Assignment B1: "Beowulf, did you ever know that you're my hero?"

1. Journal Entry WA# __________ "WHAT'S IN A NAME?"
   a) Read through all the articles given you on names. Choose a few you feel strongly about. Think about this concept of names.
   Names were a big deal during the Anglo-Saxon times and in Beowulf. Is this also true still in our society today? Where did you get your name? What weight has your name been given throughout your life? Has your name ever brought you privilege or the cause of a negative situation? What name would you rather have? Do you have a nickname? How? Why did that come about? Will you change your name after marriage? What do you think of the increasingly popular option of a woman (man) retaining her (his) childhood family name? What about double or hyphenated last names? "What's in a name, anyway?"
   b) Taking into consideration the ideas reflected in the paragraph above, the articles you just read on names, and your own ideas on the topic of names, write at least one page response for your WA. Make sure you identify the name of the article you are reacting to before your actual reaction to each specific article.

2. Journal Entry WA# __________: "HEROES" (a two-side = 10 pts.)
   You will use a packet of articles (as well as one article about a female “hero” and a male “hero”) as a basis for this [HEROES JOURNAL ENTRY]. Furthermore, one of the most popular topics regarding Beowulf is the concept of “heroism” and whether Beowulf, the character, measures up to the Anglo-Saxon definition, a modern definition, and, ultimately, your personal definition. This packet of articles helps tremendously in reviewing the concepts out there in our world today regarding a “MODERN HERO.” So, again, read the articles carefully.

For this minimum of two-side journal entry, comment on several of the following:
   a) the article entitled "Learning the Power and the Point of Communication" on the reverse side of the salmon cover sheet
   b) the article in the packet by Paul Levy entitled "What Makes a Hero?"
   c) the article in the packet from Psychology Today entitled "How to Be Great!"
   d) at least ONE other article from this packet (or another cool article you find on your own about a "hero"—be sure to attach a copy of this article to your journal)
   e) two articles included in this packet about two individual heroes (a male and a female)

Taking these articles into consideration and your own ideas about what a hero is, address all or any of the following: Talk about your own as well as what you think society's perceptions of a hero are. In addition, reflect on what you think the early English people thought of when defining hero. Think about who your heroes were (and why) as you were growing up and how those people might have faded from your memory. What heroes do you have now (or would like to have)? What heroes would you wish for your children to have? What heroes do you think they will have (regardless of your input)?

**Note:** You might even take Professor Chiodo's suggestion (as mentioned in Dale Dauten's article on the reverse side) and turn what you have written into a letter to actually send to your personal "hero" (or someone you admire most if the word "hero" sounds too weird/powerful/pretentious.)

© What better gift to give that special person during your senior year? ???? ? ?

John Gardner's Grendel JOURNALS

GG (Gardner's Grendel) #1: Personal Response
   Patrick Galloway, who has a B.A. in English Literature from San Francisco State University, said, "As much as I enjoyed reading the exploits of the great Grendel, I must say that Grendel resonated at a deeper level for me. In the title character's first-person narrative, I found a personal correlate. Gardner's Grendel, though monstrous and destitute, is a thinker, an intellectual trapped (isolated) in a world without peers. As strange as it might sound to say that I identified with a monster, that is exactly how I felt reading this novel. To experience acutely the scorn and/or fear of a world with which one feels no affinity, and yet, at the same time, to perceive the tragedy and absurdity of that world, to feel estranged by the race of beings whose own mortality and timidity makes one ashamed for having relished the thought of acceptance, to be alone. This, to me, is the crux of the matter regarding Grendel. Loneliness can drive an individual to monstrous extremes. Eating Danes, for instance."

What was your personal reaction to reading Grendel? How did it compare to reading Beowulf? Comment on Galloway's quote and how much his reaction to Grendel resonated with your own experience with the novel as well as the idea of being "an intellectual trapped (isolated) in a world without peers."

GG (Gardner's Grendel) #2: 4 Characters
   Patrick Galloway also states, "The most intriguing aspect of Grendel is the background we receive on primary characters such as Hrothgar, Færeda, Unferth, and, of course, Grendel. Gardner, while admiringly taking full advantage of his poetic licence [sic], provides biographical data for each of these individuals which lays a groundwork for subtle, psychological insight into the personalities and actions of each. Take these four primary characters, and based on what you already know from reading Beowulf, comment on what it is that Gardner's Grendel does to enhance, shed deeper insight on, and further develop these characters.

GG (Gardner's Grendel) #3: Choose a Topic
   Take one of the following topics and trace its presence in Grendel:
   - Grendel’s attitude toward language
   - Choose an astrological sign and follow it through its associated chapter. Look at its relevance and what it comes to signify in Grendel as a whole.
   - Trace Gardner’s use of “cartoon imagery” throughout the novel. Why is the use of grotesque, exaggerated humor appropriate in the novel?

GG (Gardner's Grendel) #4: Extra Credit or Required?
   Take up the idea of this being an extra credit option during our study of Beowulf, not a required assignment. After reading Grendel, thinking about it, and doing a few journals, do you think this should be extra credit or required? Give a full account as to why it should be required or extra credit.
ASSIGNMENT B2: HELLO BEOWULF (Heaney trans.)

part 1 pp. 3-89

Due date ____________________________

1. Read the HELPFUL HINTS / SIGNIFICANT QUOTATIONS SHEETS FOR BEOWULF.
   This is very important to help you get centered and focused on what's to come when reading Beowulf.

2. Read Beowulf part 1 CAREFULLY! (pp. 3-89 in the Seamus Heaney translation)

As you read, I strongly suggest you keep an ongoing list of characters as well as plot development. The names are numerous and confusing at first.

BIG HINT: there is a genealogical chart at the end of the book. Use it!

Also, keep the Significant Quotations sheet beside you to refer to as you read. Be sure to note these important quotations and their significance as you read. There is a place for you to record at least 2 other significant quotations not listed on the sheet.

3. Do the assigned WA Beowulf part 1.
   Each group will have a different assignment for this Beowulf part 1 WA.

BEOWULF GROUP – THE QUOTE EXPERTS

Journal Entry WA# Beowulf part 1: Quotes 1 – 19

Your group will be assigned quotations [1 – 19] from part 1. Divide up the quotes however you would like so that each quote is assigned a minimum of 3 quotes.

Write each quotation in its entirety on your journal entry (along with its page number) and underline each one, comment on each of the following FOR EACH QUOTE:

a. the quote's context
b. its possible meaning and relevance to part 1
c. possible larger meaning for us today or you personally

GRENDEL GROUP – MORE QUOTE EXPERTS and the LAYS

Journal Entry WA# Beowulf part 1: Quotes 15 – 19 and LAYS

Your group will be assigned quotations #15 – 19 from part 1

Divide up the quotes however you would like so that each person is assigned an equal number of quotes (at least 3 quotes each).

Write each quotation in its entirety on your journal entry (along with its page number) and underline each one, comment on each of the following FOR EACH QUOTE:

a. the quote's context
b. its possible meaning and relevance to part 1
c. possible larger meaning for us today or you personally

Your task is also to focus on the three lays in part 1.

They are the following:
“The Lay of Brecc” pp. 35-39
“The Lay of Siegmond and Hermod” pp. 59-61
“The Lay of Finnsburg” pp. 71-81

Each group member will also write about one to three of these lays and do the following:

a. Briefly re-tell each lay in your own words.
b. Discuss the significance of each lay to Beowulf and any of the other characters AND/OR to the plot or themes in the story. Why was the lay included?

MOMS GROUP – THE CREATIVE STRETCHERS

Journal Entry WA# Beowulf part 2: “WANTED”

After reading part 1 in Beowulf, do this entry. You do not have to do both choice A and B. Choose the one below in which you are most interested.

• **CHOICE A**
  Write a want ad or write/design a job description poster for the monster-slayer Hrothgar might have advertised for in order to restore peace in his kingdom.

• **CHOICE B**
  Design the resume and/or the completed job application that you think Beowulf would have turned in if necessary to do such a job or a job like killing Grendel.

  (HINT: Quality/creativity are highly encouraged.)

  **NOTE** This does not have to be a traditional fill-in-the-blank style of writing. You may choose to illustrate, use graphics, write a poem, song, etc. This would be a good time to see what your computer can create.

  **NOTE** To make sure both choices are covered, be sure to discuss ahead of time who wants to do which choice so your group has at least one of each choice represented.
**DRAGONS GROUP – THE NETWORKERS**

Journal Entry WA#1: “ANGLO-SAXON WORLD / OUR WORLD”

- a. Review the readings in the *LBT* book pp. 1-11 and pp. 18-19. You are the historians. You need to be looking for the *way* the text becomes a means for the reader to learn about the Anglo-Saxon way of life, and how it compares to our modern society.

- b. In addition, you are to look up any new, unfamiliar **vocabulary words** you might come across - those which you think other members of the class might also want or need to know. Be prepared to share.

- c. After reading part I in *Beowulf*, think about how in reading *Beowulf* this world of the Anglo-Saxon vividly portrayed. Many say *Beowulf*, indeed, is a document of **historical importance**. Look for those elements. Then, more importantly, think of how *Beowulf* connects (or not) like/reflects our world today.

Write up your findings in the form of a full-page chart:

- Make sure you make a good start with all the information given in part 1.
- Be sure to list examples and provide explanation for whatever you put in each column.
- Don't forget to keep track of page numbers in your chart next to the examples.

Set it up your chart like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENTS IN BEOWULF WHICH CLEARLY PORTRAY THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD</th>
<th>ELEMENTS IN BEOWULF WHICH CLEARLY CONNECT ARE VERY MUCH LIKE/REFLECT OUR SOCIETY TODAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. adisagda apoem afepojg&quot;Z a303omfe,skf. p. 21</td>
<td>1. aisei s-ejalh eangl beanba-caig, dlkfl. p. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. apeoth09sa fgpeasg aepojjg;voyo;s aoesjg! p. 23</td>
<td>2. ima senyoor and lavin' awl of niiti. p. 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. aeaopej p. 31</td>
<td>3. donots r gud f ar t'h everyone. p. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. pariaths elie9sl atticusdil p. 26</td>
<td>5. goota ketchum awl pokemon. p. 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HROTHGAR GROUP – LITERARY CONTEXT EXPERTS**

Journal Entry WA#1: “INTRO MAT'L AND EPIC CONNECTION”

Take notes on each of the following, and be prepared to share this material:

- a. Read introductory material to the Raffel translation of *Beowulf* in the black *LBT* text, pp. 17-18.

