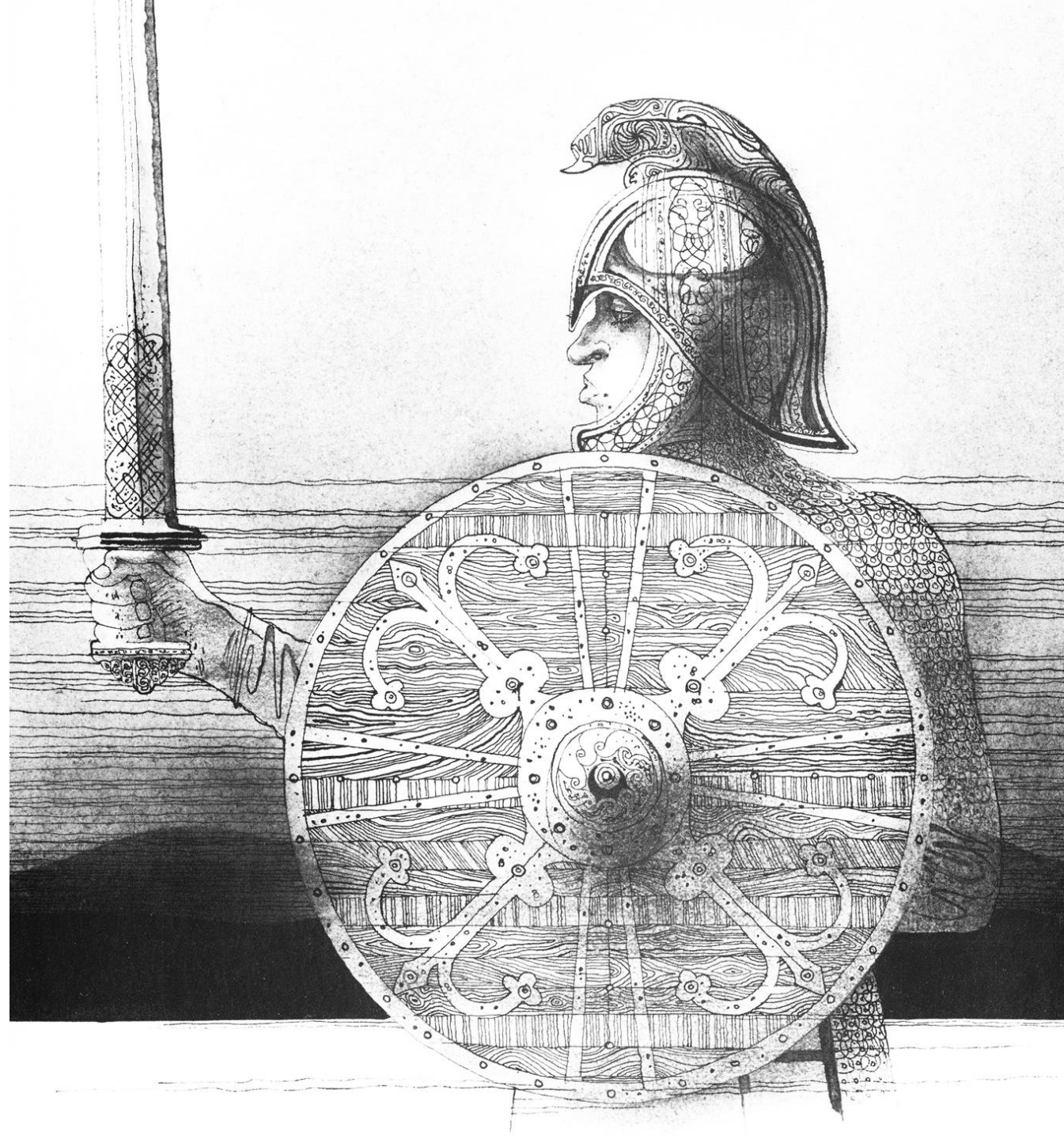


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# Seamus Heaney's



My plan was to pounce, pin him down in a tight grip and grapple him to death. But I couldn't stop him from slipping my hold...



# COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Illustrations from *Beowulf: Dragon Slayer* (1961) and *Beowulf* (1982) by Charles Keeping.

Modern verse translation of *Beowulf* (2000) by Seamus Heaney  
published by W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Music from the motion picture *Beowulf* (2007) composed and conducted  
by Alan Silvestri.

PowerPoint presentation (2017) written and designed by Matt Querino  
Algonquin Regional High School, Northborough, MA.

