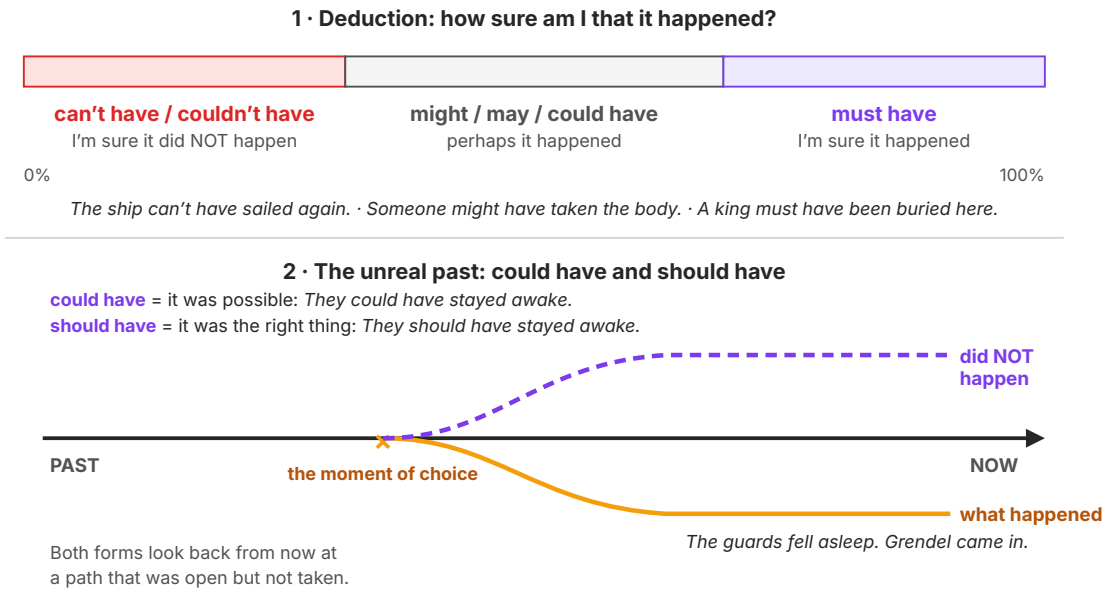



**Figura 3.5** Past modals. Above: how sure we are that something happened. Below: *could have* and *should have* look back at a possibility that was open but did not happen (violet dashed line), while the real past (amber) went another way.

### 3.4.2 *could have*: possibilities that did not happen

We often use ***could have* + past participle** for something that was **possible** in the past but **did not happen**: *If the fire of 1731 had been bigger, we* ***could have lost*** Beowulf *for ever. Beowulf* ***could have used*** *a sword against Grendel, but he chose to fight with his hands.* The same structure is used for criticism and annoyance (*You* ***could have told*** *me!* = you didn't, and you should have) and for relief (*It* ***could have been*** *worse.*). With comparatives it often expresses a judgement: *The ending* ***couldn't have been*** *sadder.*

### 3.4.3 Criticism and regret: *should have, ought to have*

***Should have* + past participle** (English 2, Unit 11) says that something was the right thing to do but did not happen; ***shouldn't have*** says that something was wrong but happened: *Beowulf's men* ***should have stayed*** *with their king. They* ***shouldn't have run*** *away.* With *I* or *we* it expresses **regret**, with other people it expresses **criticism**.

***Ought to have* + past participle** means the same as *should have*, but it is more formal and less common in conversation: *The guards* ***ought to have kept*** *watch.* The negative is *ought not to have* (*oughtn't to have* is rare): *The thief* ***ought not to have taken*** *the cup.*

*Should have* can also express an **expectation** about something that probably happened, or did not happen as planned: *The parcel* ***should have arrived*** *by now* (= I expected it to arrive; it probably has, or it is strangely late).

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

***Could have* e *should / ought to have* + participio passato.** *Could have done* = *avrebbe potuto fare* (ma non l'ha fatto): *He could have used a sword* = *Avrebbe potuto usare una spada*. *Should have / ought to have done* = *avrebbe dovuto fare* (critica o rimpianto): *They should have stayed* = *Sarebbero dovuti restare*. *Ought to have* è più formale; il negativo è *ought not to have*.

**Confronto con l'italiano.** L'italiano usa il condizionale passato del verbo modale (*avrei potuto*, *avrei dovuto*) seguito dall'infinito presente; l'inglese tiene fermo il modale e mette al passato l'infinito: *could* ***have done***, *should* ***have done***. Attenzione: *poteva farlo* può voler dire due cose: *he was able to do it* (capacità reale, cap. 2) o *he could have done it* (possibilità non realizzata).