- b. Also, YOU MUST GET A PACKET from your teacher. This material is taken from the 5th edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Read and take notes on what this *Norton* has to say about the [heroic ideal] on pp. 1-5 in the *Norton* as well as the Norton's introductory material to *Beowulf*, pp. 25-31.

- You will need to summarize this material for your group. **TAKE GOOD NOTES!**

- c. Finally, look up at least two "authoritative" definitions and characteristics of an [epic poem]. Do not just use a dictionary. Make sure you know what the terms "kennings," "alliteration," and "in medias res" mean. Check the library for a literary terms dictionary! See what there is on the Internet.

**NOTE** You must write down the bibliographic material of the two sources you used.
ASSIGNMENT B3: GARDNER'S GRENDEL AND CENSORSHIP BATTLE

Due date ___________

1. Actively read the excerpt from John Gardner's *Grendel* carefully. You might want to read the 3 questions in the lower right hand corner first so that you can key into some of the main points early.

2. **Do Journal Entry WA# “GARDNER’S GRENDEL”**
   a. Write a minimum of a half page reaction to this work. Did you like it? Was it as good, worse, better than *Beowulf*? What parts confused or delighted or repulsed or intrigued you?
      Share what you’d like. You may write down some questions you have about the work itself, too.
   b. Now, continue in your journal with answering the 5 questions listed in the corner of your copy of Gardner’s *Grendel*. Number each question and either rewrite it or include the question in the frame of your answer.

3. **Read the article attached to Gardner’s *Grendel* about the controversy of this short novel.** It is called “Grappling with Grendel or What We Did When the Censors Came” by Kenneth L. Zeeman who teaches English at Viewmont High School in Bountiful, Utah.

4. **Write down a brief response to this article on the back of this WA on Gardner’s *Grendel*.**

---

ASSIGNMENT B4: *BEOWULF* part 2 pp. 89-149

Due date ___________

1. **Read Beowulf part 2 (pp. 89-149) carefully.**
   As you read, continue your ongoing list of characters and plot development. Continue to refer to your “Significant Quotes” list as you read.

2. **Do WA# Beowulf part 2 (at least one side = 5 pts.)**
   Each group will have a different assignment for the *Beowulf* part 2 WA.

**Group 1: DRAGONS → QUOTES and LAY EXPERTS—part 2**

Your two-sided journal entry should be called:

**WA# Beowulf part 2: Quotes and Lays**

Your group will be assigned quotations [20 - 29] from part 2. Divide up the quotes however you would like so that all quotes are covered and each person is assigned a minimum of 3 quotes.

Write each quotation in its entirety on your journal entry (along with its page number) and underneath each one, comment on each of the following FOR EACH QUOTE:
   a. the quote’s context
   b. its possible meaning and relevance to parts 1 and 2
   c. possible larger meaning for us today or you personally

Your task is also to focus on the lay in part 2. It is called "The Lay of Higd and Thryth" pp. 131-135

Each group member must do the following with this lay:
   a. Briefly re-tell the lay in your own words.
   b. Discuss the significance of this lay to *Beowulf* or any of the other characters AND/OR to the plot or themes in the story. Why was this lay included?
Group 2: GRENDELS → THE BATTLERS—part 2

Your two-column journal entry should be called:

**WA# Beowulf part 2: Quotes and Lays**

After reading part 2 in Beowulf, do this entry.

First, read over the battles between Beowulf and Grendel (from part 1) and Beowulf and Grendel’s mom (from part 2).

Now think of ways these two battles compare and contrast one another.

- Make up a chart with three columns (the last column is reserved for the part 3 battle).
- In the chart, list ways the battles are similar and different. Each battle should be listed on the top of a column. See example below.

(By the way, why do you think there will—or must be—3 battles?)

**COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE TWO BATTLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLUMN blank</th>
<th>BEOWULF VS. GRENDDEL</th>
<th>BEOWULF VS. GRENDDEL’S MOM</th>
<th>BEOWULF VS. DRAGON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. no weapons</td>
<td>1. the “magic sword”</td>
<td>1. ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. eadganga</td>
<td>2. Tolkien’s dragon</td>
<td>2. ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ?</td>
<td>3. ???</td>
<td>3. ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group 3: BEOWULFS → THE CREATIVE STRETCHERS—part 2

Your two-sided journal entry should be called:

**WA# Beowulf part 2: BEOWULF VS.: Another Point of View**

Choose one of the two first battles and rewrite the battle from either Grendel’s point of view or Grendel’s mom’s point of view. Really try to imagine what might be going on inside their heads. Have fun with this one! Parody is welcome. Don’t spare the gore!

---------- IMPORTANT NOTE: WRITE THE BATTLE IN FIRST PERSON! 

Group 4: MOMMIES → THE NETWORKERS—part 2

Your two-column journal entry should be called:

**WA# Beowulf part 2: “ANGLO-SAXON WORLD / OUR WORLD”**

You are the lexicographers/historians. Continue looking for ways the text becomes a means to learn about the Anglo-Saxon way of life. In addition, you are to look up any new, unfamiliar vocabulary words you might come across—those which you think other members of your group might also want to know—AND to look closely at what the footnotes share. Be prepared to share these with your group.

After reading part 2 in Beowulf and reflecting on the chart we started for part 1, think further how in reading Beowulf the world of the Anglo-Saxons is both like our world today and is definitely not like our world today. Write up your findings in the form of a chart. List examples and provide explanation for whatever you put in each column. Make sure you keep track of page numbers.

**Set up your chart like this:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENTS IN BEOWULF WHICH CLEARLY PORTRAY THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD</th>
<th>ELEMENTS IN BEOWULF WHICH CLEARLY CONNECT/ARE VERY MUCH LIKE/REFLECT OUR SOCIETY TODAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. aedisgaedapoem æpeoigæzæ030cmhæsk</td>
<td>1. aeti sl-eajl tanfl beanb-æajkg; dækkf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. apeigb99as fgeæsg aepoaæg;vøyos æoesgj</td>
<td>2. ina senyoor and lavin'awl of illiit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. æciaæpej</td>
<td>3. donots r gud fhr u'n everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. parõhs eie9sl atticusdil</td>
<td>5. goota ketchum awl pokemon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASSIGNMENT B5: BEOWULF part 3 pp. 149-213

Due date __________________________

1. Read Beowulf part 3 (pp. 149-213) carefully. As you read, continue your ongoing list of characters and plot development.

2. Using the ideas from previous group discussion, you will now complete the "Battle Chart"—specifically the third column of the [COMPARISON/CONTRAST CHART] OF THE BATTLES.

   After reading part 3, think of ways all 3 battles compare and contrast one another. This chart should now be pretty complete! You will be able to add more in class.

   COMPARISON AND CONTRAST CHART OF THE THREE BATTLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. VS. GRENDEL</th>
<th>B. VS. GRENDEL'S MOM</th>
<th>B. VS. THE DRAGON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. You will return to your assigned Beowulf discussion group. Again, each one of you will do ONE of the following journal entries to share with your group NEXT CLASS PERIOD.

   Each group will have a different assignment for the
   [WA# Beowulf part 3: your group's specific assignment]

   Group 1: MOMMIES → THE QUOTE EXPERTS—part 3

   Your two-sided journal entry should be called:
   [WA# Beowulf part 3: Quotes 30 – 40]

   Your group will be assigned quotations [30 - 40] from part 3. Divide up the quotes however you would like so that all quotes are covered and each person is assigned a minimum of 3 quotes.

   Write each quotation in its entirety on your journal entry (along with its page number) and underneath each one, comment on each of the following FOR EACH QUOTE:
   a. the quote’s context
   b. its possible meaning and relevance to part 1
   c. possible larger meaning for us today or you personally

   Group 2: HROTHGAR→MORE QUOTE EXPERTS—part 3

   Your two-sided journal entry should be called:
   [WA# Beowulf part 3: Quotes 41 – 51]

   You will be assigned quotations [41 - 52] from part 3. Divide up the quotes however you would like so that all quotes are covered and each person is assigned a minimum of 3 quotes.

   Write each quotation in its entirety on your journal entry (along with its page number) and underneath each one, comment on each of the following FOR EACH QUOTE:
   a. the quote’s context
   b. its possible meaning and relevance to parts 1-3
   c. possible larger meaning for us today or you personally

   Group 3: DRAGONS→THE CREATIVE STRETCHERS—part 3

   Your two-sided journal entry should be called:
   [WA# Beowulf part 3: ARTISTIC RESPONSE]

   Thinking about all of Beowulf, not just part 3, design, create, write a creative response to Beowulf. Consider, perhaps, the idea of "We are really all little Beowulfs."

   You might do an artistic rendering, a reading, a collage, a song, pull together a few modern songs that relate (a soundtrack, if you will), design a book jacket, design a movie poster for the new blockbuster, Beowulf, (coming this summer to a theatre near you)—whatever!! Have fun with this one!

   P.S. Check out a Beowulf website on the Internet.

   Group 4: BEOWULFS → THE LAY EXPERTS—part 3

   Your two-sided journal entry should be called:
   [WA# Beowulf part 3: THE LAYS]

   NOTE: If there is no Group E, your task is to focus on the four lays from part 3 which are listed below.

   Each individual in your group must write about a MINIMUM of 2 of the 4 lays listed below. Makes sure that all of the lays are covered.

   If there is a Group E, the second "lay expert group," your group will only have to do the first 2 lays. This would mean everyone in your group would write about at least 2 lays.

   Part 3 lays are:
   "The Lay of the Last Survivor" p. 151-155
   "The Lay of Heardred" pp. 161-163
   "The Lay of the Three Brothers: Herwald, Hæþcyn, Higelc" pp. 163-169
   "The Messenger Lay of Ongentho" pp. 197-203

   Your task is two-fold:
   a. Briefly re-tell each lay in your own words.
   b. Discuss the significance of each lay to Beowulf or any of the other characters in the story. Why was the lay included?
Group 5: GRENDELS→THE OTHER LAY EXPERTS—part 3

Your two-sided journal entry should be called:

WA# Beowulf part 3: THE LAST TWO LAYS

Your task is to focus on the last two lays in part 3.