KING HROTHGAR

BEOWULF

WEALHTHEOW

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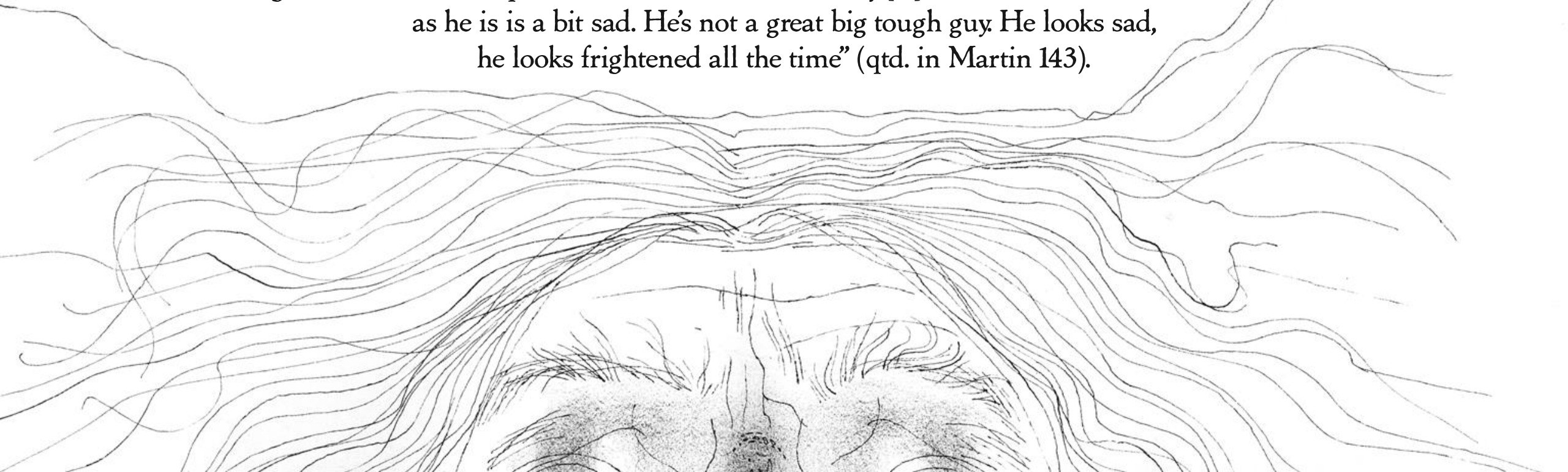
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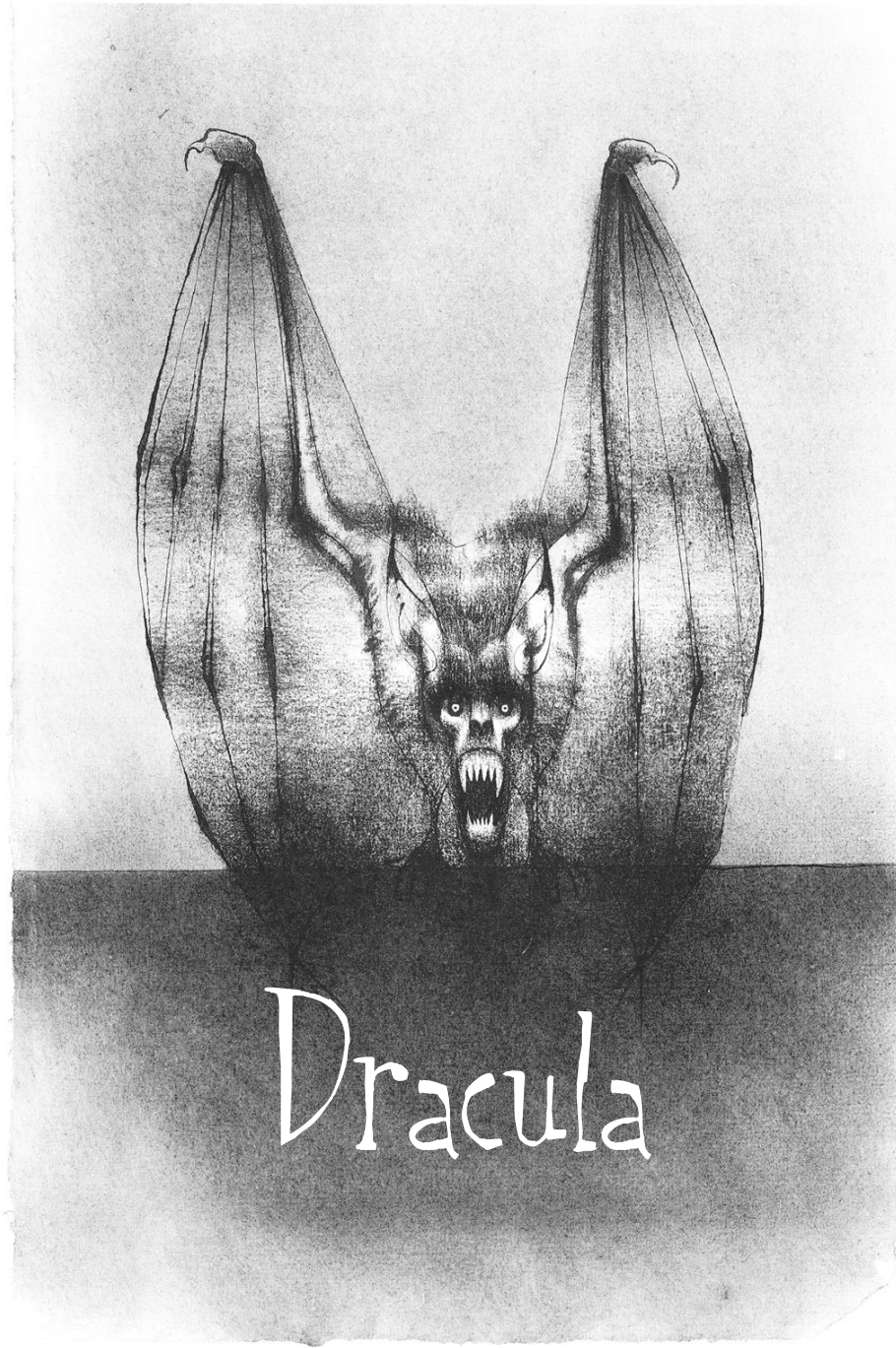
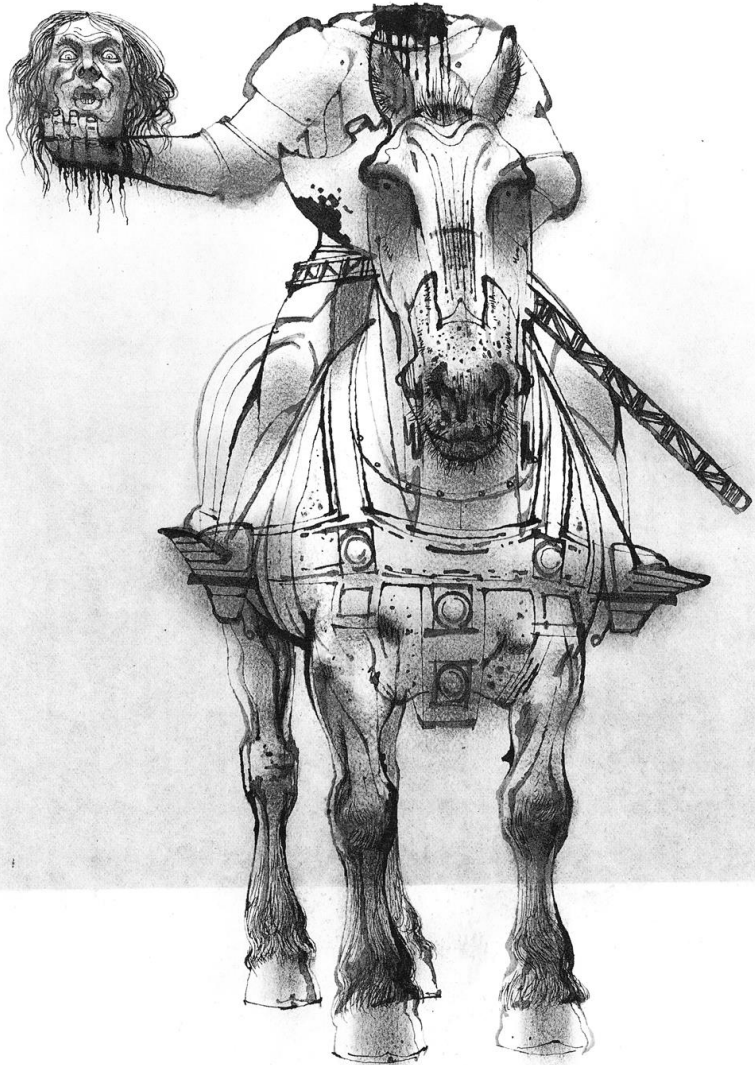
# Charles Keeping: Delineating Myth

British illustrator Charles Keeping (1924-88) turned his talents to illustrating *Beowulf* twice: at the start of his career in 1961 and towards the end of it in 1982. The more traditionally drawn characters from his earlier work are barely recognizable in his much darker approach to the material years later. Keeping wanted to impose a late twentieth-century interpretation on events and their causes. The older artist questioned the prevailing balance between good and evil, and threatened to change what had been a celebration of Beowulf, the great hero figure in the eyes of the original poet, into a castigation. “I don’t take quite so heroic a view of *Beowulf* [...] First of all Grendel—to be as disliked as he is is a bit sad. He’s not a great big tough guy. He looks sad, he looks frightened all the time” (qtd. in Martin 143).





# Sir Gawain and the Green Knight



# Frankenstein

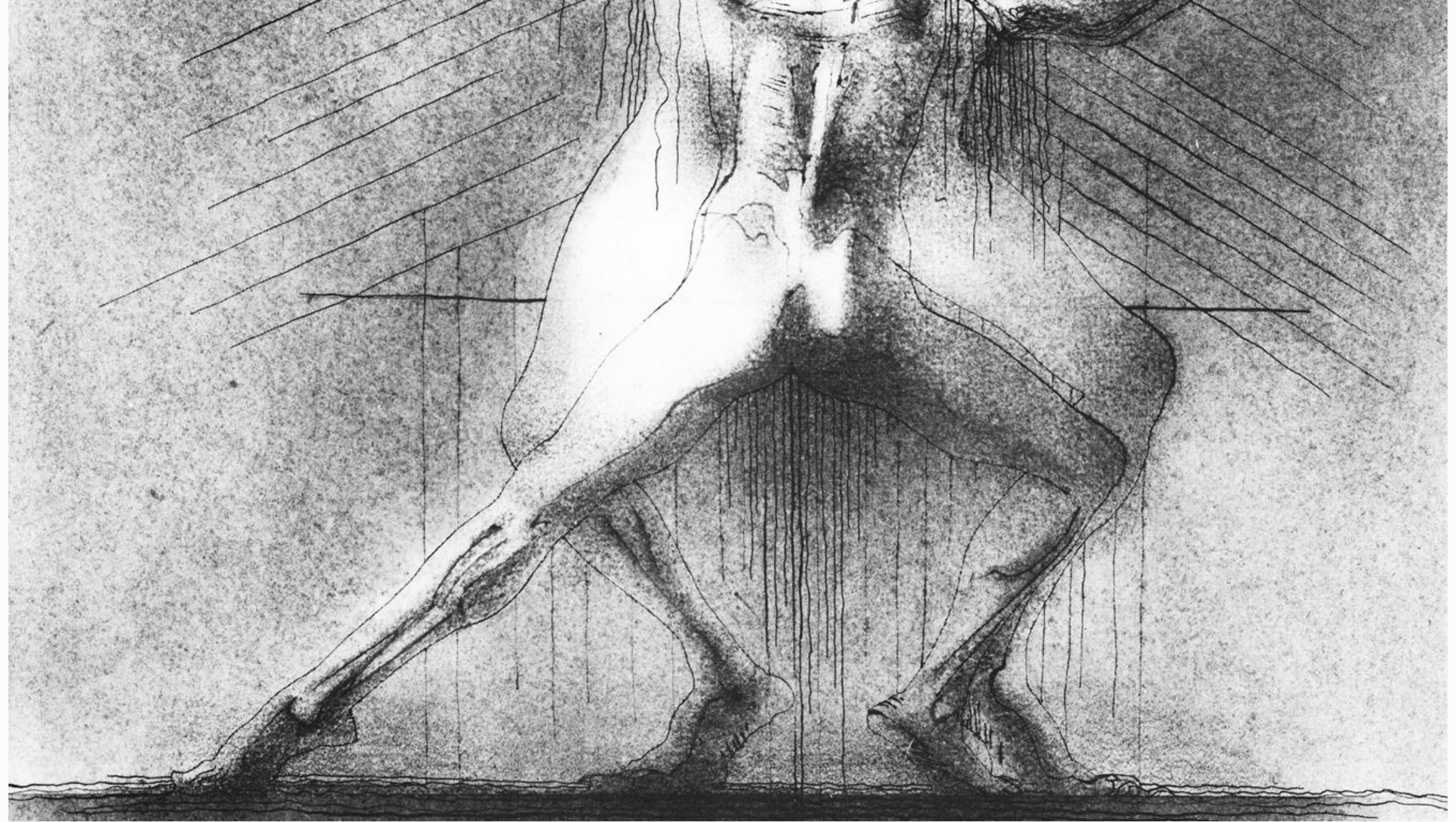




# Beowulf








# THE FIRST ENGLISH EPIC

The poem called *Beowulf* was composed some time between the middle of the seventh and the end of the tenth century of the first millennium, in the language that is today called Anglo-Saxon or Old English. It is a heroic narrative, more than three thousand lines long, concerning the deeds of a Scandinavian prince, and it stands as one of the foundation works of poetry in English. While we do not know the identity of the