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ *He could use a sword, but he didn't.* → ✓ *He* ***could have used*** *a sword, but he didn't.* (possibilità non realizzata)

✗ *They had to stay with their king, but they ran away.* (= erano obbligati, ed è un fatto) → ✓ *They* ***should have stayed***... (critica: avrebbero dovuto)

✗ *You ought have told me.* / ✗ *You should to have told me.* → ✓ *You* ***ought to have*** *told me.* / ✓ *You* ***should have*** *told me.* (*ought* vuole *to*, *should* no)

**IN SINTESI**

**Tabella 3.5** Past modals at a glance

| Meaning | Form | Example |
|---|---|---|
| sure it happened | *must have done* | *It must have belonged to a king.* |
| perhaps it happened / didn't happen | *may / might / could have done · may not / might not have done* | *It might have been Rædwald.* |
| sure it didn't happen | *can't / couldn't have done* | *He can't have known Sutton Hoo.* |
| action in progress | *must / might have been doing* | *They must have been sleeping.* |
| passive | *must / might / can't have been done* | *It must have been buried in about 625.* |
| possible, but it didn't happen | *could have done* | *We could have lost the poem.* |
| right, but it didn't happen / wrong, but it happened | *should / ought to have done · shouldn't / ought not to have done* | *They should have stayed. They shouldn't have run.* |

## 3.5 Skills: Speculating about the Past

### 3.5.1 Vocabulary: heroes and monsters

Tabella 3.6 collects the words you need to talk about epic stories, from *Beowulf* to today's fantasy films and games.

**Tabella 3.6** Heroes and monsters: key words

| Word | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **courage** (n.) · **courageous** (adj.) | the ability to do something dangerous although you are afraid | *Beowulf showed great courage when he dived into the lake.* |
| **loyalty** (n.) · **loyal** (adj.) | being faithful to a person or a group | *Only Wiglaf remained loyal to his king.* |
| **betrayal** (n.) · **betray** (v.) | breaking the trust of someone who depends on you | *For the poet, running away was a betrayal.* |
| **revenge** (n.) · **take revenge (on)** | harm done to someone because they harmed you | *Grendel's mother came to take revenge for her son.* |
| **fate** (n.) | a power that decides what will happen | *The warriors believed that nobody could escape fate.* |
| **glory** (n.) · **glorious** (adj.) | great fame and honour won by great deeds | *A hero fought for glory, not for money.* |
| **slay** (v., *slew, slain*; literary) | to kill violently, especially in a battle | *Beowulf slew the monster with a giant's sword.* |
| **boast** (v. / n.) | to talk proudly about what you have done or will do | *Before the fight, the warriors boasted in the hall.* |
| **feast** (n. / v.) | a large, special meal for many people | *After the victory, Hrothgar gave a feast.* |
| **treasure** (n.) | a collection of gold, silver and precious objects | *The dragon guarded its treasure for centuries.* |

In Modern English *boast* is usually negative (*Stop boasting!*), but in the heroic world a boast was a serious public promise. *Slay* is rare in everyday English; you meet it in literature, in fantasy and in newspaper headlines (*Dragon-slayer!*).

**Collocations with *promise* and *tribute*.** You **make** a promise (✗ *do a promise*), you **keep** it if you do what you said, you **break** it if you don't: *Beowulf made a promise to Hrothgar, and he kept it.* To **pay tribute to** someone has two meanings: in history, to pay money or goods to a stronger king (*the neighbouring peoples paid tribute to Scyld*); today, more often, to praise someone publicly, especially after their death (*The whole school paid tribute to the old teacher.*).

## 3.5.2 Reading: Treasure from a Ghost Ship

**Before you read.** Look at Figura 3.2. If you visited a museum with these objects, what would you want to know? Make three questions, then read Callum's post on the Literature Trail blog and see if he answers them. (testo della redazione)

**Literature Trail blog · Post 4: Treasure from a Ghost Ship** · by Callum

Last Saturday Sam and I took the early train to London to see the Sutton Hoo treasure at the British Museum. Mrs Hill had told us to look for "the objects behind the poem", and Sam had brought a copy of *Beowulf* in his rucksack, just in case. Everything I describe below is in Room 41, so if you ever go, you know where to run.

The first thing you see is the helmet. It was found in hundreds of rusty pieces, and the museum experts must have spent months, maybe years, putting it back together. Next to it there is a modern copy, shiny and complete: a face of metal, with eyebrows, a nose and a moustache, decorated with tiny figures. Sam said that whoever wore it must have looked like a god. I said he might have looked like a very uncomfortable god, because it is heavy.

Then there is the gold. The great gold buckle is bigger than my hand, and the shoulder clasps are covered in red garnets, cut so thin that the light passes through them. The craftsmen can't have had magnifying glasses, but the work is perfect. There is also a purse lid and, near it, the coins that were found in the purse — thirty-seven gold coins, each one from a different mint in the Frankish kingdoms. Nobody knows why they were collected like that. They might have been payment for the forty rowers of a ghost crew. That is just one theory, and the label says so.

The strangest thing is what is missing. There was no body in the ship. A guide told us that the acid sand must have dissolved the bones, and that chemical tests found traces that a body had been there. The king — if he was a king — may have been Rædwald, who died around 624, but there is no name anywhere. I find that amazing: we know the coins, the silver dish from Constantinople, even the lyre, but not the man.

On the train home Sam read aloud the funeral of Scyld from the beginning of *Beowulf*, with the treasure laid on the dead king's chest. It sounded like a description of what we had just seen. Of course the poet can't have seen Sutton Hoo — it was under the earth for more than thirteen centuries — but he could have seen burials like it, or heard songs about them.