Your part 3 lays are:

"The Lay of the Three Brothers: Herbold, Hathcyn, Higlac," pp. 163-169
"The Messenger Lay of Ongentho" pp. 197-203

Your task is two-fold:

a. Briefly re-tell each lay in your own words.
b. Discuss the significance of each lay to Beowulf or any of the other characters in the story. Why was the lay included?

ASSIGNMENT B6: GEARING UP FOR THE GRAND BEOWULF FINALE

Due date __________

Choose ONE of the following choices of journal entries.

Choice 1: Journal Entry WA# "SOME POETRY CONNECTIONS TO BEOWULF":

1. Read these poems which can be connected to Beowulf: Shelley's "Ozymandias" (on p. 638 in our black LBT text), Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (on p. 531—intro, 532-536—poem in our black LBT text), and Wilbur's "Beowulf" (if your teacher gives you a copy of this last one).
2. Now respond to the ideas in TWO of these three poems and how each connects to Beowulf and/or Beowulf.

Choice 2: Journal Entry WA# TOLKIEN ASKS "TO BE MOVED OR NOT?"

J. R. R. Tolkien, known to most of you as the author of that fantastical trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, was by training an academician—in fact, a medieval scholar. In his now famous 1936 essay, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien writes:

It (Beowulf) is an heroic-elegiac poem; and in a sense all its first 3136 lines are a prelude to a dirge [. . .] one of the most moving ever written.

Write about this quote in your entry. What do you imagine he meant by such a statement? You might begin by considering what it makes it a "heroic" poem.

What does it show us of the "heroic ideal"? And what is elegiac about it? The phrase "heroic-elegiac" is paradoxical, no? And there's the idea of a dirge. How so?

Finally, where are you on the moving part? Think about what constitutes "moving" to you. To others?

Tolkien actually calls it—yes, the same Beowulf we read—"most moving ever written." What do you think? Was Beowulf moving to you? What would most people find it moving? Why or why not?
Choice 3: Journal Entry WA#  Respond to Ideas Included in “Helpful Hints” Packet.

Go back to the hand-out you were given as we began our story of Beowulf. The hand-out was entitled “Helpful Hints to Unpack Beowulf.” Read through the page of ideas/topics and respond to as many as you wish. Just be sure to fill an entire page with your ideas.

Choice 4: Journal Entry WA#  Create The Game of Beowulf

Knowing what you know of popular board games and the story of Beowulf, create a board game that would re-enact the story’s events, characters, and themes. Actually create the rules, board, playing pieces, etc. YOU MAY COLLABORATE AND PRODUCE THIS GAME WITH ONE OTHER STUDENT IN OUR CLASS IF YOU LIKE.

ASSIGNMENT B7: LATE NIGHT THOUGHTS

Due date ____________

1. Re-read your WA# “Lay of the Last Survivor.” At the end of what you wrote in class, comment (in about a paragraph) on the experience of the activity.

2. Journal Entry WA# “LATE NIGHT THOUGHTS”

Read the article, “Late Night Thoughts,” and respond to it in at least a page. If you could write the author a letter or ask him any questions, what would they be?
Helpful Hints to Unpack Beowulf (Seamus Heaney Translation)

The following info. presents themes to keep an eye out for, things to think about, topics of interest, potential arguments, and possible paper/journal topics.

1. Be sure you are able to explain how Beowulf exemplifies the characteristics of an epic and cite specific examples from the text.

2. A **kennings**, a miniature riddle, an implied comparison usually with two parts and often hyphenated. For example, God's plan is "dread-loom" and Hrothgar is often called "gift-giver." Watch for kennings and try to make up some of your own.

3. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for students beginning with Beowulf is to keep all the **names** straight. Be sure to consult the **family tree** at the end of the book to help you.

4. Another difficulty is the poet's repeated and insistent use of digressions. Look for these passages—the tales of the past—and jot down some notes on them and their significance below. Are these digressions just interesting stories thrown in for the amusement of the audience? Which lays are most crucial in their commentary on the action, the narrative line, themes in Beowulf? Keep track of what happens in each and the significance.

### Part One

- **Brecca:** p. 35-39, l. 499-581

- **Siegmund and Hermod:** p. 59-61, l. 873-914

- **Fight at Finnsburg:** p. 71-81, l. 11070-1158

### Part Two

- **Hygd and Modthryth:** p. 131-135, l. 1925-1962

### Part Three

5. **Lay of the Last Survivor:** p. 151-155, l. 2251-2270

6. **Death of Heordred:** p. 161-163, l. 2379-2390

7. **The 3 Brothers:** p. 163-169, l. 2397-2489

8. **Messenger lay about Ongentho Wulf, Efor**

5. Think, as well, about the **extensive speeches** in Beowulf (other than the lays). In fact, about half the lines in the poem are taken up with these speeches. What is their function? Couldn't the poet have come up with more interesting ways to tell us what's going on?

6. Watch for the giving of **gifts** throughout the poem and **treasures**—treasures that are given and treasures that are selfishly hoarded.

7. How many times can you spot the word "**alone**" in the poem? References to **weaving**?

8. Of what stuff is the **Anglo-Saxon hero** made? What traits does he possess? How does Beowulf differ, say, from Hrothgar and Unferth? How do the Anglo-Saxon heroic traits compare and contrast with today's societal view of heroes? What about your personal views?

9. Is it similarly possible to characterize the **anti-hero in Anglo-Saxon society**?—Unferth, Hermod, and so on? In what ways are the monsters like them? How do they differ from the humans?

10. It has often been said that Beowulf is not one but **two stories** (the fight with Grendel and his dam and, second, the part after that) that are never successfully linked together. In what ways are the two tales linked? Here's one way to think of the problem. If the second half of the poem were missing, would the first half be complete in and of itself? and vice versa?
Take a close look at [Hrothgar’s parting words to Beowulf]. Some have called his closing speech a "sermon" on pride and munificence. Is it a sermon? A Christian sermon? Or a pagan lesson on kingship? Why is this "sermon" so critical to Beowulf's life? Does Beowulf become like Hrothgar?

Is Beowulf a Christian piece of literature or pagan? Is it God or Fate who rules the universe of this poem? If all the references to Christianity were cut out of the poem, would the spirit and point of the poem change at all? If the poem is written by a Christian, why are there no references to Jesus and the story of salvation? What kinds of values and attitudes does the poet especially seem to hold?

Why does Beowulf have [the outcome he has at the end of the poem]? Does Beowulf possess any of the traits of the anti-hero that might, so to speak, lead to this end? Does he, for instance boast to excess? Lust too greatly after material goods? Is Beowulf a [tragic hero] according to Aristotle's traditional definition? If so, what is his tragic flaw?

David Wright, a translator of Beowulf (not the translator of the version we read), states:

Beowulf is one of the longest as well as the most important of complete poems in Old English. It is not a relic of savage bygones, nor is it merely a document of historical importance. It is the only native English heroic epic, and one of the finest products of the Dark Ages of Europe [...]

Its theme is the conflict of good and evil. It is an expression of the fear of the dark, an examination of the nature and purpose of heroism, and the great statement of the Anglo-Saxon outlook and imagination [...]

It affirms the human being in a world where everything is transient, whether life, happiness, power, or splendor; where darkness too quickly follows upon light, just as the long northern winter overthrows the brief season of spring.

Think about this quote as you read the epic poem.

Wright suggests Beowulf is partially [a document of historical importance]. When we read Beowulf, we learn a lot about the Anglo-Saxon life and the values held important during that time period. As you read Beowulf, see what we can learn about the Anglo-Saxon way of life and values.

Wright implies that Beowulf has a message for us in the twentieth century just as it did for the Anglo-Saxon and early English people. Look carefully at the last section of Wright's statement and what Wright might mean by "the dark." He seems to say that Beowulf is a universal story of our journey from adolescence to adulthood to old age and the growth in wisdom about self and the world gained through the pain and triumph of experience. In other words, we are all really little versions of Beowulf. Reflect on this as you read the epic poem. What's in it for you?

A significant amount has been said about [what constitutes a hero]—both in the Anglo-Saxon times as well as in our times today. The story of Beowulf is an epic which focuses, of course, on the struggles and triumphs of an epic hero—namely Beowulf. But is he all he's cracked up to be? When all is said and done, does he measure up? Does he deserve the honor of being called a hero? Would he have been considered a hero in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons? Would he have heroic stature in our society today? Taking into account your own personal definition of hero, would Beowulf qualify?

J.R.R. Tolkien has suggested that the theme of Beowulf deals with "man alien in a hostile world, engaged in a struggle which he cannot win [...]

Is the world of Beowulf clearly "a man's world"? But wait—there are women in Beowulf. Think about the role of women in this epic poem. Are these inclusions significant to development of theme? Do the [women's roles] help our understanding of the poem's world and enrich the events of the poem? As you read the poem, think about these ideas.

Beowulf is steeped in a pagan tradition that depicts nature as hostile and forces of death as uncontrollable. Blind fate picks random victims; perhaps human beings are never reconciled with the world. Perhaps Beowulf ends up a failure. As you read Beowulf, think about this idea.

Some say that Beowulf is the story of a [dual ordeal]: an external battle with vicious opponents and an equally important internal battle with human tendencies. What do you think?

Some say Beowulf derives much of its flavor from the ingenious manner in which the heroic qualities of pre-Christian Germanic civilization are brought into harmony with Christianity. Do you agree? As you read the poem think about whether the poem's [integration of the two worlds] is successful.

J. R. R. Tolkien, known to most of you as the author of that fantastical trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, was by training an academician—in fact, a medieval scholar. In his now famous 1936 essay, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien writes:

It [Beowulf] is an heroic-epic poem; and in a sense all of its first 3136 lines are a prelude to a dirge [...]. One of the most moving ever written.

What do you imagine he meant by such a statement? What does this poem show us of the "heroic ideal"? And what is elegiac about it? Perhaps the phrase "heroic-elegiac" is paradoxical. And then there's the idea of a dirge. What does that mean? Tolkien claims it is "one of the most moving ever written." As you read Beowulf, think about these ideas and particularly where you are on the "moving" part?
1. "That was one good king." p. 3, l. 11

2. "Behavior that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere." p. 5, l. 24-25

3. "until finally one, a fiend out of hell/ began to work his evil in the world./ [Grendel] was the name of this grim demon, haunting the marches, marauding round the hearth and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time in misery among the banished monsters, [Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel/ the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:""] p. 9, l. 100-108

4. "Cain got no good from committing that murder/because the Almighty made him anathema/ and out of the curse of his exile there sprang/ ogres and elves and evil phantoms/ and the giants too who strove with God/ time and again until He gave them their reward." p. 9, l. 109-114 (what's "their reward"?"

