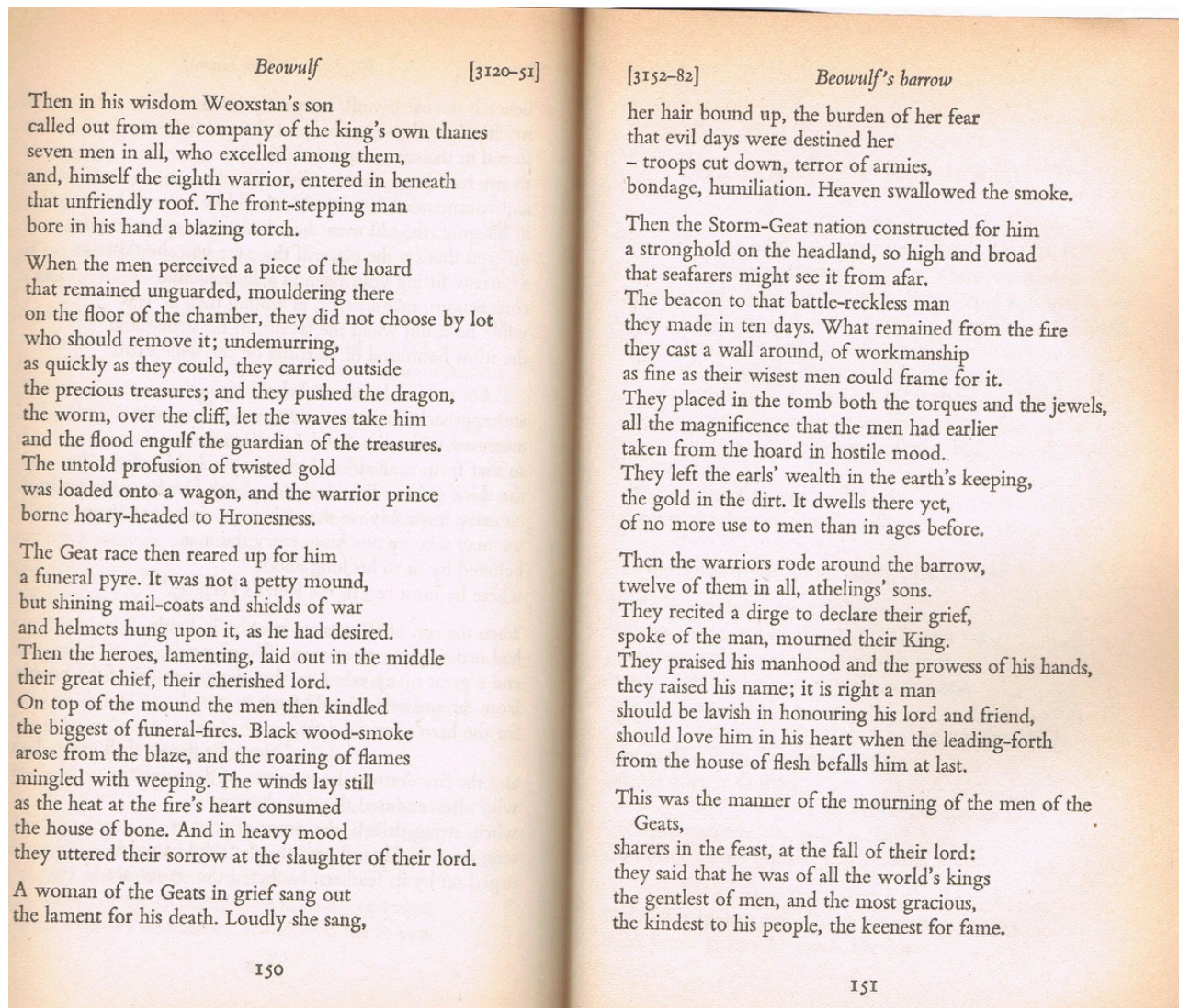


35340 Literatura anglesa medieval i del segle XVI

Jesús Tronch Pérez

Activity: commentary on *Beowulf*, lines 3120-3182

(The following is quoted from Michael Alexander's translation [Penguin, 1973])



As you prepare your commentary, consider the following:

Identify the passage, in relation to the rest of the poem.

Consider its position in the poem's "ring structure", as proposed by Niles (see handout)

Remember what has been explained in class about heroic values. In this passage, find out words, phrases and lines that bear on these ideas. Take note of line numbers.

Similarly with issues of Christianity, the role of women, genre, language and style.

Organize your ideas in a coherent way and write them down, using quotations from the passage where relevant. 30 minutes.

Activity: commentary on *Beowulf*, lines 3120-3182

Key ideas for a commentary on *Beowulf*, lines 3120-3182
(quotations are taken from Alexander's modern translation)

[Identification]

This excerpt is the ending of the epic poem *Beowulf* consisting of the burial of its protagonist, Beowulf, a legendary (fictional) king of the Geats (a Germanic tribe in modern southern Sweden)

Following the "ring structure" of the poem, this fragment corresponds with the burial of Scyld at the beginning.

The king is given a stately (lavish) and noble funeral according to the way this warrior culture wants to remember (memorialize) its hero

Heroic values expressed in the text:

- 3182, "kindest to his people" and "keenest (= eager) for fame" the very last words in the poem; the chief values in heroic society = loyalty and fame
- 3175 moralization on heroic values
- Funeral: objects indicative of heroic material culture: mail-coats, shield, helmets ← valued by a warrior society. The amount of jewels and weapons give a measure of the importance given to the dead hero

This ending raises the debate about the genre of the poem: from some scholars *Beowulf* is heroic-elegiac poem or 'lay' (narrative poem). The elegiac character can be seen in the insistence on words and phrases expressing lament:

3141 "lamenting" 3146 "weeping" 3149 "uttered their sorrow" 3151 "lament" 3171 "dirge" (= song of mourning or lament) 3177 "mourning"

Language and style:

- 3120 "wisdom Weoxstan's" ← alliteration preserved in translation. Also in 3136 "hoary-headed to Hronesness"
- Kenningar: 3133 "guardian of the treasures" = kenning for dragon; 3148 house of bone = kenning for body (see 3176 "house of flesh")
- 3120 Weoxstan's son ← ref to Wyglaf's lineage = formulaic character of language
- 3146 "winds lay still" = personification of winds. Hyperbole ; even the winds stop to lament the hero's death

Other issues:

3150 woman of the Geats = one of the few female characters in the poem, one of the six without a name
role of prophetess , foretelling a grim future
= perhaps because the Geats are without a king → critique of Beowulf's fight with dragon

3168 "of no more use to men than in ages before" = transience and vanity of worldly and material things