My only regret: I should have taken more photos. I was too busy staring. So, Giulia, Marta: when you come in the spring, you ought to see it. And bring a good camera.

**Comprehension.**

1. Why did Sam take a copy of *Beowulf* to London?
2. What is the difference between the original helmet and the modern copy?
3. Why does Callum say that the craftsmen "can't have had magnifying glasses"? What is he admiring?
4. What is unusual about the 37 coins? Is the "ghost crew" theory a fact?
5. Why does Callum think that the poet "can't have seen Sutton Hoo"? What does he think was possible?
6. What does Callum regret, and what does he advise Giulia and Marta to do?

**Language in context.** Underline every past modal in the post and decide what each one expresses: a certain deduction (*must have spent*), a possibility (*might have looked*, *might have been*, *may*

*have been*, *could have seen*), an impossibility (*can't have had*, *can't have seen*), a regret (*should have taken*) or advice (*ought to see*).

### 3.5.3 Speaking: comparing two photos

In many B2 speaking tests you compare two photos for about a minute, then speculate about them. A good answer compares rather than describes: what the photos have in common, what is different, what might have happened.

**Tabella 3.7** Useful language — comparing two photos and speculating

| Function | Phrases |
|---|---|
| Introducing | *Both photos show… · In the first photo… whereas in the second… · The main difference is that…* |
| Comparing | *…is similar to… · …is much older / more decorated than… · Unlike the first photo, the second…* |
| Speculating now | *It looks as if… · It might be… · It must be… · It can't be…* |
| Speculating about the past | *It must have been used for… · Someone might have worn it… · It can't have been easy to…* |
| Giving your opinion | *I'd say that… · If I had to choose, I'd… · What strikes me most is…* |

1. **Task 1 (two objects).** Photo A: an ancient iron helmet with a face mask, in a glass case, lit by a spotlight. Photo B: a modern firefighter's helmet with a scratched visor, hanging on a hook in a fire station. Compare the photos and say what the two helmets might have been used for, and what the people who wore them might have had in common (about one minute). Your partner then answers: *Which helmet would you rather see in a museum, and why?*
2. **Task 2 (two places).** Photo A: grassy burial mounds in a field at sunset, with a few visitors walking between them. Photo B: a reconstructed wooden hall in an open-air museum, with smoke coming out of the roof and people in medieval clothes at the door. Compare the photos and speculate: what might have happened in these places 1400 years ago? Which place tells you more about the past?

### 3.5.4 Writing: a summary

A **summary** (*riassunto*) reports the main events or ideas of a text in a much shorter form. A summary of a narrative text:

- keeps only the **main events**, in chronological order, and leaves out descriptions, dialogue and minor details;
- uses the **present simple** (the "literary present"): *Grendel enters the hall…*;
- uses **your own words**, not the words of the text (a short quotation at most);

- is **objective**: no opinions, no comments, no "I think";
- uses linkers of time and sequence: *first, then, when, as soon as, after that, finally*.

**Tabella 3.8** Model text — a summary of Beowulf's fight with Grendel (*Beowulf*, ll. 702–836), 133 words

| |
|---|
| One night Grendel leaves the moors and comes to Heorot, where Beowulf and his men are sleeping. He breaks open the door, seizes one of the sleeping warriors and eats him. Then he reaches for Beowulf, who has been watching him, and the hero grips his arm. Grendel immediately understands that he has never met a stronger man and tries to escape. The two fight so violently that the hall almost collapses. Beowulf's companions attack the monster with their swords, but no blade can cut him. Finally Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm at the shoulder, and the mortally wounded monster runs back to his home in the fens to die. In the morning the Danes celebrate, and Beowulf hangs the arm under the roof of the hall as a sign of his victory. |

**ESEMPIO SVOLTO**

**How the summary is built.** (1) **Setting in one sentence**: who, where, when (*One night … Heorot … sleeping*). (2) **Events in order**, one or two per sentence, with linkers of time (*Then, Finally, In the morning*). (3) **The turning point** is kept (*he has never met a stronger man*), the long speeches and descriptions are cut. (4) **The result** closes the summary (*the arm … as a sign of his victory*). The verbs are all in the present simple, and there are no comments: the summary never says that the fight is exciting or that Beowulf is brave — it shows what he does.

**Checklist.** Is the length right (120–150 words)? Are the events in the right order? Have you used the present simple consistently? Have you used your own words? Have you removed all opinions and minor details? Have you checked spelling and names (*Grendel, Heorot, Hrothgar*)?

**Task.** Using the plot outline in the Literature section of this chapter, write a summary of Beowulf's last fight, against the dragon (120–150 words).

## 3.6 Connections: Three Epic Heroes

### 3.6.1 Beowulf, Achilles, Aeneas

In your Italian course you have read the two great epics of the ancient world in translation, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, and this year you are reading Homer in Greek as well. Their openings, in the classic Italian versions, announce their heroes and their subjects at once:

*Cantami, o Diva, del Pelíde Achille / L'ira funesta che infiniti addusse / Lutti agli Achei* — "Sing to me, goddess, of the deadly anger of Achilles, son of Peleus, which brought endless grief to the Greeks" (Homer, *Iliad* I 1–3, translated by Vincenzo Monti, 1810).