author, and we are unsure of its precise date of composition, most scholars believe it was composed by a single Christian author for a Christian audience. The poem, filled with biblical allusions to the Old Testament, is also influenced by Germanic oral tradition and ancient myth and legend. The poem was written in England but the events it describes are set in Scandinavia, in a “once upon a time” that is partly historical but mostly fantastic.



Mead is an alcoholic beverage created by fermenting honey with water. The alcoholic content ranges from about 8% ABV to more than 20%. Mead was produced in ancient history throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.



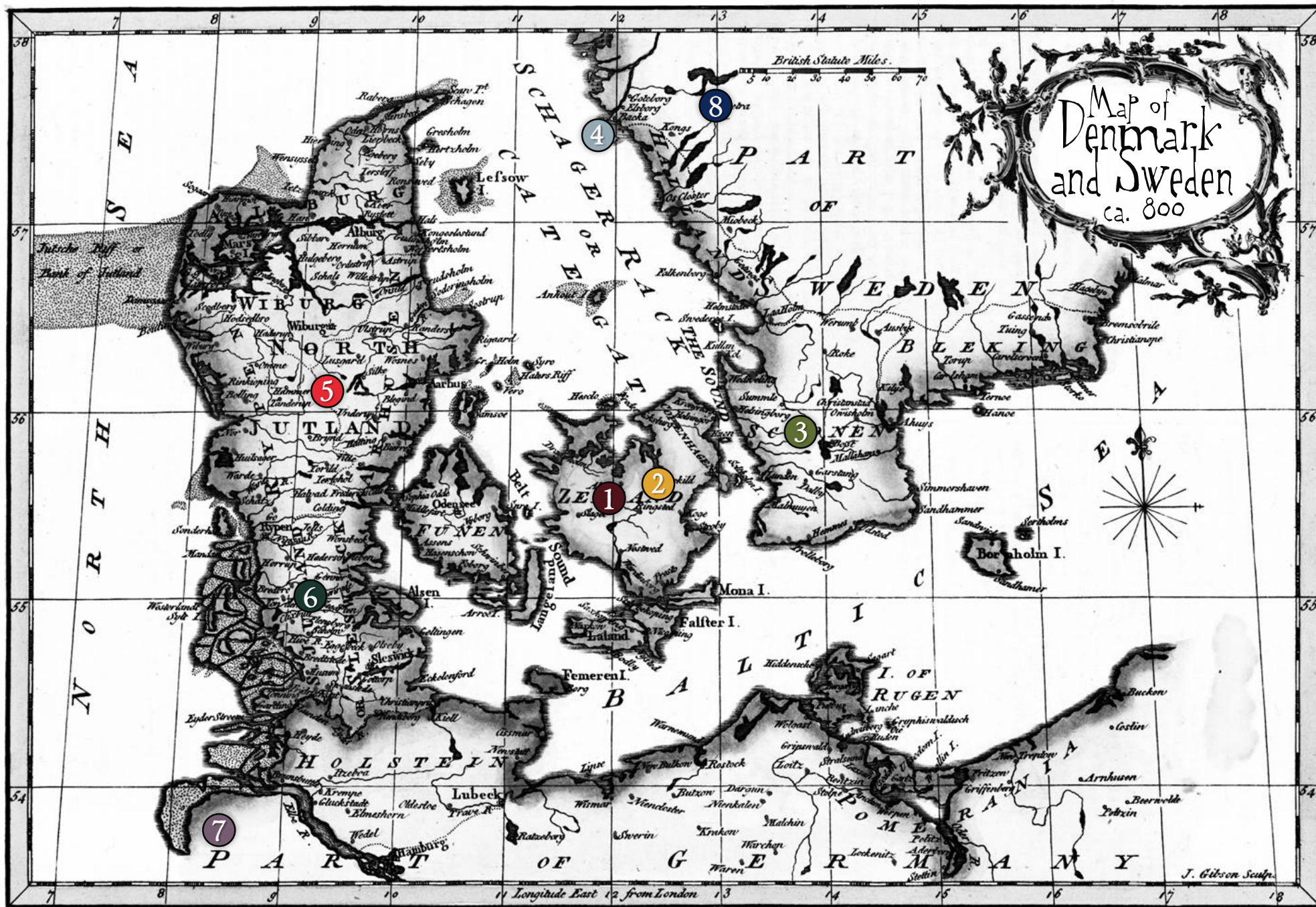
## SETTING

The poem is set mainly in Denmark and Geatland (now southern Sweden) during the eighth century. The map on the following slide shows the locations of peoples mentioned in *Beowulf*. The proximity of those peoples to one another, together with the warrior code they followed, made for frequent clashes. The name of the grand mead hall that Hrothgar builds is Heorot. “Heorot” is Old English for “Hart,” a male deer. The name possibly originates from antlers fastened to the gables or because the crossed gable-ends resembled a stag’s antlers. The hart was also an icon of royalty.



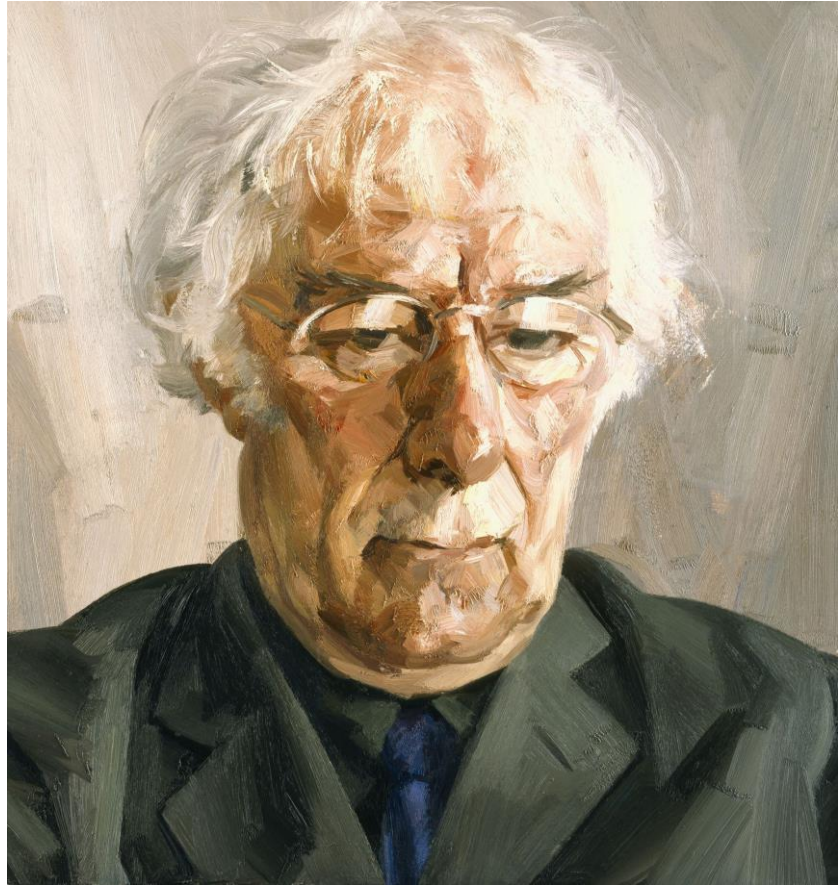


# Tribes and Locations



- 1 Danes
- 2 Heorot
- 3 Geats
- 4 Brännö Island
- 5 Jutes
- 6 Angles
- 7 Frisians
- 8 Beowulf's Barrow





# Seamus Heaney

Heaney (1939-2013) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995 for “works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past.” Over sixty translations of *Beowulf* have appeared since the early nineteenth century, but none has caught the reading public’s attention as much as Heaney’s. His *Beowulf* is both a translation of one of the oldest English poems and a personal response to a work that speaks to a modern poet about the violence of our own century and the courage with which some men and women have faced up to it. That every translation is also an act of interpretation has been a commonplace in the field of English literature. It arises in response to the notion that the word-for-word and sense-for-

-sense that aims for “faithfulness” provides at best only a partial description of all that a good translation entails. When a poet like Seamus Heaney turns his attention to translating *Beowulf*, readers pay special attention to the signs of his interpretive touches. What is presumed to be “literal” is taken in stride, perhaps necessary to understanding the narrative but inherently less interesting. His interpretation is measured not just by the changes imposed from the outside but also by shaping and reshaping the tradition from within.



