

Beowulf Book Notes

Beowulf by Gareth Hinds

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Author/Context

Beowulf is an epic poem composed somewhere between the middle of the 7th and the end of the 10th century A. D., about four centuries before the Norman Conquest. Composed in Anglo-Saxon/Old English, yet set in Scandinavia, it recounts the deeds of a Scandinavian prince (Beowulf) and reflects the world of 6th-century Geats, Danes and Swedes, who were rigidly feudal, highly civilized, violent, and also newly Christian. *Beowulf's* actual composition is dated at around the 8th century, because of its high degree of Christian content, paralleling the time of England's conversion from paganism to Christianity. It has also been suggested that the monks who copied *Beowulf* may have also inserted certain degrees of Christian morality into its text.

Consisting of 3,182 lines in verse, its author is unknown and believed to have been a medieval poet or *scop*, who wrote down the poem's events. The poem was probably carried from generation to generation through a spoken retelling, as Old English verse was traditionally heard rather than read, its audience being mostly illiterate. The events, set in a pagan Germanic society governed by a heroic code of honor, would have been familiar and pleasurable to its listeners. Many of the events are legendary and bear similarities to other Germanic historical and mythological literature in Old English, Norse and German.

The text of *Beowulf* exists in just one manuscript copy, which rests in the British Library in London. This 10th-century manuscript was probably copied by a late medieval monk and stored in monasteries, until their destruction and dissolution by King Henry VIII. Several 17th and 18th-century scholars, including Lawrence Nowell and the Danish Thorkelin, preserved the manuscript, although after much deterioration and a fire, much of the text was lost and left unreadable.

The revised *A Handbook to Literature* defines an epic poem as:

"A long [heroic] narrative poem in elevated style presenting characters of high position in a series of adventures which form an organic whole through their relation to a central figure of heroic proportions and through their development of episodes important in the history of a nation or race."

Epic poems tend to have certain common characteristics, including a "hero [who] is a figure of heroic stature...or legendary significance, [a] setting vast in scope, action consist[ing] of great deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage, supernatural forces-gods, angels, demons..., a style of sustained elevation and grand simplicity..., and finally [an] epic poet [who] recounts the deeds of his heroes with objectivity."

Margaret Drabble in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* says, "*Beowulf* is the most important poem in Old English and it is the first major poem in a European vernacular language,...remarkable for its sustained grandeur of tone and for the brilliance of its style."



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Plot Summary

Long ago, at the beginning of creation, two brothers, Cain and Abel lived peacefully, until Cain killed Abel, starting a blood-feud of kin-murder. This legacy of kin-murder was passed down through time, for the murder split the bloodline into two groups: Abel's, whose descendants were human, and Cain's, whose descendants were monstrous and sub-human.

The poem *Beowulf* begins with this legacy of kin-murder and revenge. In Denmark, an evil monster, Grendel, who is ritually ravaging his kingdom, torments King Hrothgar. Currently, the monster breaks into the castle and eats as many of Hrothgar's men as he can stomach each night. Beowulf, a noted and respected warrior from Geatland, arrives with a ship of his warriors to assist King Hrothgar in stopping Grendel. King Hrothgar accepts Beowulf's pledge to kill Grendel. That night, Grendel comes to the castle and kills some of the men, devouring them. Beowulf meets Grendel, and a battle ensues-- Beowulf uses no weapon against Grendel, and fighting barehanded, rips off his arm. Grendel escapes, but when he returns to his underwater lair, he dies. King Hrothgar is utterly grateful to Beowulf for killing Grendel. Grendel's arm is hung in the battlehall as a trophy of his bravery and the victory of mankind over monster.

The danger has not passed; Grendel's mother has become enraged by her son's death. She comes late one night to King Hrothgar's battlehall, grabs one man, eat him, and flees. She also retrieves her son's arm, which had been hanging in the hall as a trophy. Hrothgar is anxious and upset, and calls on Beowulf to aid them once again, offering him much gold and treasure, as well as alliance with his people, for doing battle with Grendel's mother. Beowulf travels with his men to the evil fiery lake where Grendel's mother lives. Beowulf makes a great speech about bravery, citing that God will look after him in his deed, and leaps into the lake wearing armor and carrying a great sword. Beowulf swims down through the lake for many hours, finally coming upon Grendel's mother. They fight for a brief time, Grendel's mother batters Beowulf around, but is unable to harm him through the armor. Beowulf finds his sword to be useless against Grendel's mother, and she swims to her underwater battlehall with him in tow. There, they continue to fight, until Beowulf takes a giant sword off the wall of the battlehall and cuts off her head, killing her. The sword is a magic sword, created by ancient monsters and giants at the beginning of creation. He swims to where Grendel's arm is located and finds the dead Grendel, whose head he decapitates as well, and takes with him as a trophy.

Beowulf swims back through the fiery lake to his men who are waiting for him. Hrothgar's men have already left, sure of Beowulf's defeat. Beowulf's men rejoice, and Beowulf goes back to Hrothgar's battlehall. Hrothgar names him as one of their friends and rewards him with gold and important advice about being a king. Beowulf and his men leave on their ship to go back to Geatland and King Higlac. Beowulf gives his King all the treasure and great weapons he received. Higlac rewards him with a great sword.



Higlac rules a long time, but eventually is killed in battle. His sons rule and are killed as well, and after this, Beowulf is crowned as King of Geatland. He rules long and well. Then, when he is an older man, a runaway slave comes upon a hidden tower in Geatland. An evil dragon lives in the tower, and guards a mighty golden treasure. The dragon had found the treasure many centuries ago, when it was left to be buried with an ancient king, whose people had died out. The slave steals a golden cup from the tower, awakening and enraging the dragon. The dragon leaves its tower, and the next night begins to ravage the kingdom, burning down villages, people, and Beowulf's castle.

Beowulf hears of the horror and vows to once again rid the land of a fiend. He meets the dragon during the day, with many of his warriors by his side. He fights the dragon, but is losing, because he is an old man. His weaponry is melting, and the dragon is burning him up. One of his fellow warriors and men, Wiglaf, runs in to distract the dragon. He brings his shield up to distract the dragon, while Beowulf takes his sword, and with the last of his strength, wounds the dragon. He then slits the dragon down his middle, cutting him in two. But with this victory comes Beowulf's death. The dragon has wounded him, and his poisonous venom is killing the brave Beowulf. Beowulf is dying, and Wiglaf cleans his lord and brings him jewels from the dragon's lair, as his lord has asked. All the rest of Beowulf's men have run away, fleeing when the dragon began to beat Beowulf. Beowulf leaves his kingdom's rule to Wiglaf, giving him his rings and mail. Beowulf dies.

Wiglaf calls to the men that fled, telling them that they were cowards and from this moment on will be banished from Geatland. Then he sends a messenger to the rest of Beowulf's warriors to tell them of Beowulf's death. Beowulf is burnt and his ashes buried in the Dragon's tower. There the jewels are left forevermore. And as Beowulf asked, the tower is built up high and tall, and named Beowulf's tower, so that sailors on the sea may always see the tower as a guide and know of the great Beowulf.



Major Characters

Abel: From the Old Testament, he is the brother of Cain, also killed by Cain, progenitor of mankind and humanity (goodness).

Beowulf: Mythical son of Edgetho, Higlac's nephew and follower/bound warrior. Later king of the Geats, he was born A.D. 495, traveled to Denmark to rid Hrothgar's Herot of Grendel in 515, and later accompanied Higlac on an expedition against the Franks and Frisians in 521. He became king of the Geats in 533, and reigned until his death. Hrothgar, the King of the Danes, befriended Beowulf's father, which explains Beowulf's journey to aid Hrothgar in ridding Denmark of the monster Grendel.

Beo: A Danish king, son of Shild and Healfdane's father.

Cain: From the Old Testament, 'the progenitor of all evil spirits', brother to Abel, whom he killed against the will of God, and thus was cast out of humanity and earth forever.

Edgetho: Beowulf's father, who was a renowned warrior and married to Beowulf's mother, Hrethel's only daughter.

Efor: A Geat warrior who kills the Swedish king named Ongentho, and is given Higlac's daughter as a reward.

Esher: Danish nobleman in the councils of King Hrothgar and his trusted friend. Grendel's mother kills him.

Finn: A Frisian king who married Hnaf's sister.

Freaw: A Danish princess, Hrothgar's daughter who is given in marriage to Ingeld, a Hathobard prince, in the prospect of settling the feud between the two peoples.

Grendel: A man-eating monster who terrorizes the Danish people, until he is later killed by the warrior Beowulf. Grendel lives, with his monstrous mother, at the bottom of a foul lake, which a variety of other monsters inhabit. He is descended from Cain ('the progenitor of all evil spirits'). The root of his name is perhaps related to the Old Norse grindill, meaning 'storm,' and grenja, 'to bellow,' and to other words which mean 'ground, (bottom) of a body of water,' and 'grinder (destroyer).'

Halga: A Danish prince, third son of Healfdane, a younger brother to King Hrothgar and a father to Hrothulf.

Hathcyn: A king of the Geats, Hrethel's second son, who takes the throne after accidentally killing his older brother, Herbald. He is eventually killed by Ongentho, king of the Swedes, in a war in which Ongentho is killed by a second band of Geats, led by Higlac.



Hathlaf: A Wulfing warrior killed by Edgetho. His death causes a feud, which is only settled after Edgetho has been exiled, and Hrothgar has interceded with gold.

Healfdane: Danish king, son of Beo and father to Hergar, Hrothgar, Halga and Yrs.

Herbald: A prince of the Geats and Hrethel's oldest son.

Herdred: A king of the Geats, son of Higlac and later killed by Onela of the Swedes.

Hergar: A Danish king, Healfdane's oldest son and Hrothgar's older brother and predecessor. He is father to Herwald and reigned only briefly.

Hermod: An archetypal king of Denmark, who only holds minor historical importance. He combined renowned military intelligence with the lowliest character imaginable.