5. "He was numb with grief, but got no respite." p. 11, l. 134

6. "[...] he would never/parley or make peace with any Dane/nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price." p. 13, l. 154-156

7. "Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed/offerings to idols, swore oaths/that the killer of souls might come to their aid/and save the people. That was their way,/their heathenish hope [...]" p. 13-15, l. 175-179

8. "There was no one else like him [Hygelac's thane] alive." p. 15, l. 196

9. "there should be nothing hidden or withheld between us." p. 19, l. 272

10. "Anyone with gumption/ and a sharp mind will take the measure/ of two things: what's said and what's done." p. 21, l. 287-299

11. "So every elder and experienced councliman/among my people supported my resolve/ to come here to you, King Hrothgar" p. 29, l. 415-417

12. "Now I mean to be a match for Grendel/settle the outcome in single combat." p. 29, l. 425-426

13. "Whichever one death fells/must deem it a just judgment by God." p. 31, l. 440-441

14. "Fate goes ever as fate must." p. 31, l. 455

15. "but his fate that night/ was due to change, his days of ravening had come to an end." p. 49, l. 733-735

16. "The captain of evil discovered himself/ in a handgrip harder than anything/ he had ever encountered in any man/ on the face of the earth. [...] He was desperate to flee to his den and hide/ with the devil's litter, [...]" p. 51, l. 749-752; 754-755

17. "[...] no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art/ could ever damage their demon opponent. [...] But his;/ [Grendel's] going away/ out of this world and the days of his life/ would be agony to him" p. 53-55, l. 801-802; 804-806 (take a look at this one; that made the most sense to me)

18. "Then he who had burnished the hearts of men/ with pain and affliction in former times/ and had given offence also to God/ found that his bodily powers had failed him." p. 55, l. 808-811


SPACE BELOW IS FOR YOUR OWN IDEAS FOR MORE HELPFUL PART ONE BEOWULF QUOTES. Jot them down below and tell why each is so significant.

**1ST QUOTE**

**COPY QUOTE:**

**WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?**

**2ND QUOTE**

**COPY QUOTE:**

**WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?**
20. “One of these things, as far as anyone ever can discern, looks like a woman; the other, warped in the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale bigger than any man.” p. 95, l. 1349-1353

21. “Now help depends again on you and on you alone. [...] Seek it if you dare. I will compensate you for settling the feud as I did the last time with lavish wealth, coffers of coiled gold, if you come back.” p. 97, l. 1376-1377, 1379-1382

22. “Wise sir, do not grieve, it is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning. For every one of us, living in this world means waiting for our end. Let whoever can win glory before death. When a warrior is gone, that will be his best and only bulwark.” p. 97, l. 1384-1389

23. “And be sure also, my beloved Hrothgar, to send Hygelac the treasures I received.” p. 103, l. 1482-1483

24. “Quickly the one who haunted those waters, who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds for a hundred seasons, sensed a human observing her outlandish lair from above. So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch him in her brutal grip.” p. 105, l. 1497-1502

25. “Hygelac’s kinsman kept thinking about his name and fame: he never lost heart. Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away. The keen, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely on the might of his arm. So must a man do who intends to to gain enduring glory in a combat. Life doesn’t cost him a thought.” p. 107, l. 1529-1536

26. “Then he saw a blade that boded well, a sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon, one that any warrior would envy, so huge and heavy of itself only Beowulf could wield it in a battle.” p. 107-109, l. 1557-1562

27. “They bowed grey heads, spoke in their sage, experienced way about the good warrior, how they never again expected to see that prince returning in triumph to their king. [...] The ninth hour of the day arrived. The brave Shieldings abandoned the cliff-top and the king went home; but sick at heart, staring at the mere, the strangers held on. They wished, without hope, to behold their lord.” p. 111, l. 1594-1598; 1600-1604

28. “So learn from this, and understand true values. I who tell you have wintered into wisdom. It is a great wonder how Almighty God is His magnificence, favours our race with rank and scope and the gift of wisdom, His sway is wide. Sometimes He allows the mind of man, of distinguished birth to follow its bent, [...]. He permits him to lord it in many lands until the man in his unthinkingness forgets that it will ever end for him.” p. 119, l. 1722-1729; 1732-1734

29. “Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part, eternal rewards. Do not give way to pride. For a brief while your strength is in bloom; but it fades quickly, and soon there will follow illness or the sword to lay you low, or a sudden fire or surge or water or jabbing blade or javelin from the air or repellent age. Your piercing eye will dim and darken; and death will arrive, dear warrior, to sweep you away.” p. 121, l. 1759-1768

SPACE BELOW IS FOR YOUR OWN IDEAS FOR MORE HELPFUL PART TWO BEOWULF QUOTES. Jot them down below [and] tell why each is so significant.

1ST QUOTE # from page lines in Beowulf.
COPY QUOTE: ________________________________

WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?

2ND QUOTE # from page lines in Beowulf.
COPY QUOTE: ________________________________

WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?
30. “Now, earth, hold what ears once held / and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first / by honorable men. […] I am left with nobody / to bear a sword or burnish plated goblets, / put a sheen on the cup. / The companies have departed. / The hard helmet, hasped with gold, / will be stripped of its / hoops; and the helmet-shiner / who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps; / the coats of mail / that came through all fights, / through shield-collapse and cut of sword, / decays with the warrior.” p. 153, l. 2247-2249; 2252-2260

31. “Then an old harrower of the dark / happened to find the hoard open, / the burning one who hunts out / barrows, / the slick-skinned dragon, threatening the night sky / with streams of fire. / People on the farms / are in dread of him. / He is driven to hunt out / hoards under ground, to guard heathen gold / through age-long vigils, though to little avail.” p. 155, l. 2271-2277

32. “Now I am old, / but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight / for the glory of winning, if the evil one will only / abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open.” p. 171, l. 2512-2515

33. “But I shall be meeting molten venom / in the fire he breathes, so I go forth / in mail-shirt and shield. I / won’t shift a foot / when I meet the cave-guard: what occurs on the wall / between the two of us will turn / out as fate, / overseer of men, decides. I am resolved. / I scorn further words against this sky-borne foe.” p. 171, l. 2522-2528

34. “This fight is not yours, / nor is it up to any man except me / to measure his strength against the monster / or to prove his worth. / I shall win the gold / my courage, or else mortal combat, / doom of battle, will bear your lord away.” p. 171, l. 2532-2537

35. “Then he drew himself up beside his shield. / The fabled warrior in his warshirt and helmet / trusted in his own strength entirely / and went under the clog. / No coward path.” p. 171, l. 2538-2541

36. “that final day was the first time / when Beowulf fought and fate denied him / glory in battle. / So the king / of Geats / raised his hand and struck hard at the enamel-eared scales” p. 173-175, l. 2573-2577

37. “For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing / to have to give ground like that and go / unwillingly to inhabit another home / in a place beyond, / so every man must yield / to the leasehold of his days.” p. 175, l. 2587-2591

38. “The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up / and got a new wind; he who had once ruled / was furled in fire and had to face the worst. / No help or backing was to be had then / from his high-born comrades; / that hand-picked troop / broke ranks and ran for their lives / to the safety of the wood. / But within one heart / sorrow welled up / in a man of worth / the claims of kinship cannot be denied.” p. 175, l. 2593-2601

39. “When he saw his lord / tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet, / he remembered the bountiful gifts bestowed on him, / how well he lived among the Wægmundings, / the freehold he inherited from / his father before him. / If he could not hold back: / one hand brandished / the yellow-timbered shield, / the other drew his sword.” p. 175-177, l. 2604-2610

40. “Weohstan kept that war-gear for a lifetime, / the sword and the mail-shirt, until it was the son’s turn / to follow his father and perform his part.” p. 177, l. 2620-2622

41. “now the day has come / when this lord we serve needs sound men / to give him their support. […] As / God is my witness, / I would rather my body were robed in the same / burning blaze as my gold-giver’s / body […] / I well know / the things he has done for us deserve better. / Should he be left exposed / to fall in battle?” p. 179, l. 2646-2648; 2650-2652; 2656-2660

42. “All this consoles me, / doomed as I am and sickening for death / because of my right ways, the Ruler of mankind / need never blame me when the breath leaves my body / for murder of kinsmen.” p. 185, l. 2739-2743

43. “my going will be easier / for having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-go / of the life and lordship / I have long maintained.” p. 185, l. 2749-2751

44. “exulting in his triumph, and saw beyond the seat / a treasure-trove of astonishing richness, / wall-hangings that were a wonder to behold, / glittering gold spread across the ground, […] / How easily / treasure / buried in the ground, gold hidden / however skillfully, can escape from any many! […] / Then, / the story goes, a certain man / plundered the hoard in that immemorial howe, / filled his arms with / flagon and plates, / anything he wanted” p. 185-187, l. 2756-2759; 2764-2766; 2773-2776

45. “To the everlasting Lord of All, / / to the King of Glory, I give thanks / that I behold this treasure here / in front of me, […] / Now that I have barred my last breath / to own this fortune” p. 189, l. 2794-2796; 2799-2800

46. “it is up to you [Wiglaf] / to look after their [my people’s] needs. / I can hold out no longer. / Order my / troop to construct a barrow […] / It will loom on the horizon at Hrunessness / and be a reminder among / my people – / so that in coming times crews under sail / will call it Beowulf’s Barrow” p. 189, l. 2800-2802; 2804-2807

47. “Every one of you / with freeholds of land, / our whole nation, / will be dispossessed, once princes from beyond / get tidings of how you turned and fled / and disgraced yourselves. / A warrior will sooner / die than live a life of shame.” p. 195, l. 2886-2891
48. “So it was with Beowulf, when he faced the cruelty / and cunning of the mound-guard. He himself was ignorant / of how his departure from the world would happen. The high-born chiefs who had buried the treasure / declared it until doomsday so accursed / that whoever robbed it would be guilty of wrong / and grimly punished for their transgression, / hasped in helms-bonds in heathen shrines. / Yet Beowulf’s gaze / at the gold treasure / when he first saw it had not been selfish.” p. 207, l. 3066-3075