# THE DANES or THE SHIELDINGS

SHIELD SHEAFSON

Beow

Halfdane

Heorogar

HROTHGAR

m.

Wealththeow

Halga

daughter

m.

Onela the  
Swede

*The names given here are the ones used in Seamus Heaney's translation. Complete tribes and genealogies of the people in Beowulf are on page 217. Heaney reads from page three to seven in this excerpt.*

# What are Kennings?

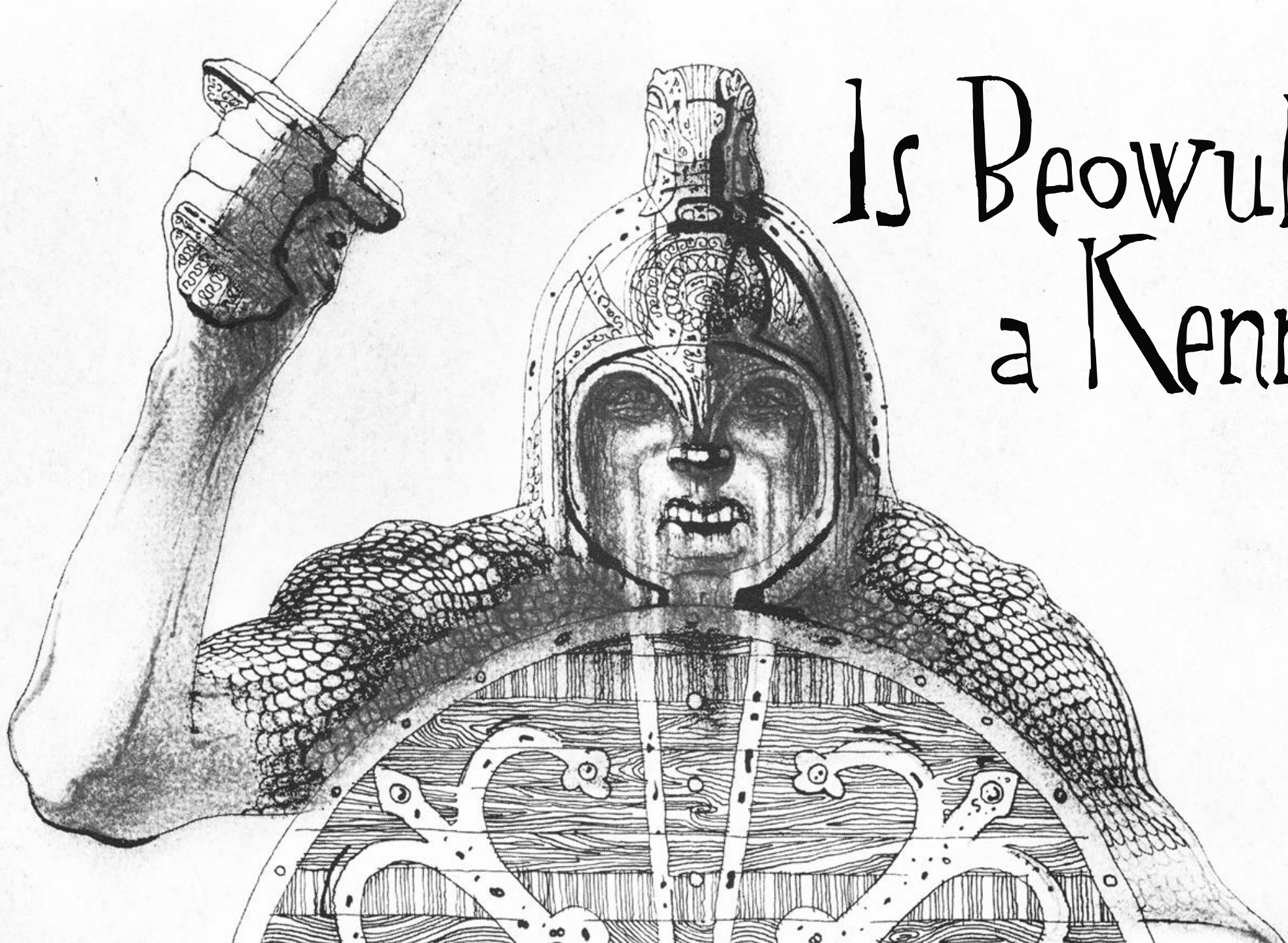
The term “kenning” denotes the recurrent use, in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and poems written in other Old Germanic languages, of a descriptive phrase in place of the ordinary name for something. This type of expression is an indication of these poems in oral tradition.

Some kennings are instances of metonymy, the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant: “the whale road” for the sea, and “the ring-giver” for a king; others of synecdoche, when a part is made to represent the whole: “the ringed prow” for a ship; still others describe striking or picturesque features of the object referred to: “foamy-necked floater” for a ship under sail, “storm of swords” for a battle.



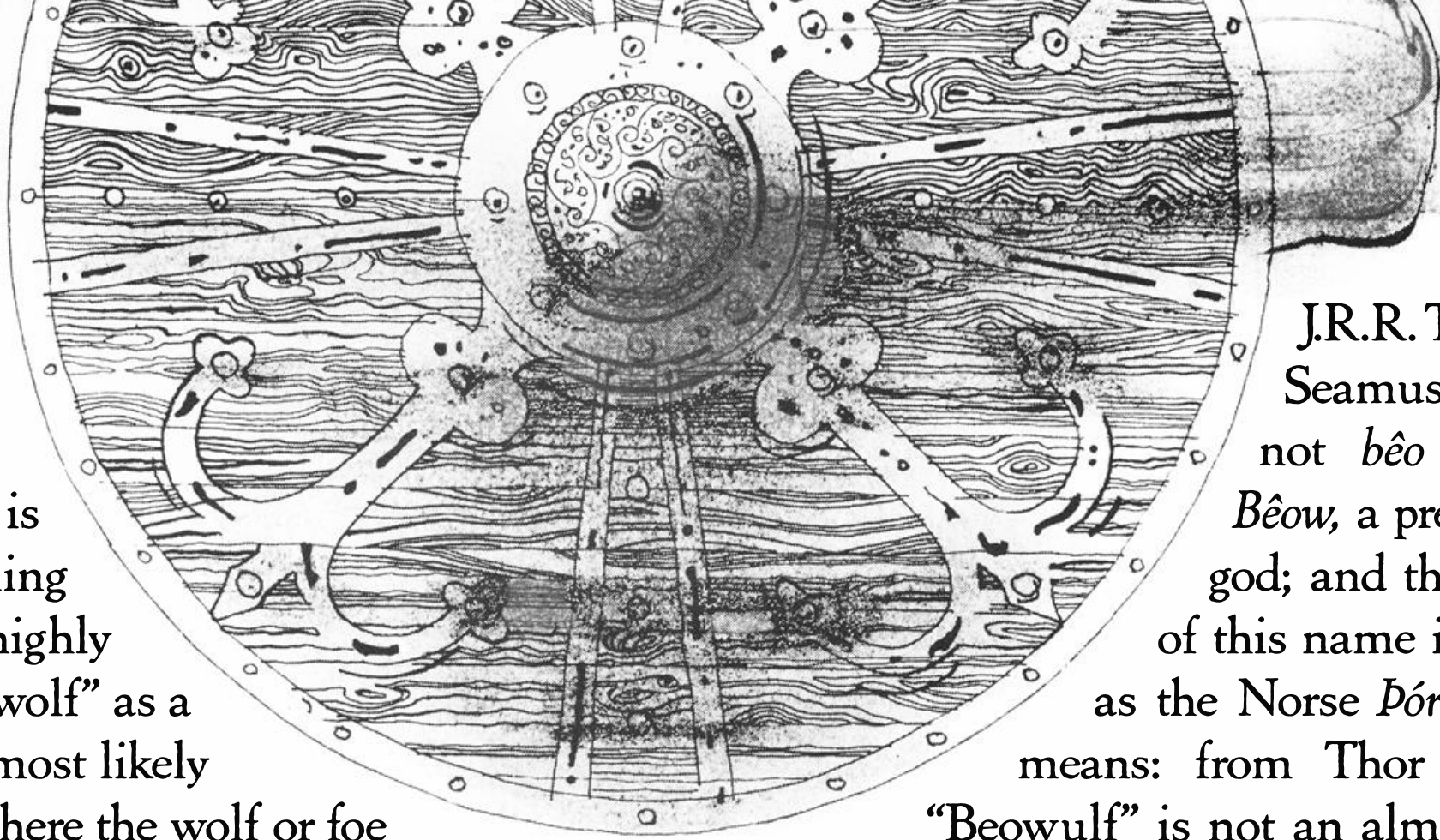


Is Beowulf  
a Kenning?