Higd: Wife of Higlac, daughter of Hareth. Her name means 'thoughtful' or 'prudent'. Her mother is unmentioned, and unimportant in this period, as women were specifically and only mentioned for their fathers and husbands, or when used as peace-gifts between feuding tribes.

Higlac: A king of the Geats, son of Hrethel and younger brother to Herbald and Hathcyn. Higlac is both feudal lord to Beowulf, and his uncle.

Hnaf: A Danish king who was killed by Finn. Finn married his sister.

Hrethel: A king of the Geats, father of Higlac and grandfather of Beowulf.

Hrethric: The older of Hrothgar's two sons.

Hrothgar: A Danish king who was the second son of Healfdane. He built Herot, the great hall in Denmark and was terrorized by Grendel's violent massacres upon his people, until Beowulf's arrival and murder of Grendel. A major character, Hrothgar is portrayed as 'wise, brave, yet troubled' at the end of his life, mainly because of Grendel and Grendel's mother, in addition to memories of his famed past, and issues dealing with who will succeed the throne after his death.

Hrothmund: Younger of Hrothgar's two sons.

Hrothulf: Son of Halga, nephew of Hrothgar. He kills Hrothgar's first son and legal heir, Hrethric, and assumes the throne after Hrothgar's death.

Ingeld: A prince of the Hathobards, son of Froda. He married Freaw, a Danish princess.

Offa: A king of the Angles, the faction which stayed on the European continent and did not emigrate to Angle-land (England). He is the husband of Thrith.

Onela: A king of the Swedes and the youngest son of Ongentho. He is married to the Danish king's (Healfdane's) daughter and assumes the Swedish throne after the death of his older brother. He later invaded Geatland after his two nephews fled to join



Herdred, the king of the Geats. Onela then killed the oldest nephew but the younger lived. Later, Beowulf ruled the Geats, and invaded Sweden with Onela's younger nephew, who then killed Onela and ruled Sweden.

Ongentho: A king of the Swedes, a famous warrior and father of Onela. He killed Hathcyn and was later killed by a group of Geats led by Higlac.

Shild: A king of the Danes, father to Beo, grandfather to Healfdane and great-grandfather to Hrothgar. A mythological character with parallel personages in Scandinavian mythology (such as Skjoldr related to religious and agricultural cycles).

Thrith: Wife of Offa, king of the Angles. She was a 'haughty, violent young woman' who was 'tamed and gentled' by her stronger husband upon marriage. No further explanation is given for this or her origin.

Unferth: A courtier of Hrothgar, renowned warrior and linguistically talented Dane. Son to Ecglaf, he lends his sword, Hrunting, to Beowulf for his battle with Grendel's mother.

Wayland: A celebrated mythic smith recounted in many Germanic poems of the period. As Raffel states directly, 'to ascribe a sword or a mail shirt to his gifted hammer was to evoke an automatic association of wonderful workmanship and, in most cases, also of wonderful men and deeds.'

Welthow: Queen to Hrothgar and mother to his sons, Hrethric and Hrothmund. She is remembered in the poem for her diplomatic yet fated speeches given at pivotal moments in the story.

Wiglaf: A Geat warrior who is also somehow related to Beowulf. Son of Wexstan, he is thought to be partially Swedish. He travels with Beowulf when he fights the dragon, and is the only one of Beowulf's band who comes to his aid during the battle. He becomes king presumably after Beowulf's death.

Yrs: Healfdane's daughter. Raffel uses her name in his translation, although it is not actually provided due to gaps present in the text. He believes that the character is most accurately and historically identified as Yrs.

Hengest: A warrior, a Dane, chief lieutenant to Hnaf and eventually, his successor.

Siegmund: Vel's son, and father and uncle to Fitla. He seems to have married his sister.

Wexstan: Father of Wiglaf and somehow related to Beowulf.

Wulf: A warrior, a Geat and brother to Efor.

Wulfgar: A herald of Hrothgar. No explanation related to lineage is given save the reference that he is a 'prince born to the Swedes'.



Brecca: Chief of a tribe of unknown location or origin, who was a companion and friend of Beowulf. Son of Bonstan.

Grendel's Mother: The mother of Grendel, the monster, progeny of the cursed line of Cain. Living in the underground lair of fire, she avenges her son's murder by Hrothgar's best advisor, and is eventually murdered by Beowulf.

Dragon: A dragon who lived hundreds of years inside a castle guarding ancient treasure until disturbed by a fleeing slave. It's wrath caused it to ravage Geatland, burning up entire villages with its fiery breath. It is finally killed in a battle with King Beowulf, in which both he and the dragon perish.

Minor Characters

Emer: Offa's son.

Ermlaf: A nobleman, a Dane and Esher's younger brother.

Fitla: Siegmund's son and nephew. Siegmund seems to have married his sister.

Froda: Chief of the Hathobards, father to Ingeld.

Garmund: father to Offa.

Hama: A personage in the cycle of tales relating to Ermlac. What relation or role he might have had to Beowulf's tale is unclear.

Hareth: Father to Higd, respected and wealthy.

Hemming: A kinsman of Offa.

Hengest: A warrior, a Dane, chief lieutenant to Hnaf and eventually, his successor.

Herward: Son of Hergar.

Hondshew: A warrior, a Geat, and a companion to Beowulf during his voyage to Denmark and King Hrothgar's court. He is killed and eaten by Grendel when Beowulf and the Geats stay in Herot to wait for Grendel's attack.

Siegmund: Vel's son, and father and uncle to Fitla. He seems to have married his sister.

Swerting: Grandfather of Higlac.

Vels: Father to Siegmund. His name is derived from 'Volsung' of the Norse saga.

Wexstan: Father of Wiglaf and somehow related to Beowulf.



Wulf: A warrior, a Geat and brother to Efor.

Wulfgar: A herald of Hrothgar. No explanation related to lineage is given save the reference that he is a 'prince born to the Swedes'.



Objects/Places

Denmark: Land of the Danes, located in Eastern Europe.

Franks: A West German people, residing near the Rhine and the Meuse rivers. A Frankish tribe conquered Gaul, about A.D. 500, and gave its name to modern France.

Frisians: West German people, living in what is now northwestern Holland.

Geats: A people of southern Sweden, the Gotar, conquered by the Swedish kingdom in about the 6th century A.D.

Hathobards: A seafaring German tribe, often associated with the Lombards, sometimes with the Erulians.

Jutes: A Frisian people or tribe related to the Frisians.

Wulfings: A Germanic tribe, geographically located somewhere south of the Baltic Sea. Welthow, wife to Hrothgar, is thought to have been a Wulfing.

Beowulf's Tower: A tower built after Beowulf's death where his ashes are buried.

Grendel's mother's battle-hall: The underwater mead-hall where Beowulf defeats Grendel's mother.

Herot: The battle-hall built by the Danish King Hrothgar, to house his men, and show off his victories and fame.

Hrunting: Unferth's sword from ancient times.

Nagling: Beowulf's sword's name.

Welthow's necklace: A necklace given to Higd by Beowulf.

Swedes: The blanket term for many different tribes and peoples living in and around what is now modern day Sweden, although not relegated to only these peoples. The Geats were themselves conquered by the Swedish Kingdom at around the 6th century A.D.

Danes: The tribe later traced to the present inhabitants of Denmark. At the time of the events of the Beowulf poem, Hrothgar is the King of Denmark and it is a stable kingdom.

Lair: The fiery underground home of Grendel and his mother, which exists in the old battlehall of a castle, beneath a lake.



Quotes

Quote 1: "His father's warrior were wound round his heart/ With golden rings, bound to their prince/ By his father's treasure. So young men build/ The future, wisely open-handed in peace,/ Protected in war; so warriors earn/ Their fame, and wealth is shaped with a sword." pg. 24, lines 20-25

Quote 2: "Nor have I ever seen,/ Out of all the men on earth, one greater/ Than has come with you; no commoner carries/ Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,/ Are both lies." pg. 31, lines 248-250

Quote 3: "recalling/ The Almighty making of the earth, shaping/ These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,/ Then proudly setting the sun and moon/ To glow across the land and light it;/...made quick with life, with each/ Of the nations who now move on its face." pg. 26, lines 91-98

Quote 4: "Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend/Grendel who haunted the moors, the wild/Marshes, and made his home in a hell./Not hell but hell on earth. He was spawned in that slime/Of Cain, murderous creatures banished/ By God, punished forever for the crime/ Of Abel's death." pg. 26, lines 101-108

Quote 5: "Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king/ Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door/ By hell-forged hands, His misery leaped/ The seas, was told and sung in all/ Men's ears" pg. 28, lines 147-151

Quote 6: "Grendel's hatred began,/...the monster relished his savage war/ On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud/ Alive, seeking no peace, offering/ No truce, accepting no settlement, no price/ In gold or land, and paying the living/ For one crime only with another. No one/ Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:/ That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,/ Stalked Hrothgar's warriors." pg. 28, lines 151-160

Quote 7: "They arrived with their mail shirts/ Glittering, silver-shining links/ Clanking an iron song as they came./ Sea-weary still, they set their broad,/ Battle-hardened shields in rows/ Along the wall , then stretched themselves/ On Herot's benches. Their armor rang;/ Their ash-wood spears stood in a line./ Gray-tipped and straight: the Geats' war-gear/ Were honored weapons." pg. 33, lines 321-330

Quote 8: "They have seen my strength for themselves,/ Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,/ Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove/ Five great giants into chains, chased/ All of that race from the earth. I swam/ In the blackness of night, hunting monsters/ Out of the ocean, and killing them one/ By one; death was my errand and the fate/ They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called/ Together, and I've come." pg. 36, lines 417-426



Quote 9: "And if death does take me, send the hammered/ Mail of my armor to Higlac, return/ The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he/ From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!" pg. 37, lines 452-455

Quote 10: "Beowulf, you've come to us in friendship, and because/ Of the reception your father found at court./ Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,/ Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior: /Your father's countrymen were afraid of war,/ If he returned to his home, and they turned him away." pg. 37, lines 457-462