*L'armi canto e 'l valor del grand'eroe / Che pria da Troia, per destino, ai liti / D'Italia e di Lavinio errando venne* — "I sing of arms and of the courage of the great hero who first came, wandering, by fate, from Troy to the shores of Italy and Lavinium" (Virgil, *Aeneid* I 1–3, translated by Annibal Caro, 1581; English glosses by the editors).

Compare them with the opening of *Beowulf* in T1. All three poems start by addressing an audience or a Muse and by naming a heroic past. But their heroes fight for different things (Tabella 3.9).

**Tabella 3.9** Three epic heroes compared

| | Achilles (*Iliad*) | Aeneas (*Aeneid*) | Beowulf |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What he fights for** | personal honour and glory; then revenge for his friend Patroclus | his duty (*pietas*) to the gods, his father and his people; a new home in Italy | glory, loyalty to his lord, the protection of other peoples and, as a king, of his own |
| **His enemies** | Hector and the Trojans; his conflict with Agamemnon | Juno's hostility; Turnus and the Latins | three monsters |
| **Fate** | he knows he will die young if he stays at Troy, and chooses glory | fate leads him to Italy: *per destino* | *wyrd* decides, but courage can help: "so win who may / glory ere death!" |
| **How the poem ends** | with the funeral of Hector; Achilles' death is not told | with the death of Turnus | with the hero's own death and funeral |

Achilles is a hero of the self: his anger and his honour move the whole plot. Aeneas is a hero of duty, often sad, who sacrifices his own desires for a future he will never see. Beowulf is closer to Aeneas than to Achilles: he risks his life for others, first for the Danes, then for his own people. But his world has no promised future like Rome: the poem ends with a funeral and with the fear of what will come next. Of the three heroes, only Beowulf dies inside his own poem.

### 3.6.2 Another Germanic people in Italy: the Lombards

While the Angles and the Saxons were settling in Britain, another Germanic people moved south: the **Lombards** (*Longobardi*), who entered Italy in 568 and ruled much of it until 774, with Pavia as their capital. They gave their name to Lombardy. Their history was written at the end of the 8th century by Paul the Deacon (Paolo Diacono), a Lombard monk, in Latin, in the *Historia Langobardorum* — a work that you can compare with Bede's *History*: in both, a churchman tells the story of a Germanic people who had become Christian.

The Lombards also left words in Italian, among them *panca*, *guancia* and *schiena*. *Panca* is a Germanic cousin of English *bench*: the same word that appears in the mead-benches of T1 and in the *benc* of the Old English hall. And Italy has one more link with Old English: one of the four great manuscripts of Old English poetry, the **Vercelli Book**, is kept in the cathedral library of Vercelli, in Piedmont. Nobody knows exactly how it got there; it may have been left by an English traveller on the road to Rome, which passed through Vercelli.

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**Archaeology and chemistry: the ghost ship.** At Sutton Hoo no wood survived, yet the archaeologists of 1939 were able to draw the whole ship (Figura 3.2). How? Iron rusts but does not disappear: the rivets that held the overlapping planks together stayed in the sand exactly where they had been, in long rows. Wood decays, but as it rots it stains the sand a darker colour, so the excavators could see the lines of the planks and of the ribs. By recording the position of every rivet, they reconstructed the shape and the size of the ship.

The same chemistry explains the missing body: acidic sand dissolves bone, but a body leaves phosphates, as the tests of the 1960s showed. Archaeology is often a science of indirect evidence: we see what is missing through the traces it leaves. **Maths link:** the ship was about 27 m long and 4.4 m wide: $27 \div 4.4 \approx 6$, so it was about six times longer than it was wide. Measure a rowing boat, a canoe or a modern ferry in a photo with a scale: are they longer or shorter in proportion?

1. Which hero do you admire most: Achilles, Aeneas or Beowulf? Give two reasons, with examples from the poems.
2. Are there “heroes” today who fight for others, like Beowulf? Think of real people or of characters in films, series and games.
3. Look up an Italian word of Lombard origin in a good dictionary (the dictionary will say *dal longobardo*). Does it have an English cousin?