Although many online resources will tell you that Beowulf's name is a kenning, meaning "bee-wolf," it is highly unlikely. A "bee-wolf" as a kenning would most likely mean a "bear," where the wolf or foe of the bee is the honey-seeking bear. However, names derived from kennings are very scarce, and no good parallel for "bee-wolf" has ever been offered. The first part of the hero's name, according to most traditional sources including

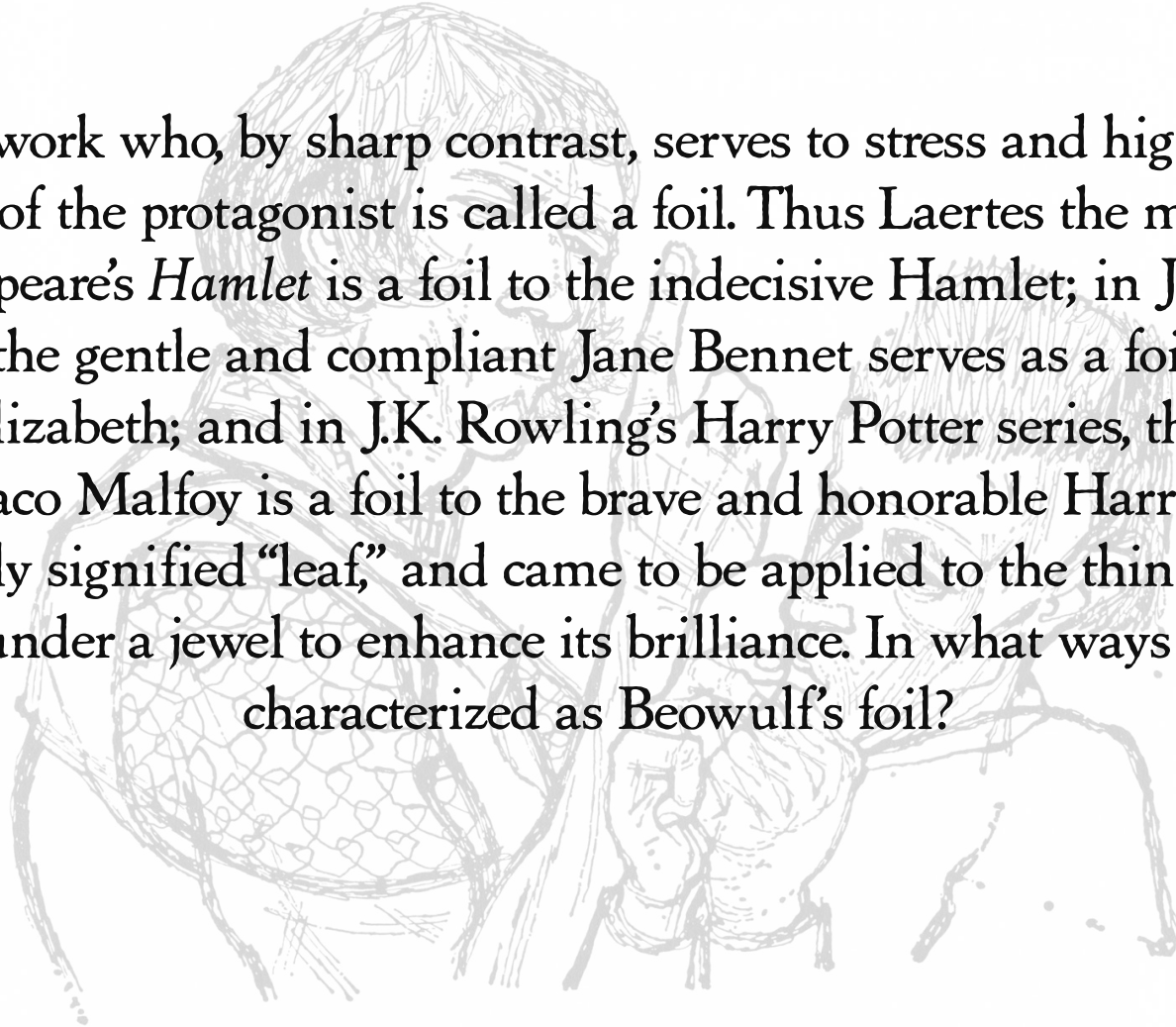


J.R.R. Tolkien and Seamus Heaney is not *bêo* "bee" but *Bêow*, a pre-Christian god; and the structure of this name is the same as the Norse *Þór-ólfr* which means: from Thor and wolf.

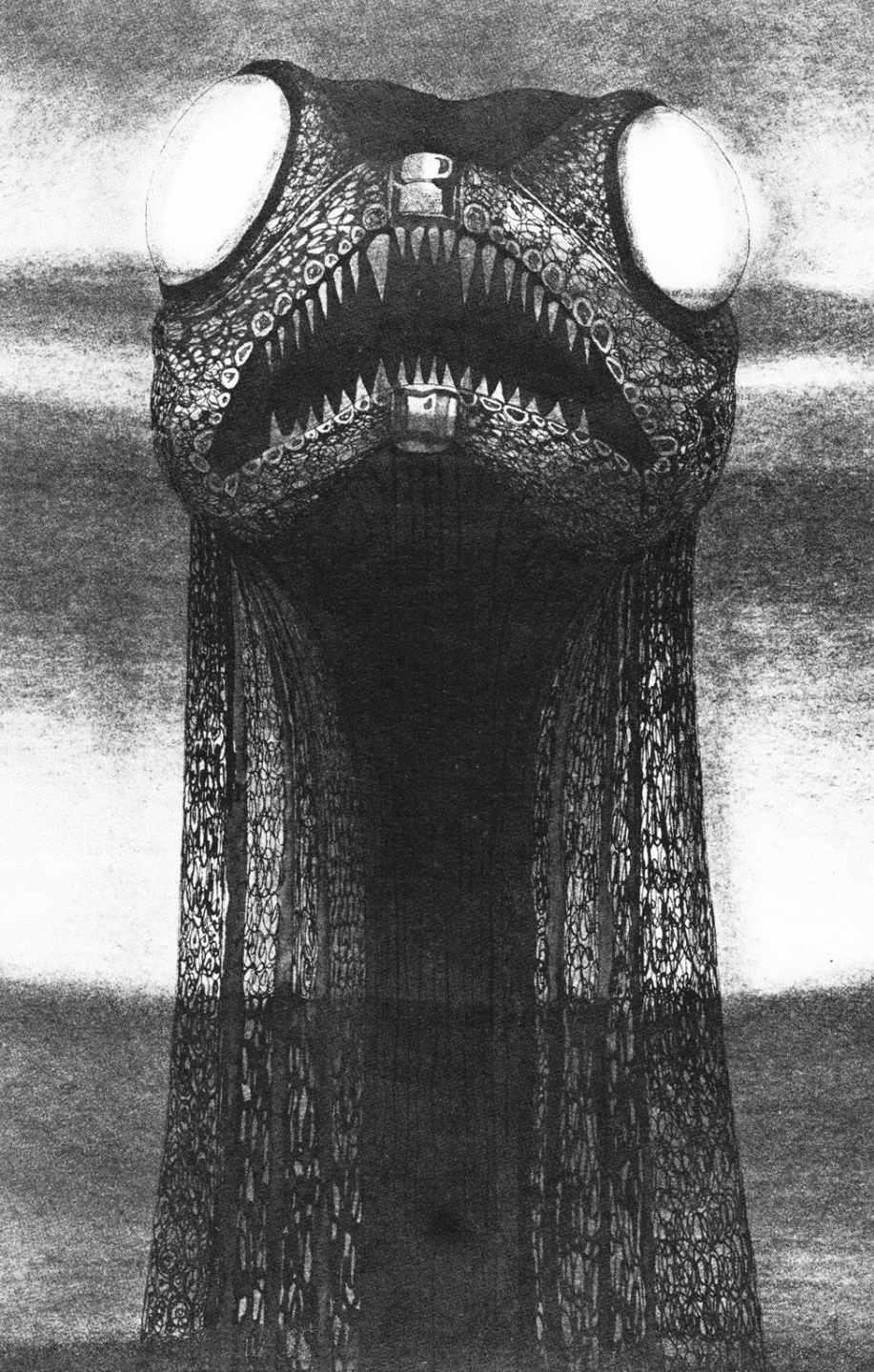
"Beowulf" is not an almost unique little allegory or kenning but a name as a man might bear—indeed some characters/ people did. Though rarely attested, it is constructed on a common model with variants in every Germanic language (Fulk and Harris 98-100).