Quote 11: "I bought the end of Edgetho's/ Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean's/ Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore/ He'd keep that peace." pg. 38, lines 470-473

Quote 12: "How many times have my men,.../ sworn to stay after dark/ And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords./ And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering/ With new light would be drenched with blood, the benches/ Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend's/ Savage assault-and my soldiers would be fewer/ Still death taking more and more." pg. 38, lines 480-488

Quote 13: "But the truth/ Is simple: no man swims in the sea/ As I can, no strength is a match for mine:" pg. 40, lines 533-534

Quote 14: "my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal/ Woven across my breast, saved me/ From death. A monster seized me, drew me/ Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws/ Tight in my flesh. But fate let me/ Find its heart with my sword, hack myself/ Free; I fought that beast's last battle,/ Left it floating lifeless in the sea." pg. 40, lines 551-558

Quote 15: "God's bright beacon/ Appeared in the east, the water lay still,/ And at last I could see the land, wind-swept/ Cliff-walls to the coast. Fate saves/ The living when they drive away death by themselves!" pg. 41, lines 569-574

Quote 16: "When we crossed the sea, my comrades/ And I, I already knew that all/ My purpose was this: to win the good will/ Of your people or die in battle, pressed/ In Grendel's fierce grip. Let me live in greatness/ And courage, or here in this hall welcome/ My death!" pg. 43, lines 632-638

Quote 17: "Grendel is no braver, no stronger/ Than I am! I could kill him with my sword; I shall not,/ Easy as it would be. This fiend is a bold/ And famous fighter, but his claws and teeth.../Beating at my sword blade, would be helpless. I will meet him/ With my hands empty-unless his heart/ Fails him, seeing a soldier waiting/ Weaponless, unafraid. Let God in His wisdom/ Extend His hand where He wills, reward/ Whom he chooses!" pg. 44, lines 677-687

Quote 18: "He strode quickly across the inlaid/ Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes/ Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome/ Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall/ Crowded with sleeping warriors,.../ And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,/ Intended to tear the life from those bodies/ By morning." pg. 46, lines 724-732



Quote 19: "the Danes started/ In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible/
Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang/ In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain/
And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's/ Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms/
Of him who of all the men on earth/ Was the strongest." pg. 47-48, lines 783-790

Quote 20: "Hanging high/ From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was/ the
monster's/ Arm, claw, and shoulder and all." pg. 49, lines 833-836

Quote 21: "gaped with no sense/ of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,/ Went tracing
his bloody footprints, his beaten/ And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake/ Where he'd
dragged his corpselike way, doomed/ And already weary of his vanishing life." pg. 50,
lines 841-846

Quote 22: "the swirling/ Surf had covered his death, hidden/ Deep in murky darkness his
miserable/ End, as hell opened to receive him." pg. 50, lines 849-852

Quote 23: "His vanity swelled him so vile and rank/ That he could hear no voices but his
own. He deserved/ to suffer and die. But Beowulf was a prince/ Well-loved, followed in
friendship, not fear;" pg. 52, lines 911-914

Quote 24: "Let God be thanked! Grendel's terrible/ Anger hung over our heads too long,/
Dropping down misery; but the Almighty makes miracles/ When he pleases, wonder
after wonder, and this world/ Rests in his hands. I had given up hope,/ Exhausted
prayer, expected nothing/ But misfortune forever." pg. 52, lines 928-934

Quote 25: "not even the sharpest of swords could have cut/ It [Grendel's hand] through,
broken it off the monster's/ Arm and ended its life, as Beowulf/ Had done armed only
with his bare hands." pg. 54, lines 987-990

Quote 26: "Wanting to stay, we go,/ All beings here on God's earth, wherever/ It is
written that we go, taking our bodies/ From death's cold bed to unbroken sleep/ That
follows life's feast." pg. 54-55, lines 1004-1008

Quote 27: "and for the one/ Murdered by Grendel gold was carefully/ Paid." pg. 56, lines
1053-1055

Quote 28: "Wear these bright jewels, beloved Beowulf;/ Enjoy them,...oh fortunate
young/ Warrior; grow richer, let your fame and your strength/ Go hand in hand; and lend
these two boys/ Your wise and gentle heart! I'll remember your/ Kindness. Your glory is
too great to forget/...Spread your blessed protection/ Across my son, and my king's
son!" pg. 61-62, lines 1216-1221, 1225-1227

Quote 29: "She'd brooded on her loss, misery had brewed/ In her heart, that female
horror, Grendel's/ Mother, living in the murky cold lake/ Assigned her since Cain had
killed his only/ Brother, slain his father's son/ With an angry sword." pg. 63, lines 1258-
1263



Quote 30: " She's taken revenge for your victory over Grendel./ For your strength, your mighty grip, and that monster's/ Death." pg. 65, lines 1334-1336

Quote 31: " Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees/ Growing out over their lake are all covered/ With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike/ Roots that reach as far as the water/ And help keep it dark. At night that lake/ Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,/ No wisdom reaches such depths." pg. 66, lines 1361-1367

Quote 32: "Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all/ To avenge our friends, not mourn them forever./ Each of us will come to the end of this life/ On earth; he who can earn it should fight/ For the glory of his name; fame after death/ Is the noblest of goals. Arise, guardian/ Of this kingdom, let us go, as quickly as we can,/ And have a look at this lady monster." pg. 67, lines 1384-1391

Quote 33: "she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,/ And there...[not] anything in the lake [could] attack him through/ The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant/ Light burned all around him, the lake/ Itself like a fiery flame...he swung his sword/ ...straight at her head; the iron sang its fierce song" pg. 71, lines 1512-1521

Quote 34: "like ice when the world's/ Eternal Lord loosens invisible/ Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost/ As only He can, He who rules/ Time and seasons, He who is truly/ God." pg. 73, lines 11607-1612

Quote 35: "Our eternal Lord/ Grants some men wisdom, some wealth, makes others/ Great. The world is God's, He allows/ A man to grow famous, and his family rich,/ Gives him land and towns to rule/ And delight in...and who/ In human unwisdom, in the middle of such power,/ Remembers that it will all end, and too soon?/ Prosperity...nothing/ Troubles him, no sickness, not passing time,/ No sorrows, no sudden war breaking/ Out of nowhere, but all the world turns/ When he spins it. How can he know when he sins?" pg. 77, lines 1728-1739

Quote 36: "the Devil's dark urgings wound him, for he can't/ Remember how he clung to the rotting wealth/ Of this world, how he clawed to keep it, how he earned/ No honor, no glory, in giving golden/ Rings, how he forgot the future glory/ God gave him at his birth, and forgetting did not care." pg. 78, lines 1747-1752

Quote 37: "All-knowing God/ Must have sent you such words; nothing so wise/ From a warrior so young has ever reached/ These ancient ears...If your lord,/ Hrethel's son, is slain by a spear,/ Or falls sick and dies...I say that the Geats/ Could do no better, find no man better/ Suited to be king, keeper of warriors/ and their treasure, than you..., Belovèd Beowulf." pg. 80-81, lines 1841-1852

Quote 38: "She and that ripening soldier will be married/...Hoping that his quarrel with the Hathobards can be settled/ By a woman. He's wrong: how man wars/ Have been put to rest in a prince's bed?/ Few. A bride can bring a little/ Peace, make spears silent for a time,/ But not long." pg. 86, lines 2025-2032



Quote 39: "His pouch hung/ At his side, a huge bag sewn/ From a dragon's skin, worked with a devil's/ Skill." pg. 88, lines 2085-2087

Quote 40: "Beowulf had brought his king/ Horses and treasure-as a man must,/ Not weaving nets of malice for his comrades,/ Preparing their death in the dark, with secret,/ Cunning tricks." pg. 91, lines 2165-2169

Quote 41: "So Edgeth's son proved himself,/ Did as a famous soldier must do/ If glory is what he seeks: not killing his comrades/ In drunken rages, his heart not savage,/ But guarding God's gracious gift, his strength,/ Using it only in war, and then using it/ Bravely." pg. 91, lines 2177-2183

Quote 42: "He was someone's slave, had been beaten/ By his masters, had run from all men's sight,/ But with no place to hide; then he found the hidden/ Path, and used it." pg. 92, lines 2223-2226

Quote 43: "counting off/ the hours till the Almighty's candle went out,/ And evening came, and wild with anger/ It could fly burning across the land, killing/ And destroying with its breath. Then the sun was gone,/ And its heart was glad; glowing with rage/...impatient to repay/ Its enemies. The people suffered." pg. 95, lines 2302-2309

Quote 44: "when he comes to me/ I mean to stand, not run from his shooting/ Flames, stand till fate decides/ Which of us wins. My heart is firm,/ My hands calm: I need no hot/ Words." pg. 101, lines 2524-2529

Quote 45: "He took us/ For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill/ This monster himself, our mighty king,/ Fight this battle alone and unaided,/...By almighty God,/ I'd rather burn than see/ Flames swirling around my lord...I swear that nothing/ He ever did deserved an end/ Like this, dying miserably and alone,/ Butchered by this savage beast." pg. 105, lines 2641-2644, 2650-2652, 2656-2659

Quote 46: "My days/ have gone as fate willed,.../ As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,/ Seeking no lying wars. I can leave/ This life happy; I can die, here,/ Knowing the Lord of all life has never/ Watched me wash my sword in blood/ Born of my own family." pg. 108, lines 2735-6, 2638-2743

Quote 47: "The old man's mouth was silent, spoke/ No more, had said as much as it could;/ He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul/ Left his flesh, flew to glory." pg. 110, lines 2817-2820

Quote 48: "stretched in front/ Of its tower, a strange, scaly beast/ Gleaming a dozen colors dulled and/ Scorched from its own heat. From end/ To end fifty feet, it had flown/ In the silent darkness, a swift traveler/ Tasting the air, then gliding down/ To its den." pg. 117, lines 3038-3045

Quote 49: "For ten long days they made his monument,/ Sealed his ashes in walls as straight/ And high as wise and willing hands could raise them.../And the treasures they'd

taken were left there too,/ ...Ground back in the earth." pg. 121, lines 3159-3163, 3165-3167



Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan Ritual

Christian/Pagan Ritual 1: Beowulf is an essentially pagan poem. Its composition occurred at the same time as England's conversion to Christianity. When Prince Beo is born, it is "allowed by the grace of god/...Lord of all life, Ruler/ Of glory". The poem combines direct references to the Old Testament with pagan references, quite often:

"[R]ecalling/ The Almighty making of the earth, shaping/ These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,/ Then proudly setting the sun and moon/ To glow across the land and light it;/...made quick with life, with each/ Of the nations who now move on its face." pg. 26, lines 91-98

Christian/Pagan Ritual 2: Beowulf's words in this final address reference fate,-that things will turn out as they will. The pagan concept of fate was called *wyrd*, and was a persistent part of later Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry, which much like Beowulf, combined the two opposing ideas.