## SINTESI

- Anglo-Saxon warrior society was built on the bond between a lord and his companions (the *comitatus*): the lord gave gifts, the men gave loyalty and their lives.
- Revenge and feuds were a duty; the *wergild* was a price for a life, paid to stop the violence.
- The mead hall was the centre of social life: feasts, gifts, songs and boasts; in the poems it stands for light and order against the dark.
- Pagan ideas such as *wyrd* (fate) survived alongside Christianity: Bede says that Rædwald had an altar for Christ and one for the old gods in the same temple.
- The ship burial at Sutton Hoo (excavated 1939; about 610–635) held a ship about 27 m long and rich treasure; the man buried there was probably, but not certainly, Rædwald.
- Old English poetry survives mostly in four manuscripts of about 975–1025; the *Beowulf* manuscript (Cotton Vitellius A.xv) was damaged in the fire of 1731.
- The Old English line has two half-lines divided by a caesura, four main stresses and alliteration linking the halves; it does not rhyme.
- Typical devices are the kenning (*whale-road* = sea), litotes (*not the first time*) and variation (several names for the same thing).
- *Beowulf* (3182 lines) is an epic in Old English set in Scandinavia; Beowulf, a Geat, fights Grendel, Grendel's mother and, as an old king, a dragon, and dies.
- The elegies "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" speak of exile, loss and the transience of the world, with the *ubi sunt* theme.
- Past modals: *must / may / might / could / can't / couldn't have done* for deductions; *must have been doing* and *must have been done* for continuous and passive forms.
- *Could have done* = possible but it didn't happen; *should / ought to have done* = criticism or regret.

## ESERCIZI

### History and Literature

1. ● Where is *Beowulf* set?
   - **A.** In Anglo-Saxon England
   - **B.** In Denmark and in the land of the Geats
   - **C.** In Iceland and Norway
   - **D.** In Roman Britain

2. ● What is Cotton Vitellius A.xv?
   **A.** The name of the ship at Sutton Hoo
   **B.** The bishop who gave a book to Exeter Cathedral
   **C.** The manuscript that contains *Beowulf*
   **D.** A Roman emperor who conquered Britain

3. ●● Which statement about the Sutton Hoo ship burial is correct?
   **A.** An inscription shows that Rædwald was buried there.
   **B.** The well-preserved wooden ship is now in the British Museum.
   **C.** The body and the bones were found in the chamber.
   **D.** The coins suggest a date of about 610–635.

4. ●● True or false? Correct the false statements. a Tacitus described the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. b A *wergild* was paid to stop a feud. c The Exeter Book is still in Exeter. d Old English poetry is based on rhyme. e Grendel's mother kills Beowulf. f The Vercelli Book is in Italy.

5. ● Match the terms (1–6) with the definitions (a–f). 1 kenning · 2 litotes · 3 caesura · 4 variation · 5 *comitatus* · 6 *ubi sunt* · a the pause between two half-lines · b a lord and the warriors who serve him · c a compound metaphor that replaces a noun · d a list of questions about things that have disappeared · e naming the same thing several times in different words · f understatement by negation

6. ●● Complete the timeline with the dates in the box: *c. 1000 · 1731 · c. 624 · 1815 · 1939 · before 1072*. a Rædwald dies · b the *Beowulf* manuscript is copied · c Leofric gives the Exeter Book to his cathedral · d the Cotton library fire · e the first printed edition of *Beowulf* · f Sutton Hoo is excavated.

7. ●●● Short answer (40–60 words). How can the Sutton Hoo ship burial help us to read *Beowulf*? Give two examples.

### Text Analysis

8. ● T1. Answer the questions. a Who was Scyld Scefing at the beginning of his life? b What did the neighbouring peoples have to do for him? c Which half-line contains the poet's final judgement on him?

9. ●● T1 and T2. Find in Gummere's translations: a a kenning for the sea · b an example of litotes · c an example of variation (two names for the same thing) · d three words that alliterate in the same line of T2.

10. ●● Copy line 4 of T1 in Old English (*Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum*). Mark the caesura with a vertical line, write the four stressed syllables in capitals and circle the alliterating ones. Then do the same with line 7 of T3 (*nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan*).

11. ●● Paraphrase T2, lines 720–727 (*To the house the warrior walked apace … like flame to see*) in simple Modern English prose (40–60 words).

12. ●● T3. Answer the questions. a What kind of song does the speaker promise in line 1? b Where was he during the night-watch? c Find a kenning and explain it. d Is the speaker a hero like Beowulf? Explain.

13. ●●● Compare T2 and T3. In both texts someone is outside, in the dark and the cold. Write a paragraph (80–100 words) on the image of the hall in T2 and of the sea in T3.

14. ●●● Write a PEE paragraph (Point, Evidence, Explanation; 80–100 words) on this point: *In T2 the poet builds suspense as Grendel approaches the hall.*

### Language

15. ● Choose the correct option. a The chamber **must / can't** have belonged to a poor farmer: it was full of gold. b The poet **might / must** have known about ship burials, but we are not sure. c Look at those burnt pages! They **must / can't** have been damaged by fire. d He **can't / mustn't** have seen Sutton Hoo: it was underground. e The coins **may / should** have been a payment for the rowers — that's one theory.

16. ● Complete with *must have, might have* or *can't have* and the verb in brackets. a The helmet is incredibly detailed. The craftsman ___ (work) on it for months. b Sam's phone is off. He ___ (forget) to charge it — or perhaps he's in a museum. c Callum ___ (see) the whole gallery in ten minutes: there are hundreds of objects. d Giulia knows all the kennings by heart. She ___ (study) the chapter very carefully. e I'm not sure where Marta is. She ___ (go) to the library.