# What is a Foil Character?

A character in a work who, by sharp contrast, serves to stress and highlight the distinct temperament of the protagonist is called a foil. Thus Laertes the man of action in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a foil to the indecisive Hamlet; in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the gentle and compliant Jane Bennet serves as a foil to her strong-willed sister Elizabeth; and in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, the cowardly and dishonorable Draco Malfoy is a foil to the brave and honorable Harry Potter. The word "foil" originally signified "leaf," and came to be applied to the thin sheet of bright metal placed under a jewel to enhance its brilliance. In what ways can Unferth be characterized as Beowulf's foil?



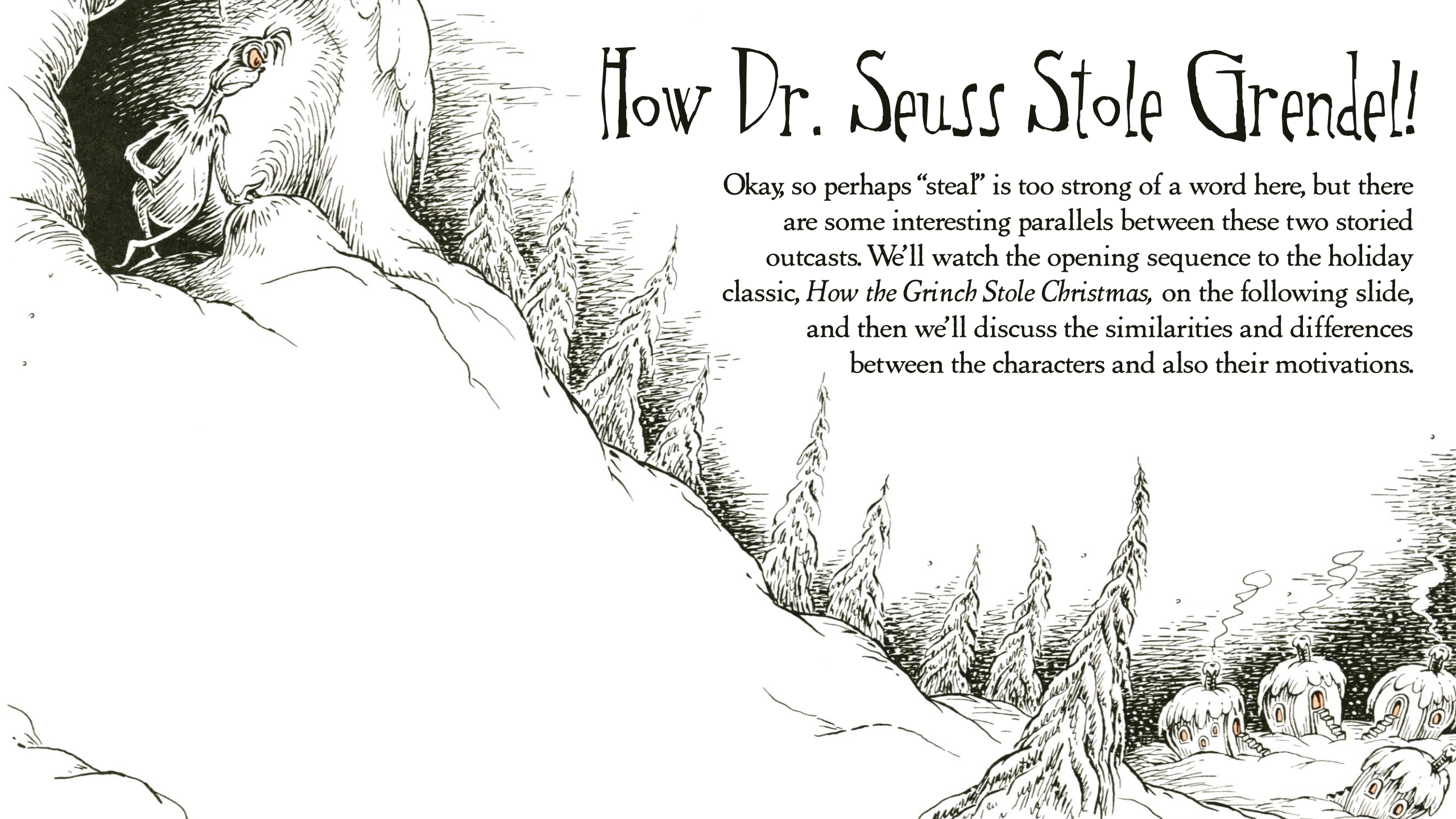
SCENES FROM THE FILM BEOWULF DIRECTED BY  
ROBERT ZEMECKIS, WHICH PREMIERED IN  
NOVEMBER OF 2007.



## BEOWULF'S BOAST

In Old English a “bêot” is a gallant boast. Anglo-Saxon warriors would usually deliver bêots in the mead hall the night before a military engagement or during the battle itself. For example, a typical warrior may boast that he will be the first to strike a blow in a battle, that he would claim a renowned sword from an enemy warrior as a spoil of battle, that he will slay a particular monster that has been wreaking havoc on a town or village, and so on. Bêots were usually accompanied by grand stories of one's past glorious deeds—such as Beowulf's tale of slaying nine sea-monsters during a swimming race. Although other cultures and times might disdain boasting as a sign of arrogance, or sinful pride, the pagan Anglo-Saxons highly regarded such behavior as a positive sign of one's determination, bravery, and character. What do you think about these boasts? What special abilities and skills do we see in Beowulf's swimming contest with Breca that, if true, may help our hero in future encounters?





# How Dr. Seuss Stole Grendel!

Okay, so perhaps “steal” is too strong of a word here, but there are some interesting parallels between these two storied outcasts. We’ll watch the opening sequence to the holiday classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, on the following slide, and then we’ll discuss the similarities and differences between the characters and also their motivations.