Christian/Pagan Ritual 3: Beowulf's battle with nine sea-monsters in his youth, reference both fate, or *wyrd*, and the Christian name of God, as being responsible for assisting him. When he is fighting with the first sea-monster, "fate let me/ Find its heart [monster's] with my sword". Later, upon his arrival on the Finnish coast:

"God's bright beacon/ Appeared in the east, the water lay still,/ And at last I could see the land, wind-swept/ Cliff-walls to the coast. Fate saves/ The living when they drive away death by themselves!" pg. 41, lines 569-574

Christian/Pagan Ritual 4: Hrothgar attributes Beowulf's success directly to Christ, and more so, to an end of a war between "men and devils, warriors and monstrous fiends".

"Let God be thanked! Grendel's terrible/ Anger hung over our heads too long,/ Dropping down misery; but the Almighty makes miracles/ When he pleases, wonder after wonder, and this world/ Rests in his hands. I had given up hope,/ Exhausted prayer, expected nothing/ But misfortune forever." pg. 52, lines 928-934

Christian/Pagan Ritual 5: Homer combines interesting references to the Old Testament and Christian dogma. The emphasis on revenge refers to "An eye for an eye", from the Old Testament, while Beowulf also speaks of the finiteness of life and importance of the soul after death.

Christian/Pagan Ritual 6: Hrothgar gives a warning to Beowulf not to become too content in peace or prosperity; not to take any of his power for granted. He suggests that Beowulf remember that all things on earth are ruled by God, that sin is possible and always present, that humans can never think themselves too proud, because plagues like Grendel, brought on by humankind's own sin, will always return to challenge the controlled order of existence.



Christian/Pagan Ritual 7: Hrothgar's warning and advice to Beowulf combine clear Christian morality of generosity, giving, lack of pride and greed, with the rituals of gold-giving practiced in kingdoms at this time.

Christian/Pagan Ritual 8: *"So Edgeth's son proved himself,/ Did as a famous soldier must do/ If glory is what he seeks: not killing his comrades/ In drunken rages, his heart not savage,/ But guarding God's gracious gift, his strength,/ Using it only in war, and then using it/ Bravely."* pg. 91, lines 2177-2183

Christian/Pagan Ritual 9: Beowulf says that fate will decide who shall win the battle. Fate is also referenced by Beowulf earlier in relation to his doings with the dragon.

"[W]hen he comes to me/ I mean to stand, not run from his shooting/ Flames, stand till fate decides/ Which of us wins. My heart is firm,/ My hands calm: I need no hot/ Words." pg. 101, lines 2524-2529

Christian/Pagan Ritual 10: The ritual that Wiglaf performs over the dying Beowulf, to revive him with water, is akin to Baptism.



Topic Tracking: Good and Evil (Light and Dark)

Good and Evil 1: Grendel's massacre of the Danes extends beyond his bloody hunger. Grendel is mankind's enemy and the physical embodiment of evil, of humanity gone wrong. He does not follow the codes of feudal society: allegiance, honor, loyalty, and community, the core values of civilization among the Danes.

"Grendel's hatred began,/...the monster relished his savage war/ On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud/ Alive, seeking no peace, offering/ No truce, accepting no settlement, no price/ In gold or land, and paying the living/ For one crime only with another. No one/ Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:/ That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,/ Stalked Hrothgar's warriors." pg. 28, lines 151-160

Light and darkness are closely associated throughout the poem, symbolizing the forces of good and evil, heaven and hell. Human civilization, in the form of heroic warriors, is often associated with light: the halls are illuminated with rejoicing and treasure. Grendel's lair is dark and gray, and he only hunts at night, in darkness.

Good and Evil 2: *"They have seen my strength for themselves,/ Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,/ Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove/ Five great giants into chains, chased/ All of that race from the earth. I swam/ In the blackness of night, hunting monsters/ Out of the ocean, and killing them one/ By one; death was my errand and the fate/ They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called/ Together, and I've come." pg. 36, lines 417-426*

Here, darkness is associated with Beowulf's previous battles. He is brave and strong enough to enter the world of darkness to fight and conquer evil on its own turf.

Good and Evil 3: *"How many times have my men,.../ sworn to stay after dark/ And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords./ And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering/ With new light would be drenched with blood, the benches/ Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend's/ Savage assault-and my soldiers would be fewer/ Still death taking more and more." pg. 38, lines 480-488*

In this description of Herot after Grendel's massacres, a definite contrast of light and dark imagery is presented. Hrothgar describes the mead-hall, "glittering/ With new light would be drenched with blood." Daylight is associated with humanity's rule. Darkness and night is associated with evil and Grendel's bloody raids. Hrothgar's warriors face the darkness and the evil, but when the light of day comes, only their blood remains.

Good and Evil 4: Light and dark imagery is contrasted in the description of Grendel's eyes in the night.



Good and Evil 5: *"the swirling/ Surf had covered his death, hidden/ Deep in murky darkness his miserable/ End, as hell opened to receive him."* pg. 50, lines 849-852

Darkness, Grendel's death, and his evil nature are directly connected. Repeated throughout the text, the connection between darkness and evil is strongest in the physical description of Grendel's lair, where his body was deposited. A sense of relief and peace returns, as hell receives Grendel's body.

Good and Evil 6: *"Wanting to stay, we go,/ All beings here on God's earth, wherever/ It is written that we go, taking our bodies/ From death's cold bed to unbroken sleep/ That follows life's feast."* pg. 54-55, lines 1004-1008

Here the poet discusses Grendel's inability to escape from life and death's eternal cycle. The poet expresses that this is constant for humans as well: "death's cold bed to unbroken sleep/ That follows life's feast". Life's cycle of *light* and *dark* repeats: *feasting* occurs in daylight, *sleeping* occurs in darkness.

Good and Evil 7: The history of Finn and the Danes is mostly one of a blood-feud, just as the story of Cain and Abel is one of treachery, deception, and kin-murder. The telling of the oral poem is an allegory for a Biblical lesson. Eventually the blood-feud must end. In this case, the Danes finally avenge Hnaf's murder by murdering the treacherous Finn and his people, only to bring on the attacks of the monster Grendel. The feud finally ends when the monster is slain by Beowulf. The telling of this story is significant as the celebration of Beowulf's victory, and the victory of light over dark, good over evil.

Good and Evil 8: Grendel's mother's home is a festering lair of hell, ignited by the legacy of kin-murder and greed. It has no foreseeable end; it is black, symbolizing fear of the unknown after death, a common medieval theme.

"Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees/ Growing out over their lake are all covered/ With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike/ Roots that reach as far as the water/ And help keep it dark. At night that lake/ Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,/ No wisdom reaches such depths." pg. 66, lines 1361-1367

Good and Evil 9: In this passage, the symbols of flaming light, unity in the rings of Beowulf's mail, his "ring-marked" sword, and the safety of the man-made meadand battle hall, all foreshadow Beowulf's victory over Grendel's mother.

Good and Evil 10: The allegory of the slave, abused by those who have power above him, who turned to the hidden path, or hidden evil (awakening a dragon unintentionally who terrorizes the land) to escape, parallels the story of Cain and Abel. The slave uses the cup to make peace with his master, but causes strife through his act. Like the slave, Cain felt oppressed by those who had power above him, and turned to evil to survive.

Good and Evil 11: Beowulf has upheld his promise as a warrior. He has not shed kin-blood, and has worked to end kin-blood feuds, started by Cain and Abel, and perpetuated through Hrethel and Grendel.



Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters

Who is human, who is a monster, who has superhuman abilities? Where does the line blur between monster/human? This is related to the lineage of Cain and Abel, and is not directly related to good and evil. It regards physical strength and supernatural ability/tendencies.

Men and Monsters 1: Grendel is considered a monster:

"Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend/Grendel who haunted the moors, the wild/Marshes, and made his home in a hell./Not hell but hell on earth. He was spawned in that slime/Of Cain, murderous creatures banished/ By God, punished forever for the crime/ Of Abel's death." pg. 26, lines 101-108

Men and Monsters 2: Beowulf is human but also has the strength, "grip," of thirty men. He is also super-human, and is some ways, almost a monster, but in a different sense than Grendel:

"They have seen my strength for themselves,/ Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,/ Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove/ Five great giants into chains, chased/ All of that race from the earth. I swam/ In the blackness of night, hunting monsters/ Out of the ocean, and killing them one/ By one; death was my errand and the fate/ They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called/ Together, and I've come." pg. 36, lines 417-426

Beowulf's strength, his primal desire for blood and violence, and his tales of killing do not seem that different to Grendel's massacres at Herot. Beowulf makes himself the equal of Grendel, and presents this parallel by declaring they are 'called together.'

Men and Monsters 3: Beowulf's power in fighting monsters is considered supernatural, but sometimes he needs the assistance of his sword or mail (he is still human and not immortal). Describing his battle with a sea-monster in his youth he says,

"my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal/ Woven across my breast, saved me/ From death. A monster seized me, drew me/ Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws/ Tight in my flesh. But fate let me/ Find its heart with my sword, hack myself/ Free; I fought that beast's last battle,/ Left it floating lifeless in the sea." pg. 40, lines 551-558

Beowulf's tells this tale the night before he will face the monster, Grendel. Recounted in the mead-hall, it is foreshadowing of his battle with Grendel, and of his future success.