49. “he selected the best [of the king’s thanes] / and entered with them, the eighth of their number, / under the God-cursed roof, one raised / a lighted torch and led the way. / No lots were cast for who should loot / the hoard / for it was obvious to them that every bit of it / lay unprotected within the vault, / there for the taking. It was no trouble / to hurry to work and haul out / the priceless store.” p. 209-211, l. 3122-3131

50. “It was their hero’s memorial; what remained from the fire / they housed inside it, behind a wall / as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it. / And they buried torches in the barrow, and jewels / and a trove of such things as trespassing men / had once dared to drag from the hoard. / They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure, / gold under gravel, gone to earth, as useless to men now as it ever was.” p. 213, l. 3160-3168

51. “So the Geat people, his hearth companions, / sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low. / They said / that of all the kings upon the earth / he was the man most gracious and fair-minded, / kindest to his people and kindest to win fame.” p. 213, l. 3178-3182

**BEOWULF QUOTES.** Jot them down below and tell why each is so significant.

1ST QUOTE

**COPY QUOTE:**

**WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?**

2ND QUOTE

**COPY QUOTE:**

**WHY IS THIS QUOTE SIGNIFICANT/REVEALING?**

---

**APPLICATION:**

**IMPORTANT IDEAS:** Highlight or underline important ideas and things that strike you—make you go “hmmmm.”

**REALLY IMPORTANT IDEAS:** Star ideas of utmost importance.

**SIGNIFICANT EVENTS:** In the upper corner, jot down an important/significant event that happens on that page.

**NEW CHARACTERS:** In the bottom corner, jot down the name of a character on the page that he or she first appears in the novel.

**VOCABULARY WORDS:** Put a box around (and maybe its definition above it) any unfamiliar vocabulary words or ones with archaic or unusual meanings; Put a 🗑️ in the margin next to the word to remind you that this word is super important.

**MAKE CROSS-REFERENCED LISTS:** Start cross-referenced lists on the front and back pages (or add large post-it notes) for things like the following:

1. **character names** and brief description and page number he/she first appears. Cross-reference by highlighting the information on the actual page of text with more in-depth comments. **NOTE:** If you bought the Raffel translation, there is a “Glossary of Names” starting on page 149. Each time you meet a new character, highlight the character’s name right in the “Glossary of Names.” Jot down the page number where he or she first appeared. If something critical happens to the character (i.e., death) jot that down right in the “Glossary of Names,” too.

2. **symbols and motifs (elements/situations which reoccur)** (ex. the gifts bestowed upon Beowulf = symbol, the use of the word...
"alone" in Beowulf = motif)
Make a chart on a blank page in the front or back of the book for these. Under each example, jot down page numbers where that symbol or motif is mentioned.
Cross-reference by highlighting the information on the actual page of text with more in-depth comments.

3. significant quotations and the page numbers where that quotation is mentioned. Cross-reference by highlighting the information on the actual page of text with more in-depth comments. If the quotation is one listed in our yellow Significant Quotations section of the Beowulf packet, not only should you highlight the quote in the text, but also put a big ‘SQ’ in the margin beside it to distinguish it from other significant quotations you have found on your own.

4. themes and the page numbers where that theme is mentioned. Cross-reference by highlighting the information on the actual page of text with more in-depth comments.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS: Comment in the margins and read personally—agree, disagree, compare or contrast to previous knowledge/another book/ideas. (Example: "I think Beowulf is way too stuck on himself!" or "Hrothgar’s speech reminds me of my dad here.")

QUESTIONS: Write question marks or actual questions in the margins about what is not understood right away on a page you’re reading (Example: Is Hrothgar Beowulf’s uncle? Or Who is Grendel’s father?)

PREDICTIONS: Predict what might happen next after reading a certain page or at the end of a chapter (Example: "I bet he’s going to lose this battle"). Write the predictions in the margin or on the bottom of that page.

SUMMARIES: Summarize (always in your own words) paragraphs, passages, sections, chapters, etc., to make sure the text is really understood.

SPECULATIONS: Write any speculations in the margin or on the bottom of that page. (Example: "What if Beowulf would have been in a relationship when this happened?" or "What if Grendel’s father were present?")

John Gardner’s Grendel
JOURNALS

Due date: __________

GG (Gardner’s Grendel) #1: Personal Response
Patrick Galloway, who has a B.A. in English Literature from San Francisco State University, said, "As much as I enjoyed reading the exploits of the great Grendel, I must say that Beowulf resonated at a deeper level for me. In the title character’s first-person narrative I found a more personal corollary: Gardner’s Grendel, though man-eating beast, is a thinker, an intellectual trapped (isolated) in a world without peers. As strange as it might sound to say that I identified with a monster, that is exactly how I felt reading this novel. To experience acutely the scorn and fear of a world with which one feels no affinity, and yet, at the same time, to perceive the vividness and obviousness of that world, to feel ostracized by a race of beings whose own fatuity and turpitude makes one ashamed for having relished the thought of acceptance, to be lonely. This, to me, is the crux of the matter regarding Grendel. Loneliness can drive an individual to monstrous extremes. Eating Danes, for instance.

What was your personal reaction to reading Grendel? How did it compare to reading Beowulf? Comment on Galloway’s quote and how much his reaction to Grendel resonated with your own experience with the novel as well as the idea of being “an intellectual trapped (isolated) in a world without peers.”

GG (Gardner’s Grendel) #2: 4 Characters
Patrick Galloway also states, “The most intriguing aspect of Grendel is the background we receive on primary characters such as Hrothgar, Wealhtheow, Unferth, and, of course, Grendel. Gardner, while admittingly taking full advantage of his poetic licence [sic], provides biographical data for each of these individuals which lays a groundwork for subtle, psychological insights into the personalities and actions of each.” Take these four primary characters, and based on what you already know from reading Beowulf, comment on what it is that Gardner’s Grendel does to enhance, shed deeper insight on, and further develop these characters.

GG (Gardner’s Grendel) #3: Choose a Topic
Take one of the following topics and trace its presence in Grendel:
• Grendel’s attitude toward language
• Choose an astrological sign and follow it through its associated chapter. Look at its relevance and what it comes to signify in Grendel as a whole.
• Trace Gardner’s use of "cartoon imagery" throughout the novel. Why is the use of grotesque, exaggerated humor appropriate in the novel?

GG (Gardner’s Grendel) #4: Extra Credit or Required?
Take up the very idea about making reading Grendel an extra credit option during our study of Beowulf, not a required assignment. After reading Grendel, thinking about it, and doing a few journals, do you think this should be extra credit or required? Give a full account as to why it should be required or extra credit.
SOME BEOWULF ANALYSIS PAPER TOPICS

David Wright, a translator of Beowulf (not the translator of the version we read), states:

Beowulf is one of the longest as well as the most important of complete poems in Old English. It is not a relic of savage bygones, nor is it merely a document of historical importance. It is the only native English heroic epic, and one of the finest products of the Dark Ages of Europe [...] Its theme is the conflict of good and evil. It is an expression of the fear of the dark, an examination of the nature and purpose of heroism, and the great statement of the Anglo-Saxon outlook and imagination [...] It affirms the human being in a world where everything is transient, whether life, happiness, power, or splendor; where darkness too quickly follows upon light, just as the long northern winter overwhelms the brief season of spring.

Topic 1: Wright suggests Beowulf is partially a document of historical importance. When we read Beowulf, we learn a lot about the Anglo-Saxon life and the values held important during that time period. In your essay, prove that Beowulf is as much an important document of historical importance as it is a good story of fiction.

Topic 2: Wright implies that Beowulf has a message for us in the twentieth century just as it did for the Anglo-Saxon and early English people. Look carefully at the last section of Wright's statement. (By the way, what does Wright mean by "the dark"?) He seems to say that Beowulf is the universal story of our journey from adolescence to adulthood and the growth in wisdom about self and the world gained through the pain and triumph of experience. Prove that it is true that most people are really little Beowulls.

Topic 3: A significant amount has been said about what constitutes a hero—both in the Anglo-Saxon times as well as in our times today. The story of Beowulf is an epic which focuses, of course, on the struggles and triumphs of an epic hero—namely Beowulf. But is he all he's cracked up to be? When all is said and done, does he measure up? Does he deserve the honor of being called a hero? In this essay, discuss whether or not Beowulf ultimately deserves to be called a hero. Concentrate, first, on whether he would have been considered a hero in the Anglo-Saxons. Next, discuss whether he would have heroic stature in our society today. Finally, discuss whether you feel, taking into account your personal definition of hero, Beowulf is a hero. NOTE: you may use the personal pronouns "I", "me", "my", "mine" ONLY in the 3rd section of the essay.

Topic 4: Much has been said of the Anglo-Saxon concept of the so-called "heroic ideal." The story starts out with Shild introduced as the model of this ideal. As translator Seamus Heaney indicated about Shild, "that was one good king." Yet, Raffel translated this same idea another way: "there was a brave king." Of what stuff is the Anglo-Saxon hero made? What traits does he possess? How does Beowulf differ, say, from Hrothgar and Uther? Ultimately, would Beowulf be considered the paradigm Anglo-Saxon hero?

Topic 5: J.R.R. Tolkien has suggested that the theme of Beowulf deals with "man alien in a hostile world", engaged in a struggle which he cannot win [...] Agree with or refute this idea.

Topic 6: Some say, "it's a man's world." 19. But there are women in Beowulf (some who participate in the actual storyline and others present in the lays). Think about the role of women in this epic poem. Are these exclusions significant to development of theme? Is the world of Beowulf clearly "a man's world"? Do the women's rules help our understanding of the poem's world and its themes and enrich the events of the poem? Agree with or refute the idea that the exclusions of women in the poem are important and help our understanding of the poet's world, themes, as well as enrich the events of the poem.

Topic 7: Beowulf is steeped in a pagan tradition that depicts nature as hostile and forces of death as uncontrollable. Blind fate picks random victims; man is never reconciled with the world. Agree with or refute this idea.

Topic 8: Beowulf is the story of a dual ordeal: an external battle with vicious opponents and an equally important internal battle with human tendencies. Agree with or refute this idea.

Topic 9: Beowulf derives much of its flavor from the ingenious manner in which the heroic qualities of pre-Christian Germanic civilization (the pagan) are brought into harmony with Christianity. The integration of the two worlds (pagan and Christian) is quite successful. Agree with or refute this idea.