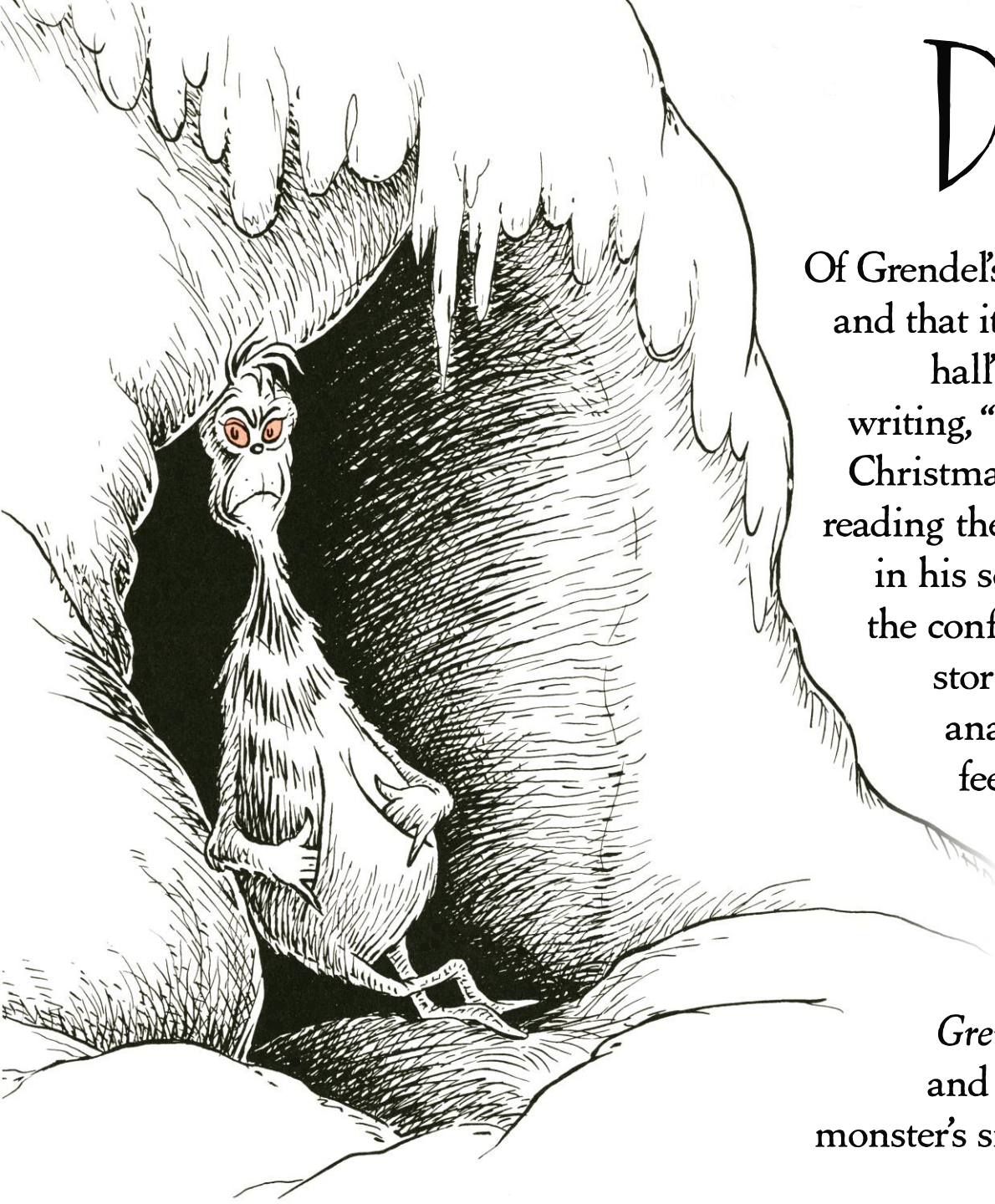




Grendel

The Grinch

What motivates these two characters to attack the communities in their stories?  
Use the results of the Venn diagram to try and answer this question.



# Drawing Conclusions

Of Grendel's motivation, Heaney tells us only that he "nursed a hard grievance" and that it "harrowed him to hear the din of the loud banquet everyday in the hall" (87-89). Seuss is even more ambiguous about the Grinch's motive, writing, "Whatever the reason / His heart or his shoes / He stood there on Christmas Eve, hating the *Whos*" (162). The lack of closure one may feel after reading these works is not necessarily a fault of the writer. As Tolkien explains in his seminal essay on *Beowulf*, if the poet had given an explicit reason for the conflict, it would greatly limit the reader's imagination and scope of the story. "The significance of a myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends" (112). While we may never fully understand the reasoning behind the Grinch's plan to steal Christmas, we will find out the definitive reason why Grendel attacks Heorot in the next novel we read, John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971). Despite being written by an American, *Grendel* is often studied alongside *Beowulf* in British Literature courses and has become part of the canon. Gardner's first-person account of the monster's side of the story is now often considered part of *Beowulf*'s continuity.

# THE HERO COMES TO HEOROT



SCENES FROM BEOWULF FIRST BROADCAST IN  
1998. THE ANIMATION WAS DONE IN MOSCOW AT  
CHRISTMAS FILMS STUDIO BY A SELECTION OF  
RUSSIA'S MOST RENOWNED ANIMATORS.

SCENES FROM “THE ART OF BEOWULF” RELEASED  
WITH THE DIRECTOR’S CUT OF BEOWULF ON  
BLU-RAY IN FEBRUARY OF 2008.





# GRENDDEL DRAWING

Grendel has haunted the imaginations of writers, artists, and readers for thousands of years. But, what exactly does Western literature's first great monster actually look like? Grendel only comes out at night and kills 30 warriors at a time, leaving very little opportunity for someone to catch a good look at him. Because of Grendel's elusive nature, authors have always left much of the creature's appearance open to the interpretation of their readers. How do you view the creature in your mind?

- The drawing must be your own original interpretation of Grendel. You may use colored pencils or markers, or shade it in black and white.
- You must use the text as a rationalization for how and what you draw, so include a pull-out quotation from the reading (pgs. 29-55) that inspired your concept of Grendel.
- The amount of effort that goes into your drawing will be apparent regardless of your artistic talent or lack thereof. Your completed assignment will count as a class participation grade.



# What is an Epic?

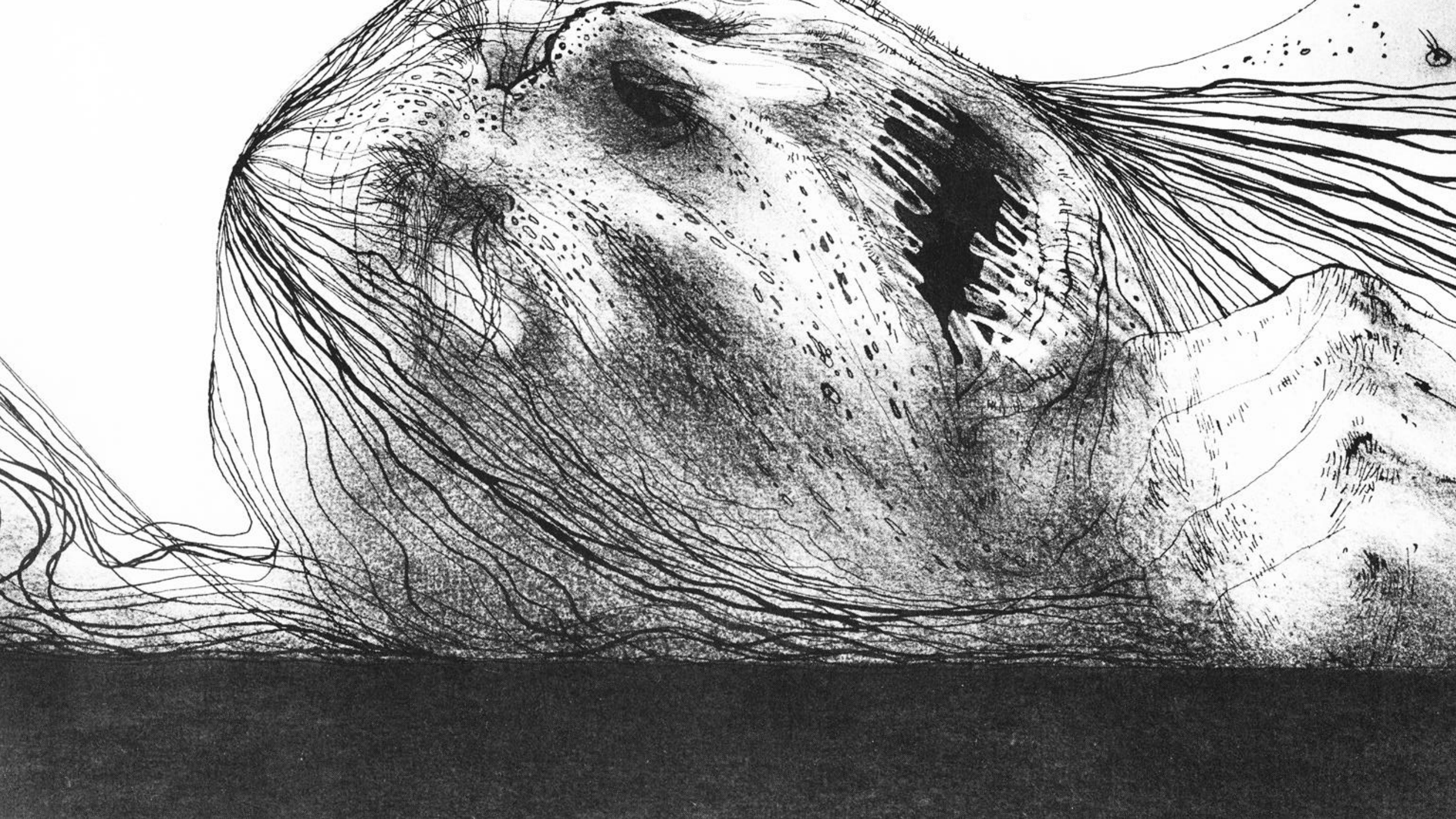
1. The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance.
2. The setting of the poem is ample in scale and may be worldwide or even larger.
3. The action involves superhuman deeds in battle or a long, arduous, and dangerous journey intrepidly accomplished.
4. In these great actions the gods or other supernatural beings take an interest or an active part.
5. An epic poem is a ceremonial performance, and it is narrated in a ceremonial style which is deliberately distanced from ordinary speech and proportioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject and architecture.











# Beowulf fights Grendel's Mother



SCENES FROM BEOWULF FIRST BROADCAST IN  
1998. THE ANIMATION WAS DONE IN MOSCOW AT  
CHRISTMAS FILMS STUDIO BY A SELECTION OF  
RUSSIA'S MOST RENOWNED ANIMATORS.