17. ●● Rewrite the sentences using a continuous or passive past modal. a I'm sure the warriors were sleeping when Grendel arrived. (must) b Perhaps someone moved the body. → The body ___ (might) c It's impossible that the ship was carried by hand. (can't) d Perhaps the scribe was copying the text too quickly. (may) e I'm sure the manuscript was kept in a monastery. (must)

18. ●● Rewrite the sentences with a past modal so that they keep the same meaning. a I'm sure that Basil Brown was excited. b It's possible that the dragon's treasure was cursed. c It's impossible that Grendel used a key. d Maybe the guards didn't hear anything. e I'm sure the scribes were tired at the end of the day.

19. ● Complete with *should have* or *shouldn't have* and the verb in brackets. a The thief ___ (steal) the cup: he woke the dragon. b Beowulf's men ___ (stay) with their king. c I ___ (leave) my essay to the last night — now it's full of mistakes. d You ___ (tell) me the train was cancelled! I waited for an hour.

20. ●● *Could* or *could have*? Complete with the right form of the verb in brackets. a When he was young, Beowulf ___ (swim) for days in the sea. b Beowulf ___ (use) a sword against Grendel, but he chose not to. c The fire ___ (destroy) the manuscript completely: we were lucky. d We ___ (visit) the British Museum on Saturday, but we went to the Science Museum instead.

21. ●● Find and correct the mistake in each sentence. a He mustn't have read the poem: he doesn't know who Grendel is. b The treasure must be buried in the 7th century. c You should to have asked the guide. d They ought have kept watch. e She must has left her bag on the train.

22. ●● Write a sentence for each situation, using the modal in brackets. a A friend didn't tell you about a test, and you got a bad mark. (should) b Your friend crossed the road without looking. Nothing happened, luckily. (could) c Your classmate failed the test. He didn't study. (ought to) d You arrived very late, but nobody noticed. (needn't have — recall chapter 2)

23. ●●● Translate into English. a Il re sepolto a Sutton Hoo dev'essere stato molto potente, ma non può essere stato povero. b Avresti potuto dirmelo prima! Avrei dovuto controllare l'orario. c Quando Grendel è entrato, i guerrieri dovevano star dormendo.

### Vocabulary

24. ● Complete with words from Tabella 3.6. a The old king gave a ___ for all his warriors, with food, mead and music. b Wiglaf showed his ___ by staying at his lord's side. c The dragon's ___ was full of gold cups and rings. d Grendel's mother wanted ___ for the death of her son. e The warriors believed that nobody could change their ___. f Leaving your lord in a battle was a terrible ___.

25. ●● Complete with the correct form of *make, keep, break* or *pay*. a Beowulf ___ a promise to Hrothgar before the fight. b He ___ his promise: Grendel never came back. c Many people ___ tribute to the archaeologist when she died. d If you ___ a promise, people stop trusting you. e The defeated tribes had to ___ tribute to the king every year.

26. ●● Word formation. Write the noun or the adjective. a courage → (adj.) · b loyal → (n.) · c betray → (n.) · d glory → (adj.) · e fame → (adj.) · f bold → (n.)

### Writing and Speaking

27. ●●● Write a summary (120–150 words) of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, using the outline in the Literature section. Follow the model and the checklist in the Writing section.

28. ●● Speaking. Work in pairs. Student A compares two photos for about one minute: Photo A, a gold buckle in a museum case; Photo B, a modern gold medal hanging on a ribbon. Speculate about who might have owned or won each object and why it was important. Student B then answers: *Which object tells you more about the society it comes from?* Then swap roles with two new "photos" of your choice.

**Towards B2**

29. ●● Multiple-choice cloze. Choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.
The *Beowulf* manuscript has had an adventurous life. It was copied around the year 1000, but nobody knows where it (1) _____ for the next six centuries. In the 1600s it became (2) _____ of Sir Robert Cotton's great library. In 1731 a fire broke out, and the manuscript (3) _____ have been lost for ever. It was saved, but its edges were badly (4) _____ . Today scholars (5) _____ on two copies made in 1787 to read the letters that have (6) _____ since then.
1 A was kept B was keeping C kept D has been kept · 2 A piece B part C side D member · 3 A must B should C could D ought · 4 A injured B harmed C wounded D damaged · 5 A rely B trust C believe D count up · 6 A disappeared B vanishing C lost D missed

30. ●● Open cloze. Write ONE word in each gap.
Nobody knows (1) _____ wrote *Beowulf*. The poet (2) _____ have been a monk, because the poem is full of Christian ideas, but he also knew a great deal (3) _____ the old heroic songs. He (4) _____ have heard them in a king's hall. We cannot be sure, (5) _____ the manuscript gives no name. What we do know is that the poem was copied by two scribes, (6) _____ handwriting is different.

31. ●● Word formation cloze. Use the word in capitals to form a word that fits the gap.
The (1) _____ (DISCOVER) of the Sutton Hoo ship was one of the most (2) _____ (EXCITE) moments in British archaeology. The (3) _____ (EXCAVATE) worked fast, because war was coming. The objects show the (4) _____ (WEALTHY) of an early English king and the (5) _____ (CRAFT) of his workers. Their beauty still surprises (6) _____ (VISIT) to the British Museum.