Topic 10: Is Beowulf a Christian piece of literature? or pagan? Is the message ultimately a Christian one? Is it God or Fate who rules the universe of this poem? If all the references to Christianity were cut out of the poem, would the spirit and point of the poem change at all? If the poem is written by a Christian, why are there no references to Jesus and the story of salvation? What kinds of values and attitudes does the poet especially seem to hold? Agree or refute some of these ideas.

Topic 11: Think about the lays and the other extensive speeches in Beowulf. Prove that either the lays/speeches are vital to develop major themes/characters in the poem or that we could just as well have done without them.

Topic 12: How does Beowulf develop the theme of the importance of interconnectedness? How many times can you spot the word alone in the poem? What about references to weaning? What does the importance of the giving of gifts throughout the poem and treasures—treasures that are given and treasures that are selfishly hoarded—have to do with stressing the importance of being connected with others? (Recall the biblical question, "Am I my brother's keeper").

Topic 13: Take a close look at Hrothgar's parting words to Beowulf. Some have called his closing speech a "sermon" on pride and humankind. Is it a sermon? A Christian sermon? Or a pagan lesson on kingship? Why is this "sermon" so critical to Beowulf's life? Does Beowulf become like Hrothgar? What does this epic poem say about the concept of PRIDE?

Topic 14: J.R.R. Tolkien, known most of you as the author of that fantastical trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, was by training an academian—in fact, a medieval scholar. In his now famous 1936 essay, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien writes:

It [Beowulf] is an heroic-epic poem; and in a sense all of its first 3136 lines are a prelude to a dirge [...] one of the most moving ever written. Prove that Beowulf does or does not "live up to" this statement.

Topic 15: You can create your own thesis based on something of importance that came to mind after reading Beowulf or after considering the above essay questions. This question must be submitted beforehand for instructor approval. In order for me to consider it, you must write a preliminary thesis statement and rough outline. Then, make an appointment to discuss it for possible approval by ______ date.
The Middle Ages

to ca. 1485

ca. 450: Anglo-Saxon Conquest.
597: St. Augustine arrives in Kent; beginning of Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity.
871-899: Reign of King Alfred.
1066: Norman Conquest.
ca. 1200: Beginnings of Middle English literature.
1360-1400: The summit of Middle English literature: Geoffrey Chaucer; Piers Plowman; Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

The medieval period in English literature extends for more than 800 years, from Caedmon’s Hymn at the end of the seventh century to Everyman at the beginning of the sixteenth. The date 1485 with the accession of Henry VII to the throne of England is an arbitrary but convenient one to mark the “end” of the Middle Ages. Historians used to divide this period into two parts, unfairly calling the earlier centuries the Dark Ages in order to distinguish them from the later centuries, when European culture attained one of the summits of its history. While the term is misleading—for the Dark Ages were only relatively dark—it is nevertheless true that the English Middle Ages embraced two quite different periods of literary history, the Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) and the Middle English, sharply divided from each other by the Norman duke William’s conquest of the island in 1066. Both English culture and the English language changed radically in the years following this event, and English literature developed a new spirit.

Because it is impossible to read the Old English language without a great deal of study, Old English texts printed in this book are given in translation. Middle English texts such as Chaucer’s, written in a dialect which is the ancestor of Modern Standard English, appear in the original, but have been spelled in a way that it is hoped will aid the reader. Middle English texts written in the more difficult regional dialects are given in translation. Analyses of the sounds and grammar of Middle English, and of Old and Middle English prosody, appear at the end of this introduction.

The Old English Period

The Anglo-Saxon invasion of the island of Britain which began in the first half of the fifth century was a phase of a great folk migration that had started some centuries earlier and was to continue for several more—the movement of the Germanic tribes from the northeast of Europe into the areas of the Roman Empire to the west, south, and southeast. The so-called Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain actually consisted of three tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Although each was independent, through their common Germanic heritage these tribes were closely allied with one another and with the many other tribes that already had or would in the future overrun much of the old Roman Empire. They shared the same prehistoric ancestors; even in historical times their individual tongues amounted to little other than variant dialects of a common language, while the customs of one tribe differed little from those of another.

In its earliest period Germanic society had been organized by families: the head of the family was the chief of his close kinmen, and the family formed an independent political entity. With the passing of time, the unit of society tended to grow larger as a number of families united under a single superior chief or “king,” to use the word derived from the Old Germanic name for chief. But the unit grew to be very large only rarely, when some particularly successful king attracted others to him in order to perform some specific exploit; and such larger unions rarely endured long after the completion of the venture for which they had been formed. The normal order of society was made up of a number of small bands, which, while they did not always live at peace with one another, still shared a sense of community and kinship, especially in the face of a common enemy such as the people whose lands they were invading; but when they had conquered, their natural political divisioniveness reasserted itself. Thus long after the Anglo-Saxons had become settled in Britain, the island was still broken up into a bewildering number of kingdoms, some of them very short-lived, and a coherent union of all England was not achieved until after the Norman conquest.

The same general organization of many kings coexisting within a common culture had been characteristic of that other migratory people, the Greeks (or, more accurately, Achaeans), who centuries earlier had overrun the region of the eastern Mediterranean. And both to the Achaeans and to the Germanic peoples the ideal of kingly behavior was enormously important—indeed, it was perhaps the chief spiritual force behind the civilizations they both developed, the creative power that, in their earliest periods, shaped their history and their literature. It is generally called the heroic ideal; and put most simply, the heroic ideal was excellence. The hero-king strove to do better than anyone else the things that an essentially migratory life demanded: to sail a ship through a storm, to swim a river or a bay, to tame a horse, to choose a campsite and set firm defenses, in times of peace even to plow a field or build a hall, but always and above all, to fight. Skill and courage were the primary qualities of a king who should successfully lead his people in battle and sustain them during peace.

In its oldest form, the ideal was appropriate only to kings, but because society was so closely knit, all the more important male members of the tribe tended to imitate it. (Germanic society was wholly dominated by males; women are rarely mentioned in the surviving records of it, and only if they
are the wives or daughters of kings.) In general, of course, the heroic ideal of conduct was aristocratic, restricted to the king and his immediate retainers, though without that quality of unreality and remoteness from daily life that we associate with later medieval aristocracy. The king was the active leader of a small number of fellow warriors who, as members of his household, beheld all that he did. A successful king won from his retainers complete loyalty. It was their duty to defend him in battle, to give up their own lives while defending or avenging his. In return the king gave his retainers gifts from the spoil that had been accumulated in warfare. Royal generosity was one of the most important aspects of heroic behavior, for it symbolized the excellence of the king’s rule, implying in the one hand that the retainers deserved what they were given because of their loyalty to him, and, on the other, showing that he himself was worthy of such loyalty. The heroic ideal had a very practical bearing on the life of the people whom the king ruled.

While the heroic ideal would win practical success for a king, it had also another, perhaps more important end—enduring fame. In cultures whose religion, unlike Christianity, offers no promise of an afterlife, a name that will live on after one’s death serves as the closest substitute for immortality. From this arises the heroic paradox, still latent in our own civilization, that by dying gloriously one may achieve immortality. The poet who could sing the story of his heroic life, of course, the agent upon whom the hero depended for his fame, and a good poet—or bard, to use the customary term for the poet of heroic life—was a valued member of a primitive court. Alexander is said to have expressed envy of Achilles because he had had a Homer to celebrate his deeds. The poetic form which primitive bards evolved for their heroic narratives is called “epic”; it is characterized by a solemn dignity of tone and elevation of style. Their poems were not written down, but recited aloud from memory, and hence most of them have been lost. In Greece there have survived Homer’s two epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, while from Germanic culture the chief survivor is the Old English Beowulf. But enough has been preserved to show the enduring popularity of heroic stories throughout the migratory phase of the two peoples, who never tired of hearing the deeds of their folk heroes. Thus the immortality that the old heroes had sought was achieved through poetry, and poetry in turn gave inspiration to later men in leading their own lives.

CHRISTIANITY AND OLD ENGLISH CULTURE

Whatever literary materials the Anglo-Saxons brought with them when they came to Britain existed only in their memories, for the making of written records was something they learned only when they were converted to Christianity. The Celtic inhabitants whose land they were seizing were Christians, as had been the Romans whose forces had occupied the island since the first century and whose withdrawal at the beginning of the fifth had opened the way to the Anglo-Saxons; but for one hundred fifty years after the beginning of the invasion Christianity was maintained only in the remoter regions where the Anglo-Saxons failed to penetrate. In the year 597, however, St. Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory as a missionary to King Ethelbert of Kent, one of the most southerly of the kingdoms into which England was divided, and about the same time missionaries from Ireland began to preach Christianity in the north. Within seventy-five years the island has once more predominantly Christian. Ethelbert himself was one of the Christian converts, and it is indicative of the relationship between

Christianity and writing that the first written specimen of the Old English (Anglo-Saxon) language is a code of laws promulgated by the first English Christian king.

In the centuries that followed up till the Norman Conquest England produced a large number of distinguished, highly literate churchmen. One of the earliest of these was Bede, whose Ecclesiastical History of the English People, written in Latin, was completed in 731; this remains our most important source of knowledge about the Anglo-Saxon period. In the next generation Alcuin, a man of wide culture, became the friend and advisor of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne, whom he assisted in making the Frankish court a great center of learning: thus by the year 800 English culture had developed so richly that it overflowed its insular boundaries. But the greatest impetus on English culture came from a man who was not of the clergy: Alfred, king of the West Saxons from 871 to 899, who for a time united all the kingdoms of southern England and beat off those new Germanic invaders, the Vikings. This most active king was an enthusiastic patron of literature. He himself translated various works from Latin, the most important of which was Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy, the early sixth-century Roman work whose heroic stoicism has proved continuously congenial to the English temperament. Apparently under Alfred’s direction Bede’s History was also translated into Old English, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was begun: this year-by-year record of important events in England was maintained until the middle of the twelfth century. Furthermore, the preservation of many of the surviving earlier English works, including Beowulf, is due to the fact that copies of them were made in the West Saxon dialect because, in large part, of the impetus Alfred gave to literary studies. Though the political stability that Alfred achieved was not long-lived, the culture he nourished so lovingly was maintained at a high level until the very end of the Old English period.