Men and Monsters 4: Beowulf does not need any weapons to fight the monster Grendel. This elevates him above other humans, and further reveals monstrous qualities; Grendel does not need weapons to fight either. Beowulf, unlike Grendel, and like a human warrior, places his faith in God.



"Grendel is no braver, no stronger/ Than I am! I could kill him with my sword; I shall not,/ Easy as it would be. This fiend is a bold/ And famous fighter, but his claws and teeth.../Beating at my sword blade, would be helpless. I will meet him/ With my hands empty-unless his heart/ Fails him, seeing a soldier waiting/ Weaponless, unafraid. Let God in His wisdom/ Extend His hand where He wills, reward/ Whom he chooses!" pg. 44, lines 677-687

Men and Monsters 5: Grendel is immune to man-made weaponry, and he has bewitched all blades. He cannot be wounded or cut through the human standard of power, and is defeated only by Beowulf, who faces him without a sword.

Men and Monsters 6: *"not even the sharpest of swords could have cut/ It [Grendel's hand] through, broken it off the monster's/ Arm and ended its life, as Beowulf/ Had done armed only with his bare hands."* pg. 54, lines 987-990

Men and Monsters 7: *"She'd brooded on her loss, misery had brewed/ In her heart, that female horror, Grendel's/ Mother, living in the murky cold lake/ Assigned her since Cain had killed his only/ Brother, slain his father's son/ With an angry sword."* pg. 63, lines 1258-1263

Grendel's mother is a supreme monster, a "female horror" left from the days of Cain and Abel. She thirsts to avenge her son's death by Beowulf's hand, revenge repaid from the original biblical murder. Grendel is a descendent of the sub-human Cain, and Beowulf, a descendent of Abel. A cycle of revenge killings has been perpetuated. Within this plot, a blood-feud between the Geats and the Danes has finally (in Section 3) ended, and replaced by peace and friendship (the two sides united in fighting Grendel). There is foreshadowing that more blood will be shed and that the cycle of revenge will continue.

Timeline

MONSTER kills HUMAN

Cain kills Abel

|

MONSTER kills HUMAN

Grendel kills Danes in Herot

|

HUMAN kills MONSTER

Beowulf kills Grendel

|

MONSTER kills HUMAN

Grendel's mother kills Esher

|

HUMAN kills MONSTER

Beowulf kills Grendel's mother

|

HUMAN and MONSTER kill each other

Beowulf and Dragon kill each other



Men and Monsters 8: Beowulf is more than just human. He is able to sink through the waves of a lake, down to its bottom, and fight for hours without breathing. Also, Grendel's mother cannot harm him through his miraculous armor. The armor, with its rings, is a symbol of the joined friendship and peace between the Geats and Danes. Beowulf is able to fight Grendel's mother and win because of his monstrous strength, but also because he has the protection of his comrades' armor, and the support (and strength) of the two tribes' bond.

Men and Monsters 9: *"His pouch hung/ At his side, a huge bag sewn/ From a dragon's skin, worked with a devil's/ Skill."* pg. 88, lines 2085-2087

Grendel's pouch was made of dragon's skin, and was said to have been "worked with a devil's skill."

Men and Monsters 10: Monsters, including the dragon, Grendel's mother, and Grendel, can only attack and eat men in their mead-halls at night. Related to light and dark imagery, their power is derived from *evil*, and functions in the dark. In contrast, all heroes and warriors leave to fight the monsters in daylight, when the Lord reigns.



Topic Tracking: Treasure

Treasure 1: In 8th century feudal society, the possession of treasure, gold, famous swords, and mail/helmets regulated loyalty, allegiance and protection. Warriors who fought for a particular Lord, such as Shild, could be guaranteed a certain amount of treasure and spoils from war, raids, and different battles, in return for their service. The Lord with the most treasure, bravery and fame would become King; the throne was then passed down to young generations of great warriors. Thus, Beo, Shild's son, inherited the throne along with his father's wealth. The entire system was based on a Germanic heroic code of honor, which designated bravery, strength, wealth, and honor as desired values. A King was a "ring-giver," because gold often came in rings, also a symbol of loyalty or sacred vows.

Just so, Hrothgar's lieutenant, upon seeing Beowulf, can tell he is wise and honorable, from his weapons:

"Nor have I ever seen,/ Out of all the men on earth, one greater/ Than has come with you; no commoner carries/ Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,/ Are both lies." pg. 31, lines 248-250

Treasure 2: The mark of success in battle, strength and prowess, is shining, beautiful armor, silver mail and gold swords. The more brilliant their weapons were thought to be, passed down from their forefathers and past battles, the more honorable and noble the warriors were.

"They arrived with their mail shirts/ Glittering, silver-shining links/ Clanking an iron song as they came./ Sea-weary still, they set their broad,/ Battle-hardened shields in rows/ Along the wall , then stretched themselves/ On Herot's benches. Their armor rang;/ Their ash-wood spears stood in a line,/ Gray-tipped and straight: the Geats' war-gear/ Were honored weapons." pg. 33, lines 321-330

Treasure 3: Weapons and swords are the emblem of feudal society, justice and organization by men. Neither Grendel nor Beowulf need swords to battle each other.

Treasure 4: Gold is used as a peace offering by King Hrothgar after Beowulf's father, Edgetho, killed a Wulfing warrior. Hrothgar makes peace with the Wulfings, and therefore the Geatish line is indebted to the Danish court. This explains why Beowulf immediately travels to Denmark to rid Herot of Grendel.

"I bought the end of Edgetho's/ Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean's/ Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore/ He'd keep that peace." pg. 38, lines 470-473

Treasure 5: It is significant that Hrothgar's queen, Welthow, pours mead for each warrior out of a jeweled cup belonging to Hrothgar's kingdom. Gold and treasure such as this are the property of Hrothgar, and the act of pouring wine from such a cup signifies the



Danish warriors' and now the Geatish warriors' allegiance to Hrothgar in battle. Welthow is described as a "bracelet-wearing queen" (ll. 622), which also relates directly to her role as a peacemaker; much like treasure, women were often married off between feuding tribes to make peace. Beowulf invokes his promise to Hrothgar after her words, sealing their transaction:

"When we crossed the sea, my comrades/ And I, I already knew that all/ My purpose was this: to win the good will/ Of your people or die in battle, pressed/ In Grendel's fierce grip. Let me live in greatness/ And courage, or here in this hall welcome/ My death!" pg. 43, lines 632-638

Treasure 6: Gold was paid to the warrior for killings supported by a King or a state.

Treasure 7: Beowulf used his bare hands to kill Grendel, but fights Grendel's mother wearing his mail and armor, Hrothgar's helmet, and carrying Unferth's sword, Hrunting.

Treasure 8: Treasure owned by generations of warriors in a particular tribe can often breed conflict. Beowulf's example when speaking of the Danes and Hathobards, is that some young warrior will see a Dane using a sword or helmet that once belonged to his father or Lord, and want to start a war because of it.



Sections 1-6 (lines 1-455)

Beowulf begins with the poet recounting the ancient Danish lineage. Shild, who was an abandoned child, traveled to Denmark, and now reigns as a glorious Danish king and a great warrior. He has a son, Beo, who becomes prince of Denmark, through God's grace. Shild's warriors are bound and loyal to Beo, the new prince, through the generational passing of Shild's treasure and swords:

"His father's warrior were wound round his heart/ With golden rings, bound to their prince/ By his father's treasure. So young men build/ The future, wisely open-handed in peace,/ Protected in war; so warriors earn/ Their fame, and wealth is shaped with a sword." pg. 24, lines 20-25

Topic Tracking: Treasure 1

Shild dies and is given a glorious burial, sent adrift onto the sea in a ring-prowed fighting ship heaped with gold. Beo is king of the Danes, who rules as long and honorably as his father. He begets a son, Healfdane, who in turn rules until the end of his life. Healfdane has three sons and princes, Hergar, Hrothgar, Halga the Good, and one daughter, Yrs, who marries Onela, king of the Swedes. Hrothgar takes the throne and rules as king, first building a great mead-hall, Herot, which reached high toward heaven.

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 1

Herot is a famous hall, filled with song and treasure. The poet (or scop) sings of first creation:

"[R]ecalling/ The Almighty making of the earth, shaping/ These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,/ Then proudly setting the sun and moon/ To glow across the land and light it;/...made quick with life, with each/ Of the nations who now move on its face." pg. 26, lines 91-98

But an evil monster, Grendel, lives in the hellish darkness near Herot. Grendel is the descendant of Cain, murderous brother and killer of Abel, cursed to hell and from the light of God for all time. The evil that was spawned from Cain became spirits, monsters, fiends, goblins and giants, forging the blood feud between mankind and monster.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 1

The first night after Grendel has been lurking near Herot, he makes his first raid, creeping luridly into the mead-hall, slaughtering thirty men, and carrying their bodies off to his lair. Hrothgar and the Danes mourn sorrowfully for the deaths of their kinsmen. The next night Grendel comes again, killing and eating all the Danes in Herot who do not flee from the hall. Herot is left empty for twelve years. King Hrothgar and his people are left to grieve over the triumph of evil:



"Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king/ Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door/ By hell-forged hands, His misery leaped/ The seas, was told and sung in all/ Men's ears"
pg. 28, lines 147-151

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 1

Grendel does not dare to touch King Hrothgar's throne though; it is protected by God. The warriors among the Danes debate possible solutions, and make pagan vows, hoping for anything to help stop Grendel's massacres. The poet tells us that those cast into danger must have faith in God, without doubt, to receive peace.