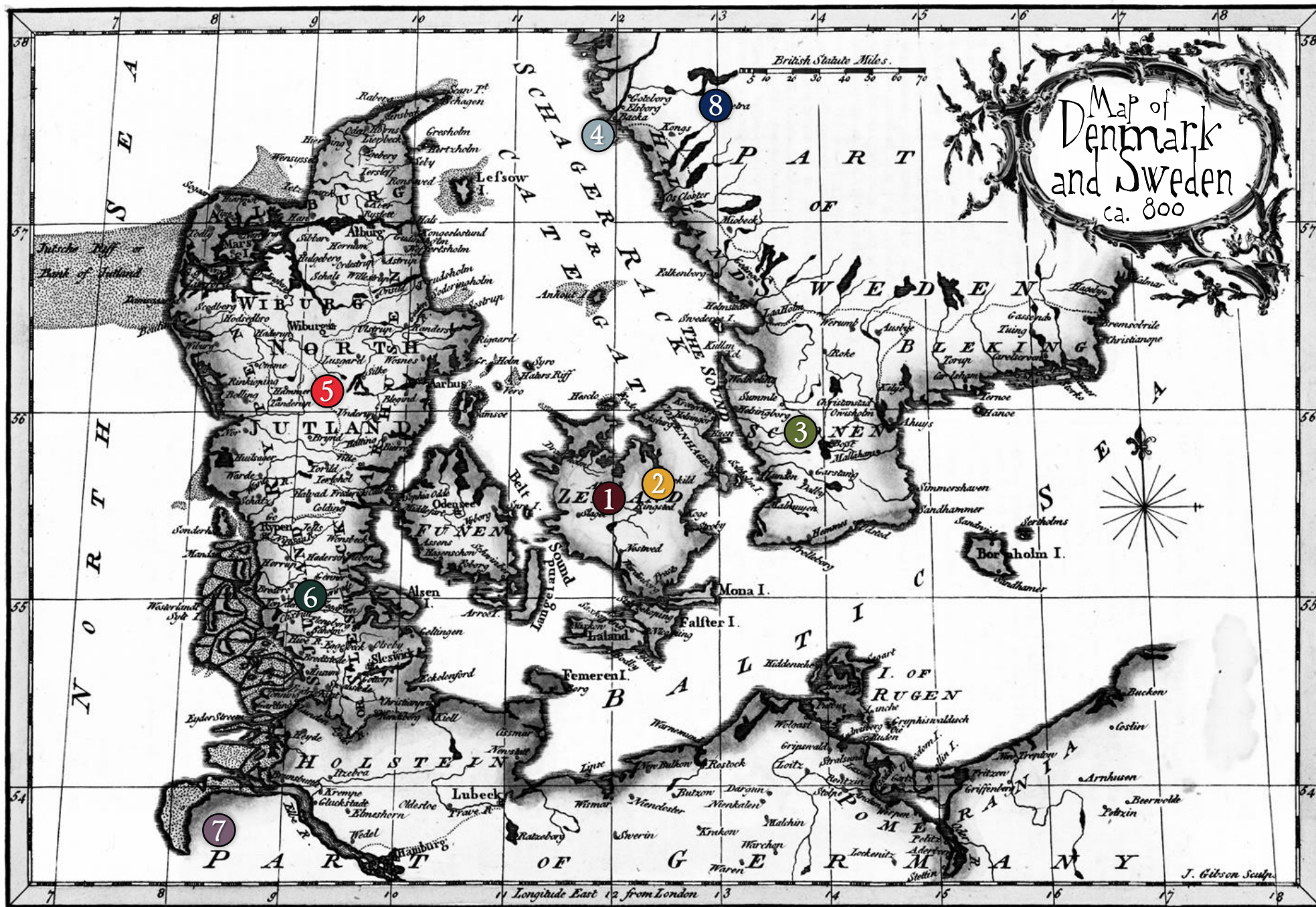


SCENES FROM “JOSEPH CAMPBELL AND  
THE POWER OF MYTH,” WHICH AIRED  
ON PBS IN JUNE OF 1988.





# Tribes and Locations

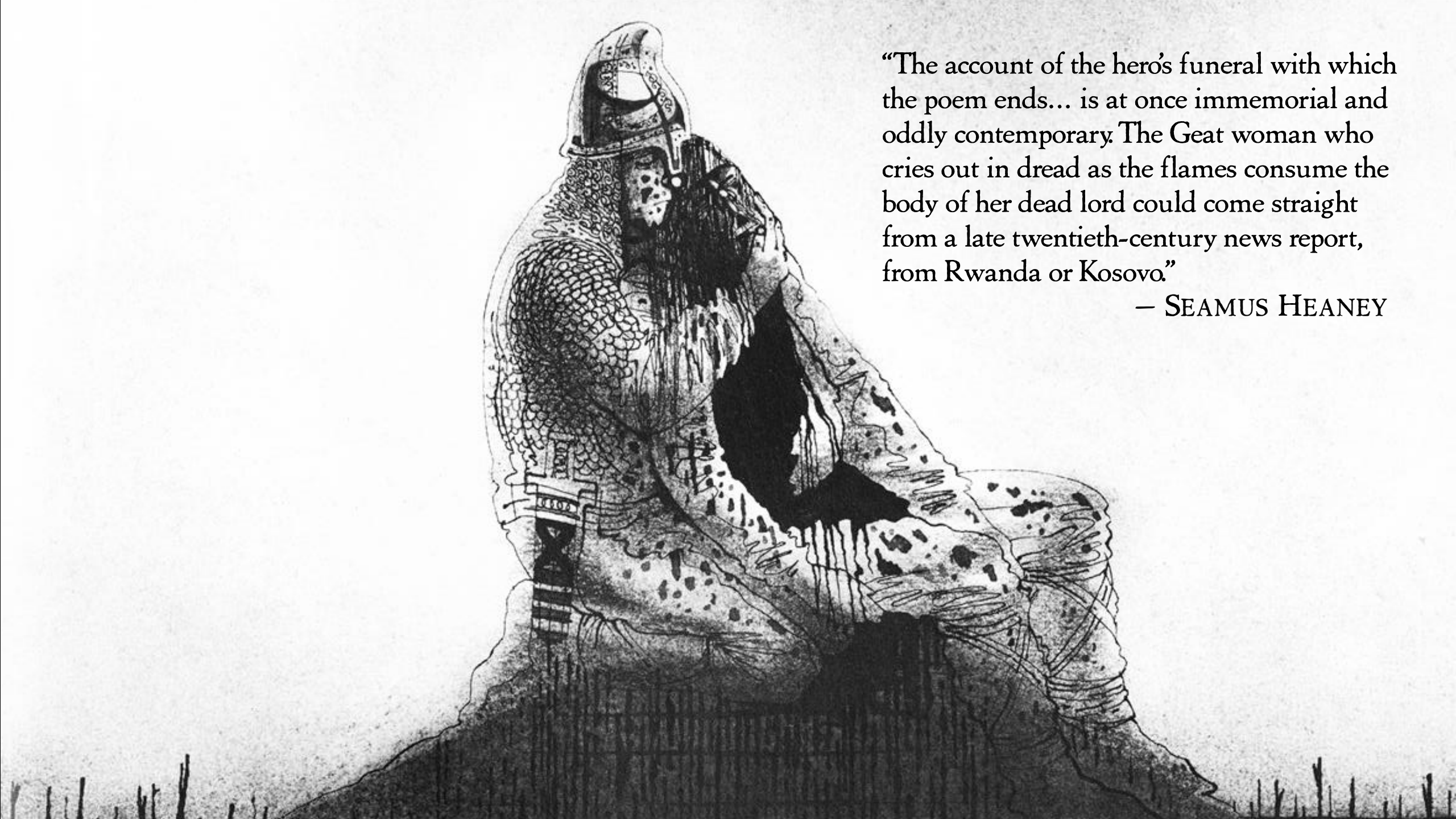




# Beowulf Attacks the Dragon



SCENES FROM BEOWULF FIRST BROADCAST IN  
1998. THE ANIMATION WAS DONE IN MOSCOW AT  
CHRISTMAS FILMS STUDIO BY A SELECTION OF  
RUSSIA'S MOST RENOWNED ANIMATORS.



“The account of the hero’s funeral with which the poem ends... is at once immemorial and oddly contemporary. The Geat woman who cries out in dread as the flames consume the body of her dead lord could come straight from a late twentieth-century news report, from Rwanda or Kosovo.”

— SEAMUS HEANEY



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