OLD ENGLISH POETRY

The genius for heroic poetry the Anglo-Saxons brought with them when they came to Britain, as they probably also brought with them the alliterative form (see the section on “Old and Middle English Prosody” and, for a discussion of poetic style, the end of the introduction to Bede and Caedmon’s Hymn) in which all the Old English poetry that has survived was composed. Since they wrote nothing down until they had become Christianized, and since in many respects Christian ideals and heroic ideals are difficult to reconcile, it is natural that very little poetry has survived that is purely Christian in composition. But Beowulf, the greatest of Germanic epics, containing much evidently pre-Christian material, even though the author of the particular form of the poem that has come down to us was a Christian who refers to events of the Old (but not of the New) Testament. Several other short poems or fragments also seem to reflect the pagan period without Christian coloring. Yet the vast bulk of Old English poetry is specifically Christian, devoted to religious subjects. Interestingly enough, however, it is almost all in the heroic mode, while the Anglo-Saxons adapted themselves readily to the ideals of Christianity, they did not do so without adapting Christianity to their own heroic ideal. In order to make the alien world of the Bible intelligible to their hearers, Old English poets (almost all of whom are nameless) infused it with many of the values that they had inherited from their own history. Thus Moses and St. Andrew, Christ and God, share the attributes of a Beowulf, are represented as heroes w
famous deeds. In the *Dream of the Rood*, the Cross speaks of Christ as "the young hero, . . . strong and stouthearted," whose crucifixion is less a passion—a suffering—than a heroic action. In Caedmon's *Hymn* the creation of heaven and earth is seen as a mighty deed, an "establishment of wonders" not altogether unlike Hrothgar's building of the hall Heorot in *Beowulf*. The sad consciousness of the transience of all earthly good combined with the compulsion to go on striving—so characteristic of the heroic spirit—appears most poignantly in two Christian laments, the *Wandrer* and the *Seafarer*. That the heroic ideal held its value down to the end of the Old English period is shown by the *Battle of Maldon*, in which the defeat of English defenders by a band of marauding Vikings is described in the highest tradition of Germanic heroism. Against doom, there is only courage.

The world of Old English poetry is a dark one, and to a modern reader it may also seem a narrow one with narrow laws that exclude all but sardonic laughter. Men in the mead-hall are said to be cheerful, but even there they think of struggle in war, of possible triumph but more possible failure. Romantic love—one of the principal topics of later literature—appears hardly at all. Men seem seldom to relax; clothed in their armor, they are always preparing to test their courage against fate. (They are, indeed, so habitually seen as warriors that in the earlier poetry the words for "man" and "warrior" are often interchangeable.) Depressing as this world may seem, it is recreated in Old English poetry with extraordinary intensity, with high spiritual excitement. This excitement is achieved in part by the frequent use of ironic understatement. Actions and things are spoken of as less than they really are because, apparently, the speaker wishes to suggest that they are more—or perhaps other—than they are. "They cared not for battle," says the author of the *Battle of Maldon* about those cowardly Englishmen who fled the fight. Even the "berning," that highly formalized compound metaphor common to Old Germanic poetry, often seems to suggest potentials ironically—"whale's road" or "swan's path" for a sea so perilous for men lacking the physical equipment of whales and swans. The dignity the Anglo-Saxons assigned to poetry—which was the repository of the ancient traditions by which they lived—apparently prevented the humor latent in ironic understatement from reaching any expression more overt than a grim smile. Yet despite its somberness, Old English poetry goes about its business of depicting harsh reality with an extraordinary subtlety and intensity.

*Beowulf*

*Beowulf*, the oldest of the great long poems written in English, may have been composed more than twelve hundred years ago, in the first half of the eighth century, though some scholars would place it as late as the tenth century. Its author may have been a native of what was then West Mercia, the West Midlands of England today, though the late tenth-century manuscript, which alone preserves the poem, originated in the south in the kingdom of the West Saxons. In 1731, before any modern transcription of the text had been made, the manuscript was seriously damaged in the fire that destroyed the buildings in London which housed the extraordinary collection of medieval English manuscripts made by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631). As a result of the fire and of subsequent deterioration of the manuscript, a number of lines and words have been lost from the poem, but even if the manuscript had not been damaged, the poem would still have been difficult, because the poetic Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) in which it was written is itself hard, the style is allusive, the ideas often seem remote and strange to modern perceptions, and because the text was inevitably corrupted during the transcriptions which must have intervened between the poem's
composition and the copying of the extant manuscript. Yet despite its difficulty, the poem himself of Beowulf is still capable of stirring the hearts of readers, and because of its excellence as well as its antiquity, the poem merits the high position that it is generally assigned in the study of English poetry.

While the poem itself is English in language and origin, it deals not with native Englishmen, but with their Germanic forebears, especially with two south Scandinavian tribes, the Danes and the Geats, who lived on the Danish island of Zealand and in southern Sweden, respectively. Thus, the historical period it concerns—insofar as it may be said to refer to history at all—is some centuries before the poem was written; that is, it concerns a time following the initial invasion of England by Germanic tribes in 449, but before the Anglo-Saxon migration was completed, and perhaps before the arrival of the ancestors of the audience to whom the poem was sung; this audience may have considered itself to be of the same Geatish stock as the hero, Beowulf. The one datable fact of history mentioned in the poem is a raid on the Franks made by Higelac, the king of the Geats at the time Beowulf was a young man, and this raid occurred in the year 520. Yet despite their antiquity, the poem's materials must have been very much alive to his audience, for the elliptical way in which he alludes to events not directly concerned with his plot demands of the listener a wide knowledge of traditional Germanic history. This knowledge was probably kept alive by the old heroic poetry, of which little has been preserved in English, though much must once have existed. As it stands, Beowulf is not only unique as an example of the Old English epic, but also the greatest of the surviving epics composed by the Germanic peoples.

It is generally agreed that the poet who put the old materials into their present form was a Christian, and that his poem reflects a Christian tradition: the conversion of the Germanic settlers in England had largely been completed during the centuries preceding the one in which the poet wrote. But there is little general agreement as to how clearly Beowulf reflects a Christian tradition or, conversely, the actual nature of the Christian tradition that it is held to reflect. Many specifically Christian references occur, especially to the Old Testament: God is said to be the Creator of all things and His will is recognized (sporadically if not systematically) as being identical with Fate (wyrd); Grendel is described as a descendant of Cain, and the sword that Beowulf finds in Grendel's mother's lair has engraved on it the story of the race of giants and their destruction by Flood; the dead await God's judgment, and He and the Devil are ready to receive the souls of Grendel and his mother, while believers will find the Father's embrace; Hrothgar's speech of advice to Beowulf (p. 57) seems to reflect patristic doctrine in its emphasis on conscience and the Devil's lying in wait for the unwise. Yet there is no reference to the New Testament—to Christ and His Sacrifice which are the real bases of Christianity in any intelligible sense of the term. Furthermore, readers may well feel that the poem achieves rather little of its emotional power through any direct invocation of Christian values or of values that we associate with Christian doctrine, as we know it. Perhaps the sense of tragic waste which pervades the Finnsturg episode (p. 47–49) springs from a Christian perception of the insane futility of the primitive Germanic thirst for vengeance; and the facts that Beowulf's chief adversaries are not men but monsters and that before his death he is able to boast that as king of the Geats he did not seek wars with neighboring tribes may reflect a Christian's appreciation for peace among men. But while admitting such values, the poet also invokes many others of a very different order, values that seem to belong to an ancient, pagan, warrior society of the kind described by the Roman historian Tacitus at the end of the first century. It should be noted that even Hrothgar's speech about conscience is directed toward making Beowulf a good Germanic leader of men than a good Christian. One must, indeed, draw the conclusion from the poem itself that while Christian is a correct term for the religion of the poet and of his audience, it was a Christianity that had not yet by any means succeeded in obliterating the older pagan tradition, which still called forth powerful responses from the hearts of men and women, despite the fact that many aspects of this tradition must be abhorrent to a sophisticated Christian. In this connection it is well to recall that the missionaries from Rome who initiated the conversion of the English proceeded in a conciliatory manner, not so much uprooting paganism as in order to plant Christianity as an alternative to the faith that it would ultimately choke out the weeds of paganism. And the English long to some of their ancient traditions: for instance, the legal principle of the payment of wergild (defined below) remained in force until the Norman Conquest, four centuries after the conversion of the English.

In the warrior society whose values the poem constantly invokes, the most important of human relationships was that which existed between the thane—the thane—and his lord, a relationship based on personal devotion and service. When a thane owed loyalty to his lord, he became not so much his servant as his voluntary companion, one who would take pride in defending him and fighting in his wars. In return, the lord was expected to take affectionate care of his thanes and reward them richly for their valor: a thane, like Hrothgar or Beowulf, is referred to by such poetic epithets as "protector of warriors" and "dispenser of treasure" or "ring-giver," and the failure of bad kings is ascribed to their ill-temper and avarice, both of which alienate them from their retainers. The material benefit of this arrangement is obvious, yet under a good king the relationship seems to have had a significance more spiritual than material. Thus the treasure that an ideal Germanic king seizes from his enemies and rewards his retainers with is regarded as something more than mere wealth that will serve the well-being of its possessor; rather, it is a kind of visible proof that all parties are realizing themselves to the full in a spiritual sense—that the men of this band are congenially and successfully united with one another. The symbolic importance of treasure is illustrated by the poet's remark that the gift Beowulf gave the Danish coast guard brought the latter honor among his companions, and even more by the fact that although Beowulf dies while obtaining a great treasure for his people, such objects as are removed from the dragon's hoard are actually buried with him as a fitting sign of his ultimate achievement.

The relationship between kinsmen was also of deep significance to this society and provided another emotional value for Old English heroic poetry. If one of his kinsmen had been slain, a man had the special duty of either killing the slayer or exacting from him the payment of wergild ("man-price"); each rank of society was evaluated at a definite price, which had to be paid to the dead man's kinsmen by the killer who wished to avoid their vengeance—even if the killing had been accidental. Again, the money itself had less significance as wealth than as a proof that the kinsman had done what was right. Relatives who failed either to exact wergild or to
gance could never be happy, having found no practical way of satisfying their grief for their kinsmen’s death. “It is better for a man to avenge his friend than much mourn,” Beowulf says to the old Hrotgar, who is bewailing Aesche’s killing by Grendel’s mother. And one of the most poignant passages in the poem describes the sorrow of King Hrothgar after one of his sons had accidentally killed another; by the code of kingship Hrothgar was forbidden to kill or to exact compensation from a kinsman, yet by the same code he was required to do one or the other in order to avenge the dead. Caught in this curious dilemma, Hrothgar became so disconsolate that he could no longer face life.