The great Beowulf, nephew and feudal warrior to Higlac, King of the Geats, hears of Grendel's massacres. Beowulf, who is the strongest and most powerful of the Geats, prepares a boat to sail to Denmark with fourteen of his best warriors. He lands on the shores of Denmark, and is greeted by one of Hrothgar's lieutenants, to whom he expresses his desire to destroy Grendel, and to ask Hrothgar for his permission. Beowulf and his men travel to Herot, shining and glittering in their armor, gold helmets, and swords.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 2

Beowulf and his men enter Hrothgar's court and speak to Wulfgar, prince born to the Swedes, and follower of Hrothgar. Wulfgar informs Hrothgar of Beowulf, his name, people and history. King Hrothgar knows of Beowulf's origins and noble birth; Beowulf is strong, gold-laden and brave and Hrothgar welcomes him into the hall. Hrothgar is old and needs the strength of a hero (Beowulf) to end Grendel's bloody raids. Hrothgar offers Beowulf and his men much gold and sanctuary in Herot. Beowulf tells the Lord of his desire to kill Grendel, of his great strength, and his super-human power.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 2

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 2

Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he and Grendel have been called together to battle, because of their equal strength and thirst for vengeance. He says he will fight Grendel without a sword, just as Grendel's massacres in Herot involved no weapons.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 3

Beowulf says God must decide who lives and who dies, placing his faith in his actions with God. He refers both to Christian ideas and paganism in his final words to Hrothgar,

"And if death does take me, send the hammered/ Mail of my armor to Higlac, return/ The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he/ From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!"
pg. 37, lines 452-455

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 2



Sections 7-12 (lines 456-836)

Hrothgar, King of the Danes, welcomes Beowulf into his court, explaining how peace was achieved between the Danes and Beowulf's father, Edgetho. Edgetho had killed Hathlaf, causing a feud and later Edgetho's exile:

"Beowulf, you've come to us in friendship, and because/ Of the reception your father found at court./ Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,/ Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:/ Your father's countrymen were afraid of war,/ If he returned to his home, and they turned him away." pg. 37, lines 457-462

Only after Hrothgar, new to the Danish throne, interceded with gold as a peace offering to the Wulfings, was peace between the Geats and Danes found.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 4

King Hrothgar laments Grendel's massacres in Herot, telling Beowulf and the Geatish warriors how many men he has lost. He invokes the Lord's name to stop this madness. Hrothgar draws the parallel between his men's lack of success against Grendel and his hope for Beowulf's bravery and success in slaying the monster. Mead is poured out and all the men rejoice at the prospect of the impending battle.

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 3

Unferth, Ecglaf's son and one of Hrothgar's courtiers, jealous of Beowulf's renowned bravery and fame, accuses Beowulf of vanity and boastful pride. He tells of a dangerous swimming match Beowulf had with his friend and companion, Brecca. The two young warriors swam side by side for seven nights in the ocean, were separated, and Brecca won. Unferth says he thinks Beowulf's luck will change with Grendel. Beowulf laughs off Unferth's attack, calling him friend, and proclaiming:

"But the truth/ Is simple: no man swims in the sea/ As I can, no strength is a match for mine." pg. 40, lines 533-534

Beowulf brushes away Unferth's words with his pride, claiming he and Brecca were young and overzealous. Beowulf boasts how he killed a fierce monster in the sea with his sword; attacked by a whole host of monsters in the ocean, he fought them off until he reached land. The sun, "God's bright beacon," showed him Finnish soil, where he landed after killing nine sea-monsters.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 3

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 3

Beowulf reveals that Unferth murdered his brothers to achieve power in the Danish court. Unferth will "suffer hell's fires,...forever tormented" for his deeds. He blames



Grendel's attacks on the Danes' as a consequence of their acts of reprisal against one another. The reason the monster ravages their mead-hall is partially their own fault; it is a consequence for their own evil actions. Welthow, Hrothgar's queen, passes among all the warriors, pouring mead from a jeweled cup for each to drink. Upon reaching Beowulf's place, she thanks God that he arrived to save her people from the curse of Grendel. Beowulf pledges allegiance to the Danes once again, willing to sacrifice his life to end the curse.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 5

Before retiring to bed, Hrothgar makes a speech declaring that if Beowulf and his men rid Herot of Grendel, Beowulf's ship will sail home full with treasure. Hrothgar will be indebted to the Geats, symbolized by the gift of gold.

Night falls in Herot and all of Hrothgar's men prepare for sleep. Beowulf strips himself of his armor, mail and swords, in preparation for his battle with Grendel. He is firm with the Lord's presence and brave. The Lord's favor is with the Geats and Danes, as Beowulf waits, watchful.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 4

Grendel approaches Herot in the lurid glare of the moon, breaking down the door, joyless and hungry:

"He strode quickly across the inlaid/ Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes/ Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome/ Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall/ Crowded with sleeping warriors,.../ And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,/ Intended to tear the life from those bodies/ By morning." pg. 46, lines 724-732

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 4

Grendel kills his first Geat warrior, breaking him apart with his great jaws, and drinking the hot blood from his veins. He reaches for Beowulf, lying on the floor silently, but Beowulf seizes his giant claws, bends them back and holds him. Grendel is filled with fear, wanting to escape to his lair, away from Herot. But Beowulf grips his claws fast until they crack. He and Grendel battle up and down the hall, as the walls shake with their rage. Grendel cries out in pain:

"[T]he Danes started/ In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible/ Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang/ In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain/ And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's/ Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms/ Of him who of all the men on earth/ Was the strongest." pg. 47-48, lines 783-790

The Geats rise at the sight of Beowulf's battle with Grendel, their swords raised to protect their master. But all their weapons are useless against Grendel; they cannot puncture or harm him, for he had bewitched them.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 5



Grendel's shoulders, bound fast in Beowulf's hands, snap and split at the sinews. Grendel flees in agony, to die in his murky lair at the bottom of a marsh. Beowulf is victorious, his boasts fulfilled, and the Danes rejoice, the proof "[h]anging high/ From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was/ the monster's/ Arm, claw, and shoulder and all."
pg. 49, lines 833-836



Sections 13-18 (lines 837-1250)

The morning after Beowulf's bloody defeat and killing of Grendel, warriors and royalty from far and wide journey to Herot to behold the physical evidence of Grendel's struggle. They are unsympathetic of his death:

"[G]aped with no sense/ of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,/ Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten/ And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake/ Where he'd dragged his corpse-like way, doomed/ And already weary of his vanishing life." pg. 50, lines 841-846

Grendel's lair is ominous and murky, the water bloody and boiling from his rotting corpse.

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 5

All present rejoice and recount again the tale of Beowulf's bravery. An old soldier sings a song of ancient heroes, and includes Beowulf's victory, securing his place among the honored. Siegmund boasts tales of his bravery, especially that of slaying a dragon. Compared to Beowulf, we are told that Hermod was treacherous, exiled along with the Jutes:

"His vanity swelled him so vile and rank/ That he could hear no voices but his own. He deserved/ to suffer and die. But Beowulf was a prince/ Well-loved, followed in friendship, not fear;" pg. 52, lines 911-914

The whole party returns to Herot, where Hrothgar proclaims Beowulf's victory a miracle and ordained by the Lord. He accepts Beowulf as his son (Hrothgar already has two sons, Hrethric and Hrothmund), and offers his wealth to Beowulf. Beowulf responds that he was guided by his heart to perform this act for the good of the Danes; he would have liked to have killed Grendel on the very floor of Herot, and left his body as the prize.

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 4

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 6

Herot is decorated for the festivities, although it is crumbling from Grendel's attacks. A banquet is prepared.

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 6

Hrothgar and his nephew, Hrothulf, toast each other, as King and people become one. Beowulf is given a glorious gold banner, a helmet, a coat of mail, and an ancient sword, "richly rewarded" by the gracious ring giver, Hrothgar. The King also gives him a set of golden-bridled horses, as a reward for his bravery. Ancient armor and swords are brought down as gifts for all Beowulf's men and Beowulf, "and for the one/ Murdered by Grendel gold was carefully/ Paid." pg. 56, lines 1053-1055



Topic Tracking: Treasure 6

Hrothgar's hall resounds with the laughter and songs of poets, who retell the famed history of the Danish tribe. The Finish tribe attacked the Danish tribe, killing Hnaf its king, brother to Finn's wife. Finn's wife mourned her loss; both her son and brother were killed. With both tribes depleted through war, Finn offered peace between the Danes and the Frisians, and an equal division of property and wealth. Hnaf's and his son's bodies were placed on the funeral pyre to burn away the memory of hatred and war. But Hengest, Hnaf's chief lieutenant and successor, cannot forget the treachery of Finn to his Lord. Soon after, he murdered Finn in his bed with a knife through the belly. The vengeful Danes murdered countless Finns, looted treasure for their ships, and took the Queen back to Denmark, the homeland she had longed for.

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 7

Welthow, Hrothgar's Queen, walks among her King and her nephew, a symbol of peacemaking between Beowulf's people and her people. She offers a cup of mead to her King to seal the bond between Beowulf and the King, and sits with her sons.

Beowulf, showing his friendship, accepts the cup of mead, and the gifts of mail and gold from the Danes. Welthow entreats him to watch and honor the name of her two sons with his strength and kindness,

"Wear these bright jewels, beloved Beowulf;/ Enjoy them,...oh fortunate young/ Warrior;
grow richer, let your fame and your strength/ Go hand in hand; and lend these two boys/
Your wise and gentle heart! I'll remember your/ Kindness. Your glory is too great to
forget/...Spread your blessed protection/ Across my son, and my king's son!" pg. 61-62,
lines 1216-1221, 1225-1227

The Danes and Geats go to sleep, with their mail shirts on and swords ready, as soldiers must always do!



Sections 19-24 (lines 1251-1739)

In Herot, the Danes and the Geats sleep amongst each other, a symbol of their renewed kinship. While they slumber, Grendel's mother waits in her murky lair, seeking revenge for the murder of her son.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 7

The poet tells us the story of Cain, who was exiled to the desert, along with the 'race of fiends' he bore, and his descendent Grendel, who had attacked Herot, awaiting his match with Beowulf. Beowulf had been a good match for Grendel, ordained by God to avenge Grendel's greed and bloody attacks on Herot.