32. ●●● Key-word transformation. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using the word given. Use two to five words, including the word given. a I'm sure the dragon was guarding the treasure. MUST · The dragon ___ the treasure. b It was a mistake to run away. SHOULD · They ___ away. c It's impossible that the poet visited Sutton Hoo. CAN'T · The poet ___ Sutton Hoo. d Perhaps the helmet was made in Sweden. MIGHT · The helmet ___ in Sweden. e It was possible for us to lose the poem, but we didn't. COULD · We ___ the poem.

## PER APPROFONDIRE

- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*: the Old English section, with *Beowulf*, "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" and their introductions.
- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the opening chapter on Old English poetry and its manuscripts.
- [MOR] K. O. Morgan (ed.), *The Oxford History of Britain*: the chapter on the Anglo-Saxon period, for kingship, the warrior society and Christianity.
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries *alliteration*, *epic*, *elegy* and *litotes*.
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on modal verbs with perfect infinitives (*must have, could have, should have*).

# Glossario del capitolo

**Alliteration**
*allitterazione* — the repetition of the same first sound in stressed syllables close together; the structural principle of the Old English line.

**Barrow**
*tumulo* — an ancient burial mound of earth or stones.

**Caesura**
*cesura* — a pause inside a line of verse; in Old English it divides the two half-lines.

**Comitatus**
*comitato, seguito armato* — the group of warriors bound by loyalty to a lord, who rewards them with gifts.

**Elegy**
*elegia* — in Old English, a first-person poem of loss and exile on the shortness of earthly life; later, a lament for the dead.

**Epic**
*poema epico, epica* — a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero, important for a whole people.

**Feud**
*faida* — a long conflict between families or groups, with killings and revenge.

**Half-line**
*emistichio* — one of the two halves of an Old English line, each with two main stresses.

**Kenning**
*kenning* — a compound metaphor that replaces a noun: *whale-road* = the sea.

**Litotes**
*litote* — understatement made by denying the opposite: *not the first time* = many times.

**Mead hall**
*sala dell'idromele* — the great hall of an Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian lord, where his warriors feasted and slept.

**Ought to have + past participle**
*avrebbe dovuto* — a more formal form of *should have*, for criticism or regret about the past.

**Ship burial**
*sepoltura in nave* — a burial in which the dead person is laid in a ship, often with treasure, under a mound.

**Summary**
*riassunto* — a short text that reports only the main events or ideas of a longer one, in your own words.

**Ubi sunt**
*ubi sunt* — from Latin "where are…?": a poetic theme of questions about people and things that have disappeared.

**Variation**
*variazione* — naming the same person or thing several times in a row with different words.

**Wergild**
*guidrigildo* — in Anglo-Saxon law, the price of a person's life, paid by a killer's family to the victim's family.

**Wyrd**
*fato, destino* — in Old English, the power that decides what happens to every person (the origin of Modern English *weird*).

# Soluzioni

**1.** B (in Denmark and in the land of the Geats).

**2.** C (the manuscript that contains *Beowulf*).

**3.** D. (A: no inscription names the man; B: the wood rotted away, only its shape and the rivets survived; C: no body was found.)

**4.** a F — Tacitus (AD 98) described the Germanic peoples of his time, before the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain. b T. c T. d F — it is based on stress and alliteration, not rhyme. e F — Beowulf kills Grendel's mother; he dies after fighting the dragon. f T (in Vercelli, Piedmont).

**5.** 1 c · 2 f · 3 a · 4 e · 5 b · 6 d.

**6.** a c. 624 · b c. 1000 · c before 1072 · d 1731 · e 1815 · f 1939.

**7.** Model answer: The ship burial shows that the poem's descriptions are realistic. *Beowulf* opens with a king laid in a ship with treasure, like the burial at Sutton Hoo, and the poem describes decorated helmets, gold and gift-giving lords; the Sutton Hoo helmet, the gold buckle and the coins show that such objects really existed in early Anglo-Saxon England. (about 60 words)

**8.** a A foundling: he arrived alone and poor (*friendless, a foundling*; *fea-sceaft funden*). b They had to obey him and pay tribute (*gave him gifts*; *hyran scolde, gomban gyldan*). c *þæt wæs god cyning* (Gummere: *a good king he!*), l. 11.

**9.** a *whale-path* (T1, l. 10) · b *Not first time, this* (T2, l. 716) · c the hall: *wine-palace* / *gold-hall of men* (ll. 714–715), or *the portal* / *the house's mouth* · d any line with three alliterating words, e.g. *sundry … seize … stately* (l. 713), *welkin … walked … wine-palace* (l. 714), *hardy heroes … hall-thanes* (l. 719), *forged … fast … fists* (l. 722), *baleful … burst … blatant* (l. 723), *fearful flashes … flame* (l. 727).

**10.** T1 l. 4: Oft SCYLD SCEF-ing | SCEAÞ-ena ÞREATum — alliteration on *sc*: SCYLD, SCEF, SCEAÞ (ÞREAT does not alliterate). T3 l. 7: NEAR-o NIHTwaco | æt NAC-an STEFN-an — alliteration on *n*: NEAR, NIHT, NAC (STEFN does not alliterate).

