

Beorfestival – An Excerpt.

The following poem was recorded in Anglo-Saxon in the tenth century, but may well be older still. Enthusiasts of Norse literature will note that while keeping with the alliterative tradition, the influence of the newer rhyming school can be detected creeping in. Alliteration would continue to dominate in Anglo-Saxon verse for some centuries, until the older style was finally overcome by Chaucer's powerful stylistic juxtaposition of rhyming couplets and fart jokes.

Beorfestival is attributed to the bard Guffbad the Uncleanly, noted for his *Unquiet Annals* and famous *Beoproblem*, and is thought to have been performed at the coronation of Harald Haraldsson, who on becoming king took the name of Steve. Harald's reign was short, as he was killed in the following year in personal combat by The Rune Formerly Known as Steve, who wanted his name back.

Those wishing to learn more about the period may be interested to know that a second season of the popular Anglo-Saxon television programme, *The Only Way is Wessex*, will be appearing in the new year, as soon as the stars of the show have finished caking their faces in three inches of fake woad. Alternatively, they're still repeating Richard of the Briar's rural epic *The Gudlyf* on BBC 2.

The Saga of Beorfestival - an excerpt.

High on the Norse hills Hrothgar's longhall
Great the gathering of Vikings inside
"Mead and more maidens!" the connoisseurs call
When bolts burst open and gate gapes wide.

In the portal a monster is poised to pillage
The company curtails its copious quaffing
Every Viking is now vexed in Hrothgar's village
For spillage of offal is now in the offing.

"I desire directions," the monster now mutters
"I had hopes to holiday in the Camargue."
But the Norsemen know not the noises he utters -
All the horned heroes hear is "Rargh."

Ravenous roaring rattles the rafters
Warriors' warcries become wails of alarm
The brutal beast battles and lets out laughter
Till one bold berserker lops off its arm.

The creature cries "Curse you, bloody betrayer!"
It picks up its hand, and halts its attack.
"Two things you must know: I am Suruk the Slayer
And just you wait till my arm grows back!"

Back in the spaceship he seals up his shoulder

Broods on Beowulf's belittling blow.
Bloodlust for battle makes the beast bolder
Re-armed he rushes forth into the snow.

"Holy Thor!" howls Hrothgar, "we just copped a kicking!"
But bloody Beowulf still hungers for more.
"That monster his woeful wounds will be licking!"
He grabs his greataxe and runs out the door.

Vengeance is now the viking's sole venture
He shouts to the slayer he'd hoped to be dead
"Like me you used to be an adventurer
Until now when you take a big axe to the head!"

In snow and spacecraft they fight unrelenting
The warriors' weapons wage wintery war
Till Beowulf's horned helm is dealt a denting
"Loki's balls!" cries Beowulf, "Let's call it a draw!"

The demon decides against decapitation
Back home Beowulf bluffs that the battle was won
Hrothgar hails him with alliteration
Freed by the fiend for the fight was such fun.

Now Saga only for over-sixties is suited
Where Vikings voyaged now trails a toboggan.
But remember Suruk to whom mercy's reputed
And attest to his quest for a Norse noggin.