As the Danes sleep that night, after much rejoicing, Grendel's mother comes to Herot, and snatches a single warrior, Esher, Hrothgar's right man; her bloody claws hold her lunch. As she leaves Herot, she steals Grendel's claw, Beowulf's treasured prize. Hrothgar sends for the brave Beowulf, who arrives to hear the King's tale of Grendel's mother:

"She's taken revenge for your victory over Grendel./ For your strength, your mighty grip, and that monster's/ Death." pg. 65, lines 1334-1336

Hrothgar describes the two fiends, Grendel (the bastard son) and his mother. He describes their hellish home of hidden evil upon evil, windy wolf-dens, cliffs, and skies of dark air and black rain. He entreats Beowulf to take upon the challenge again, to kill Grendel's mother, to seek out and destroy the evil she represents. With victory, Beowulf will be rewarded with twisted gold and heaps of ancient treasure!

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 8

Beowulf vows to seek out Grendel's mother, no matter where she may hide, proclaiming to the Danes:

"Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all/ To avenge our friends, not mourn them forever./ Each of us will come to the end of this life/ On earth; he who can earn it should fight/ For the glory of his name; fame after death/ Is the noblest of goals. Arise, guardian/ Of this kingdom, let us go, as quickly as we can,/ And have a look at this lady monster." pg. 67, lines 1384-1391

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 5

Beowulf, his men, and the Danes, including Hrothgar on horseback at Beo's side, follow Grendel's mother's tracks through the forest. The entourage finds her lair, surrounded by cold gray stones, twisted trees, and a bloody gurgling lake which holds Esher's floating head. The lake is infested with serpents and sea-creatures; Beowulf kills one, shooting it through the heart. Beowulf prepares to enter the steaming lake; he puts on



his armor and mail, dons Hrothgar's famed helmet, and grabs Unferth's sword, Hrunting, which has never failed any man in battle.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 7

Beowulf speaks to Hrothgar by the lake, reminding him of their kinship, and his gratitude for the King's generosity as a ring-giver; he asks him to protect his beloved men should he die. In a flash, Beowulf leaps into the lake, sinking downward through the waves for hours. He reaches Grendel's hideous mother at the bottom. As the battle begins, Grendel's mother scratches the thickly ring-woven mail, but without success.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 8

Grendel's mother carries Beowulf off to her home, holding him so tight he cannot move his sword. Greedy sea monsters fight and attack him on the way, stabbing at his armor. They arrive at a brilliant underwater battle-hall, where Beowulf realizes he is immune to her attacks:

"[S]he'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,/ And there...[not] anything in the lake [could] attack him through/ The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant/ Light burned all around him, the lake/ Itself like a fiery flame...he swung his sword/ ...straight at her head; the iron sang its fierce song" pg. 71, lines 1512-1521

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 9

Beowulf stabs at her head, but discovers that no sword or piece of armor can harm her evil skin. Grendel's mother bites at his helmet, and scratches his mail and sword until Beowulf throws down his weapons in a rage, seeing that they are of no use. Desiring only personal fame, he uses his hands to rip at her shoulder, and pounds her to the ground. Grendel's mother leaps up to him, seizes him and sits on him, stabbing him with a bloody knife. Her attacks fail, the ring-woven mail holding under her rage; God's glory, victory, and truth stand by Beowulf's side; he leaps again, and continues fighting!

Beowulf sees a giant sword hanging on the wall; it is a magical sword fashioned by monsters, and is too heavy for humans to hold. In a savage, angry and crazed rage, Beowulf pulls the weapon from its place, and swings it through the air at Grendel's mother's neck, cutting straight through flesh and bone. Grendel's mother dies instantly, a bloody and wet pile on the floor. The brilliant light of "Heaven's own candle" illuminates the sky; her and her son's bloody raids have been avenged. As a final gesture of revenge, Beowulf finds Grendel's body and decapitates him.

Above, next to the lake, Hrothgar and both tribes of men see pools of blood float to the surface. The sun sets quickly, and the Danes leave fearing that Beowulf is lost, dead at the hands of Grendel's mother. The Geats stay, watching for their Lord. Below the surface of the lake, the monster's sword melts away into blood, and mixes with the water; the Dane's curse is broken as the sword disappears. "like ice when the world's/ Eternal Lord loosens invisible/ Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost/ As only He can, He who rules/ Time and seasons, He who is truly/ God." pg. 73, lines 1607-1612



Beowulf takes the sword's hilt and Grendel's head as a prize for his victory, and leaves the rich treasures in the monster's lair. He swims to the surface of the calm lake, and the Geats rejoice upon seeing their Lord. They ride home, all fourteen glorious and bold, to Hrothgar's hall, where Beo presents Grendel's ugly head, giving the details of his battle with Grendel's mother, and how the monster's sword saved him.

Beowulf gives Hrothgar the ancient hilt of the sword, carved with runes from the beginning of time, of ancient wars between good and evil, the splitting of races, and of tyranny. Hrothgar speaks to Beowulf, proclaiming him a better man than himself. Hrothgar has become wise after a lifetime pursuing peace and justice for his people. He tells Beo that he will do what he promised, in the name of friendship, and entreats Beowulf to do the same, and to avoid becoming Hermod, who was ruled by hatred, wishing only for war, and murdering his comrades. Hrothgar says how a king must be:

"Our eternal Lord/ Grants some men wisdom, some wealth, makes others/ Great. The world is God's, He allows/ A man to grow famous, and his family rich,/ Gives him land and towns to rule/ And delight in...and who/ In human unwisdom, in the middle of such power,/ Remembers that it will all end, and too soon?/ Prosperity...nothing/ Troubles him, no sickness, not passing time,/ No sorrows, no sudden war breaking/ Out of nowhere, but all the world turns/ When he spins it. How can he know when he sins?" pg. 77, lines 1728-1739

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 6



Sections 25-30 (lines 1740-2143)

Hrothgar continues giving advice to Beowulf: a king must be peaceful and not arrogant, yet remain ready to do battle at any time, to protect his kingdom. If a king does not:

"the Devil's dark urgings wound him, for he can't/ Remember how he clung to the rotting wealth/ Of this world, how he clawed to keep it, how he earned/ No honor, no glory, in giving golden/ Rings, how he forgot the future glory/ God gave him at his birth, and forgetting did not care." pg. 78, lines 1747-1752

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 7

Hrothgar tells Beowulf to heed his words: to not become prideful, greedy, tyrannical or war-hungry. For when his flesh fails, and he dies, it will make a difference. He tells how he ruled Denmark peacefully for more than fifty years, guarding his kingdom from attack and abuse, until the awful Grendel emerged. Beowulf avenged the monster's attacks twice; for these acts Hrothgar will reward him with gold.

Beowulf and his men join with the Danes to feast and rejoice in their shared victory. When night comes, Beowulf falls asleep peacefully, waited on by the best of Danish servants, grateful for the rest after his tremendous battle. He sleeps and dreams until a "black-feathered raven" sings at morning, casting aside the shadows of night. All of Beowulf's men rise with him, eager to set sail for their homeland, armored and ready to load their ship.

Beowulf rises to say farewell to his Lord Hrothgar, weighed down with the kind gift of Unferth's sword. Beowulf thanks the gracious Hrothgar, saying how he and his people must now return to his Lord, Higlac, but how they will remain forever loyal, ready with bands of Geatish warriors to fight if summoned. Hrothgar praises the young Beowulf:

"All-knowing God/ Must have sent you such words; nothing so wise/ From a warrior so young has ever reached/ These ancient ears...If your lord,/ Hrethel's son, is slain by a spear,/ Or falls sick and dies...I say that the Geats/ Could do no better, find no man better/ Suited to be king, keeper of warriors/ and their treasure, than you..., Beloved Beowulf." pg. 80-81, lines 1841-1852

Beowulf, in his victory over Grendel, has transformed Geats and Danes, once bitter enemies, into peaceful brothers, willing to fight alongside one another. Hrothgar assures Beowulf that as long as he is King, the Danes will welcome the Geats with open arms, treasure gifts, and open mead-halls. He gives Beowulf a dozen more golden treasures, crying in his old age in remembrance of the good that Beowulf has brought to his people and his kingdom.

Beowulf and his men load their ship with horses, gold, and armor and sail for Geatland. They pass through the waves and wind until Geatish shores greet them in the distance. The Geats on land run to meet them, happy to see the beloved warriors return in the



flesh. Beowulf and his men gather their gold and treasure and march to the Lord Higlac's hall, presenting the treasure to the Lord they follow.

The poet speaks about Higlac's wife, Higd, a wise and peaceful Queen, and contrasts her with Thrith, a haughty and vicious woman who sentenced men who gazed upon her beauty too long to death by the sword. But Thrith had been married to Offa across the ocean, who had made her into a good, generous woman.

Higlac orders Beowulf to sit by his side and tell the tales of his time spent in Denmark. Beowulf sings the story of his meeting with Grendel, his battle, Herot's rejoicing, the arrival of Grendel's mother, and his final battle against the female fiend. Beowulf tells how Hrothgar also plans to marry his daughter, Freaw to Ingeld of the Hathobards (with whom they have a blood-feud), as a message of peace:

"She and that ripening soldier will be married/...Hoping that his quarrel with the Hathobards can be settled/ By a woman. He's wrong: how man wars/ Have been put to rest in a prince's bed?/ Few. A bride can bring a little/ Peace, make spears silent for a time,/ But not long." pg. 86, lines 2025-2032

Beowulf tells Higlac how war will come from this match, how some hot-mouthed warrior at the banquet will stir anger, wishing for revenge, seeking treasure won by war with his ancestors.

Topic Tracking: Treasure 8

Beowulf finishes his tale of glory to Higlac and describes Grendel's hideousness: how he consumed Dane upon Dane, stuffing them into his pouch made of dragonscales which rested at his side.

Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 9

Beowulf's strength wins out, he overcomes both fiends, wins Hrothgar's favor, treasure, and now his Lord's too!