**11.** Model answer: Grendel walks quickly to the hall. He is an outcast, without joy. As soon as he touches the door, which is locked with iron bars, it breaks open, and he angrily bursts in. He walks across the decorated floor full of rage, and a frightening light like fire shines from his eyes. (about 55 words)

**12.** a A *true* song about himself, his own experience (*soðgied*). b At the prow (front) of the boat, at night (*æt nacan stefnan*). c *cearselda*, "halls of care": the ship, or the hard places at sea, where he lives with sorrow instead of joy. d No: he is not a famous warrior who fights monsters, but an ordinary, lonely man who speaks about his suffering; his courage is to endure hardship. (Accept answers that see a different kind of heroism in his endurance.)

**13.** Model answer: In T2 Grendel comes from the dark moors towards Heorot, a *gold-hall* full of light, wine and warriors; the hall stands for community and joy, and he, *parted from peace*, wants to destroy it. In T3 there is no hall at all: the speaker is alone on the cold sea at night, and the only "halls" he knows are *halls of care*. Both texts show the outside as a place of exile, but in T2 the outsider is a monster, in T3 a suffering human being. (about 95 words)

**14.** Model answer: **Point:** the poet builds suspense as Grendel approaches. **Evidence:** the passage follows him step by step, from *the moorland* to *the wine-palace*, to *the portal*, to the *fair-paved floor*, and finally to the *fearful flashes* in his eyes. **Explanation:** like a camera moving closer, each stage brings the monster nearer to the sleeping men; the listener knows what he has done before (*Not first time, this*), so every step increases the fear, and the image of his burning eyes ends the passage at the moment of greatest tension. (about 95 words)

**15.** a can't · b might · c must · d can't · e may.

**16.** a must have worked (must have been working) · b might have forgotten · c can't have seen · d must have studied · e might have gone.

**17.** a The warriors must have been sleeping when Grendel arrived. b The body might have been moved (by someone). c The ship can't have been carried by hand. d The scribe may have been copying the text too quickly. e The manuscript must have been kept in a monastery.

**18.** a Basil Brown must have been excited. b The dragon's treasure may / might / could have been cursed. c Grendel can't / couldn't have used a key. d The guards may / might not have heard anything. e The scribes must have been tired at the end of the day.

**19.** a shouldn't have stolen · b should have stayed · c shouldn't have left · d should have told.

**20.** a could swim (general ability) · b could have used · c could have destroyed · d could have visited.

**21.** a mustn't → can't (couldn't) have read · b must be buried → must have been buried · c should to have → should have asked · d ought have → ought to have kept · e must has → must have left.

**22.** Possible answers: a You should have told me about the test! · b You could have been hit by a car! · c He ought to have studied (harder). · d I needn't have worried: nobody noticed.

**23.** a The king buried at Sutton Hoo must have been very powerful, but he can't (couldn't) have been poor. b You could have told me earlier! I should have checked the timetable. c When Grendel came in, the warriors must have been sleeping.

**24.** a feast · b loyalty · c treasure · d revenge · e fate · f betrayal.

**25.** a made · b kept · c paid · d break · e pay.

**26.** a courageous · b loyalty · c betrayal · d glorious · e famous · f boldness.

**27.** Model answer (130 words): *The next night Grendel's mother comes to Heorot to avenge her son. She kills Hrothgar's dearest counsellor and escapes with Grendel's arm. Beowulf and the Danes follow her tracks to a dark lake in the moors. Beowulf puts on his armour and dives into the water with a sword lent to him by a Danish warrior. At the bottom of the lake the monster drags him into her underwater hall. During the fight the borrowed sword cannot wound her, and Beowulf nearly dies. Then he sees an ancient sword made by giants hanging on the wall. He seizes it and kills her with it. He also cuts off the head of Grendel's dead body and takes it back to Hrothgar. The Danes celebrate, and Beowulf returns home with rich gifts.* **Check:** present simple, main events only, no opinions.

**28.** Model answer (Student A): *Both photos show precious gold objects, but they come from very different worlds. The buckle in the first photo is clearly very old: it must have belonged to someone rich and powerful, perhaps a king, because it is decorated so carefully. It might have been a sign of his rank, something people saw when he sat in his hall. The medal in the second photo is modern. Someone must have won it in a competition, maybe a race. Unlike the buckle, it is a sign of what someone did, not of their birth. What strikes me most is that both objects say "this person is important".* Student B: *I'd say the buckle tells us more, because it shows the wealth of a king and the skill of his craftsmen.*

**29.** 1 A (was kept) · 2 B (part) · 3 C (could) · 4 D (damaged) · 5 A (rely) · 6 A (disappeared).

**30.** 1 who · 2 may (might, could; not *must*: the next sentences say we cannot be sure) · 3 about · 4 may (might, could) · 5 because (as, since) · 6 whose.

**31.** 1 discovery · 2 exciting · 3 excavators · 4 wealth · 5 craftsmanship (craft) · 6 visitors.

**32.** a must have been guarding · b shouldn't (should not) have run · c can't have visited · d might have been made · e could have lost.