Sections 31-36 (lines 2144-2693)

Beowulf praises the generosity and kindness of King Hrothgar, who opened his store of jewels and treasure to Beowulf, to choose what he pleased to bring to King Higlac. Beowulf has his men carry out these treasures to Higlac, pledging his loyalty to his Lord:

"Beowulf had brought his king/ Horses and treasure-as a man must,/ Not weaving nets of malice for his comrades,/ Preparing their death in the dark, with secret,/ Cunning tricks." pg. 91, lines 2165-2169

Higlac and Beowulf are cousins and comrades, who rely on each other in times of war and peace. Beowulf gives Higlac, Welthow's gift of a necklace and three horses; he understood Hrothgar's advice of generosity.

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 8

The poet tells us of how Beowulf was scorned as a child, and not favored by any of the Geats. Higlac brings forth Beowulf's grandfather's sword and gives it to Beowulf. In the years after Higlac's death, Herdred, his son, ruled for many years. After his death at the hands of the Swedes, Beowulf ruled the Geats for more than fifty winters, with wisdom and justice. It was then that a dragon, who had been sleeping in a hidden tower, awoke in Geatland.

A slave had come to the entrance of the dragon's lair, saw a hoard of treasure and gold, and fled with a jewel-studded golden cup. The dragon awoke, knowing exactly what had been stolen. The man escaped:

"He was someone's slave, had been beaten/ By his masters, had run from all men's sight,/ But with no place to hide; then he found the hidden/ Path, and used it." pg. 92, lines 2223-2226

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 10

The poet tells us the history of the treasure, left in ancient times at the end of a dynasty, its King burying the gold in a stone tower, giving it up to the earth. Gold and treasure should not be left unused by men, even if the gold can bring no pleasure to those who abandon it. A flaming dragon, raging in the night for caves and food, came upon the gold many centuries ago, and has forever since slept on its heap.

The dragon follows the tracks of the slave who roused it, seeking revenge for the stolen cup; his greed for treasure will cause war and death. It waits until night comes,

"counting off/ the hours till the Almighty's candle went out,/ And evening came, and wild with anger/ It could fly burning across the land, killing/ And destroying with its breath. Then the sun was gone,/ And its heart was glad; glowing with rage/...impatient to repay/ Its enemies. The people suffered." pg. 95, lines 2302-2309



Topic Tracking: Men and Monsters 10

The drago, with its deadly fire-breath, destroys all the homes and land in Geatland. It destroys Beowulf's hall and his throne; sorrow spreads throughout the land. Beowulf, now old, yet still a warrior, begins to plan his revenge for the dragon's rage. A large iron shield is fashioned; the poet tells us in advance that this battle will be Beowulf's last, and that it will end in both his and the dragon's death.

Beowulf tells the story of his first Lord, Hrethel's sorrow, how when he was young, his Lord's oldest son, Herbald, was killed by his brother, Hathcyn. The death was an accident, a mistake on a hunting trip. Hrethel's sorrow for his dead son was great; he felt no sympathy for Hathcyn, and life became cheerless. When Hrethel had died, his two younger sons inherited all his treasures and the kingdom. War arose between the Swedes and the Geats, as a response to Hrethel's death. Hathcyn, now King of the Geats, was killed by a Swedish sword. Higlac's soldiers avenged this most horrible of deaths, and Efor cracked open the Swedish King's skull.

Beowulf speaks next of Higlac's death, of how he crushed the man who had killed Higlac with his bare hands. He justifies his use of a sword in his duel with the dragon; he 'shall fight with both hand and sword.' Beowulf needs the iron shield to protect himself from the dragon's burning breath.

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 9

Beowulf prepares for battle, declaring the treasure kept by the dragon will be his when the monster is dead. He enters the arching hall, and gives a battle-cry. Hearing it, the dragon, thirsty for blood, attacks, breathing fire and smoke upon Beowulf. The iron shield at first holds, but then begins to melt, a sign that fate is against Beowulf. Beowulf strikes at the dragon with his sword, piercing its skin, and drawing blood. The sword breaks under the weight. Unwilling to leave this world for eternal darkness, Beowulf fights on. Falling back, the dragon envelopes Beowulf in a swirl of flames, while all his brave followers run for the woods - all save one: Wiglaf.

Wiglaf, son of Wexstan, stays by Beowulf's side, raising his yellow sword and shield, weapons once belonging to Onela's nephew which his father had won and later given to him. Both sword and soul strong, he speaks for all, remembering his Lord's graciousness, and how his comrades had once pledged loyalty and now ran off like traitors. He shouts:

"He took us/ For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill/ This monster himself, our mighty king,

Fight this battle alone and unaided,/...By almighty God,/ I'd rather burn than see/ Flames swirling around my lord...I swear that nothing/ He ever did deserved an end/ Like this, dying miserably and alone,/ Butchered by this savage beast." pg. 105, lines 2641-2644, 2650-2652, 2656-2659



Wiglaf dives through the ravaging flames, screaming his Lord's name, distracting the dragon by jumping under Beowulf's shield. The warrior Beowulf strikes the dragon with the last of his strength; Nagling smashes the dragon's head. The sword breaks to pieces in Beowulf's hands, the dragon spews fire at him, and drives its tusks deep into Beowulf's neck.



Sections 37-43 (lines 2694-3182)

Wiglaf stabs the dragon low in its body, in an effort to kill it and stop the hideous flames burning his master's body. The flames fade off as the dragon dies. Beowulf knives the dragon in half, mustering the last of his strength. Split apart, it falls, blood seeping into the ground and over the gold. Beowulf's wounds are too much; death is near, his neck stinging from the dragon's venom. Beowulf drops to the ground and good Wiglaf bathes his wounds with water. Beowulf speaks to Wiglaf, entreating him to gather the dragon's gold at his feet before he dies:

"My days/ have gone as fate willed,.../ As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,/ Seeking no lying wars. I can leave/ This life happy; I can die, here,/ Knowing the Lord of all life has never/ Watched me wash my sword in blood/ Born of my own family." pg. 108, lines 2735-6, 2638-2743

Topic Tracking: Good and Evil 11

Wiglaf enters the dragon's tower quickly, seeking and carrying out as much treasure, ancient helmets, and gold as possible before his Lord dies. The interior of the castle is lit by a brilliant light, which brightens the gray stones and signifies the goodness of their partnership in killing the dragon. Wiglaf brings the treasure to Beowulf to soften his death. The treasure has been won, and he sprinkles more water over his King.

Topic Tracking: Christian/Pagan 10

Beowulf speaks to Wiglaf, telling him to lead the Geats. As he dies, he asks him to take the treasure to his people, and rule well. He asks Wiglaf to build a monument, a tomb where King Beowulf's ashes will be buried, a high tower over the old one, so sailors will see it and speak of it forevermore. Then Beowulf gives forth his golden necklace, helmet, rings, and mail to the future king and dies:

"The old man's mouth was silent, spoke/ No more, had said as much as it could;/ He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul/ Left his flesh, flew to glory." pg. 110, lines 2817-2820

Wiglaf looks at his Lord, now dead, and the hideous dragon, split in two by his hand, lying nearby. The Geats who had run away, abandoned Beowulf and then Wiglaf when terror struck, come from the trees toward Wiglaf, waiting for him to speak. Wiglaf speaks to them harshly, saying how Beowulf had trusted in their word, gave them weapons and treasures, a hall, and mead. He tells of how they ran with fear when the dragon attacked Beowulf. Wiglaf had only done a small thing: he distracted the dragon just long enough to give Beowulf time to kill it. He declares that no more treasure will be given to them, there will be no more ring giving. When the other Geats discover their cowardice, they and their family will forever be disgraced, worthy only of death.



Wiglaf sends a messenger to the Geats, who had waited far off, telling of Beowulf's fate. The messenger speaks to them, saying how Beowulf fought, and both he and the dragon died. Wiglaf has been left as King, but peace cannot be expected with the Franks, nor with the Swedes. He speaks of their history, and how Higlac had saved the Geats from the Swedish King's blade.

The messenger tells the history of war between the Geats and the Swedes. Ongentho, when he heard of Higlac's strength and reputation, withdrew his men into the forest, away from the Geats. But the Geats had no mercy for Ongentho, and invaded the army, and Wulf (of the Geats) cracked the Swedish King's helmet and skull. Ongentho wounded Wulf in the helmet as well, but his brave brother, Efor, killed Ongentho with one blow of his massive sword. Wulf was bandaged, and the Geats praised the brave Efor, who was given Higlac's only daughter, gold, and land.

The messenger's story speaks of the horrors that will come with Beowulf's death; the Geats will surely be attacked. He speaks of how the dragon's jewels will be burnt on Beowulf's funeral pyre, and the rest will be buried in the tower built in the King's name, to greet the sea. Sadness will descend throughout Geatland for their loss. The warriors walk to where Beowulf lay, and see the dragon:

"stretched in front/ Of its tower, a strange, scaly beast/ Gleaming a dozen colors dulled and/ Scorched from its own heat. From end/ To end fifty feet, it had flown/ In the silent darkness, a swift traveler/ Tasting the air, then gliding down/ To its den." pg. 117, lines 3038-3045

Wiglaf speaks of Beowulf, and how his bravery and desire for gold cost him his life. He leads the Geats to the tower, where the wealthiest of Geats gather the dragon's treasure in their arms, and carry it to Beowulf's pyre. The best of helmets, gold and mail are placed on the pyre, and the fire grows, enveloping the great King. Wiglaf and his men roll the dragon off the cliff, and into the ocean. The smoke billows from Beowulf's pyre, and the brave Geats watch in sorrow as he is swallowed by Heaven. Then:

"For ten long days they made his monument,/ Sealed his ashes in walls as straight/ And high as wise and willing hands could raise them.../And the treasures they'd taken were left there too,/ ...Ground back in the earth." pg. 121, lines 3159-3163, 3165-3167

The warriors, Geats and Wiglaf, sing their praises high and loud; no nobler life on earth was had among men. The best of the Geats ride around Beowulf's tower on horseback, singing stories for all, of a wise and brave King had once lived named Beowulf.