It is evident that the need to take vengeance would create never-ending feuds, which the practice of marrying royal princesses to the kings or princes of hostile tribes did little to mitigate, though the purpose of such marriages was to replace hostility by alliance. Hrothgar wishes to make peace with the Heatho-Bards by marrying his daughter to their king, Ingeld, whose father was killed by the Danes; but as Beowulf predicts, sooner or later the Heatho-Bards’ desire for vengeance on the Danes will erupt, and there will be more bloodshed. And the Danish princess Hildebrith, married to Finn of the Jutes, will see her son and her brother both killed while fighting on opposite sides in a battle at her own home, and ultimately will see her husband killed by the Danes in revenge for her brothers’ death. Beowulf himself is, for a Germanic hero, curiously free of involvement in feuds of this sort, though he does boast that he avenged the death of his king, Heordred, on his slayer Onela. Yet the potentiality—or inevitability—of sudden attack, sudden change, swift death is omnipresent in Beowulf: men seem to be caught in a vast web of reprisals and counterreprisals from which there is little hope of escape. This is the aspect of the poem which is apt to make the most powerful impression on the reader—its strong sense of doom.

Beowulf himself is chiefly concerned not with tribal feuds but with fatal evil both less and more complex. Grendel and the dragon are threats to the security of the lands they infest just as human enemies would be, but they are not part of the social order and presumably have no one to avenge their deaths (that Grendel’s mother appeared as an avenger seems to have been a surprise both to Beowulf and to the Danes). On the other hand, because they are outside the normal order of things, they require of their conqueror something greater than normal warfare requires. In each case, it is the clear duty of the king and his companions to put down the evil. But the Danish Hrothgar is old and his companions unenterprising, and excellent though Hrothgar has been in the kingship, he nevertheless lacks the quality that later impels the old Beowulf to fight the dragon that threatens his people. The poem makes no criticism of Hrothgar for this lack; he merely seems not to be the kind of man—one might almost say he was not fated—to develop his human potential to the fullest extent that Fate would permit: that is Beowulf’s role. In undertaking to slay Grendel, and later Grendel’s mother, Beowulf is testing his relationship with unknown destiny. At any time, as he is fully aware, his luck may abandon him and he may be killed, as, indeed, he is in the otherwise successful encounter with the dragon. But whether he lives or dies, he will have done all that any man could do to develop his character heroically. It is this consciousness of testing Fate that probably explains the boasting that modern readers of heroic poetry often find offensive. When he boasts, Beowulf is not only demonstrating that he has chosen the heroic way of life, but is also choosing it, for when he invokes his former courage as pledge of his future courage, his boast becomes a vow; the hero has put himself in a position from which he cannot withdraw.

Courage is the instrument by which the hero realizes himself. “Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good,” says Beowulf in his account of his swimming match: that is, if Fate has not entirely doomed a man in advance, courage is the quality that can perhaps influence Fate against its natural tendency to doom him now. It is this complex statement (in which it is hard to read the will of God for Fate) that Beowulf’s life explores: he will use his great strength in the most courageous way by going alone, even unarmed, against monsters. Doom, of course, ultimately claims him, but not until he has fulfilled to its limits the pagan ideal of a heroic life. And despite the desire he often shows to Christianize pagan virtues, the Christian poet remains true to the older tradition when, at the end of his poem, he leaves us with the impression that Beowulf’s chief reward is pagan immortality: the memory in the minds of later generations of a hero’s heroic actions. The poem itself is, indeed, a noble expression of that immortality.
I. The Danes (Bright, Half, Ring, Spear, North, East, South, West, Danes; Scyldings, Honor, Victor, Wulfdan; Ingl's friends).

   Scyld

   Beow (wulf)

   Healfdene

   Hrothgar = Wealthow = Halga = Daughter = Onela the Swede

   Hrothmung = Frawaru = Ingeld = Heatho-Bard = Hrothulf

II. The Geats (Sea, War, Weather-Geats)

   Harthel

   Herebeald = Haethcyn = Hygelac = Hygd = Daughter = Egthoew

   Herred = Daughter = Eofor = Beowulf the Geat

III. The Swedes

   Ongentheow

   Ohthere = Onela = Healfdene's Daughter

   Eamhund = Eadgils

IV. Miscellaneous

   A. The Tall Danes (also called Scyldings) involved in the fight at Finnsburg may represent a different tribe from the Danes of paragraph 1, above. Their king Hroc had a son, Hnaef, who succeeded him, and a daughter Hildibrith, who married Finn, king of the Jutes.

   B. The Jutes or Frisans are represented as enemies of the Danes in the fight at Finnsburg and as allies of the Franks or Hugas at the time Hygelac the Geat made the attack in which he lost his life and from which Beowulf swam home. Also allied with the Franks at this time were the Hetware.

   C. The Heatho-Bards (i.e., "Battle-Bards") are represented as inveterate enemies of the Danes. Their king Froda had been killed in an attack on the Danes, and Hrothgar's attempt to make peace with them by marrying his daughter Freawaru to Froda's son Ingeld failed when the latter attacked Hecorot. The attack was repulsed, though Hecorot was burned.

   † The daughter of Hygelac who was given to Eofor may have been born to Hygd.
CHART TO HELP WITH THE LAYS IN PART 3
(= married to)

HRETHEL (Beowulf's grandpa)

HYGELAC = HYGD (father Haereth) daughter = Ecgtheow
(killed by Haethcyn) (king of Geats) (generous, wise woman, not like Modryth)
(Hygelac became King of Geats after Frisian War)

HEARDRED = daughter = Eofer
(became King after Hygelac killed in Frisian War)
(killed by Onela after harboring Swedes)

Herebeald Haethcyn

(Hygelac was killed after Frisian War; became King
in hunting died, Haethcyn when his brother
accidently became King. Haethcyn was
couldn't get revenge on Haegtheow. Two
it is a brother (Swedish King) Geat warriors,
who is the killer) attacked Geats.

Efor and Wulf,
kill Onenanweth
motivated solely
by the rewards)

(becomes King after
Heardred is killed
after harboring
group of Swedish
exiles who rebel
against the Swedish
King Onela. Onela
invades Geatland to
find the rebels and in
the course of the
battle, Heardred slain.
footnote bottom of p.
67 says that "Onela"
left Geatland in
Beowulf's charge.
Beowulf becomes king
continues war and
Onela is killed.)
**Beowulf - Characteristics of the Epic**

Epic: a long 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 to the history of a nation or race.

**Characteristics**
1. The hero is a figure of heroic stature, of national or international importance, and of great historical or legendary significance.
2. The setting is one of vast scope, covering great nations, the world, or the universe.
3. The action is of great deeds requiring great valor and superhuman courage.
4. Supernatural forces—gods, angels, demons—interest themselves or intervene from time to time.
5. The style is elevated and grand simplicity is used.
6. The epic poet recounts the deeds of his heroes with objectivity.

**Other devices common to epics**
1. opens by stating a theme
2. invocation of a Muse to inspire the poet
3. the narrative begins in medias res—in the middle of things—giving necessary exposition in later portions of the epic.
4. catalogues are present: warriors, ships, armies
5. extended formal speeches by the main characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anglo-Saxon Epic</th>
<th>Beowulf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Narrative:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Address to the Muse:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Begin in middle:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Flashback:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Return to present:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Repetitions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Catalogues:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Stock phrases:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Epithets:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Conflict:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hospitality code:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Supernatural intervention:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Visit to Hades:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Affects entire nation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Vast setting:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Epic boasting:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beowulf
translated by Burton Raffel

Prologue

Hear me! We've heard of Danish heroes,
Ancient kings and the glory they cut
For themselves, swinging mighty swords!
How shield made slaves of soldiers from every
Land, crowds of captives he'd beaten
Into terror; he'd traveled to Denmark alone,
An abandoned child, but changed his own fate,
Lived to be rich and much honored. He ruled
Lands on all sides: wherever the sea
Would take their soldiers sailed, returned
With tribute and obedience. There was a brave
King! And he gave them more than his glory,
Conceived a son for the Danes, a new leader
Allowed them by the grace of God. They had lived,
Before his coming, kingless and miserable;
Now the Lord of all life, Ruler
Of glory, blessed them with a prince, Beo,
Whose power and fame soon spread throughout the world.
Shild's strong son was the glory of Denmark;
His father's warriors 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.
When his time was come the old king died,
Still strong but called to the Lord's hands.
His comrades carried him down to the shore,
Bore him as their leader had asked, their lord
And companion, while words could move on his tongue.
Shild's reign had been long; he'd ruled them well.
There in the harbor was a ring-prowed fighting
Ship, its timbers icy, waiting,
And there they brought the beloved body
Of their ring-giving lord, and laid him near
The mast. Next to that noble corpse
They heaped up treasures, jeweled helmets,
Hooked swords and coats of mail, armor
From the ends of the earth; no ship
Ever sailed so brightly fitted,

Historical Context:
Many scholars believe the poem was composed in eighth-century England.
However, the events and social customs it tells about belong to sixteenth-
century Geats, Danes, and Swedes,
Germanic tribes living near the European homeland from which the
Anglo-Saxons had come to England.

Literary Movement:
As with much literature that is part of our oral tradition, the actual poet
who composed Beowulf is unknown.
In translating the poem from Old English, Burton Raffel defined his
goal as "to re-create something roughly equivalent in the new
language, something that is itself good poetry and that at the same time
carries a reasonable measure of the force and flavor of the original."

Literary Movement:
Much Old English literature dealt
with the lives of kings and their roles.
Although many believe the poet to be a Christian, the glorification of
war and death and the striving for
fame are characteristic of the pagan
concerns and beliefs of the people
at this time.

Literary Movement:
Here we see evidence of Christian
beliefs at work. Notice the terms
"grace of God," "Lord of all life," and
"Ruler" of glory.

Writer's Technique:
Notice that the words at the end of
lines do not rhyme. End-rhyme is
rare in Old English poetry.

Writer's Technique:
Here we see an example of caesura,
or pause. A characteristic of Old
English poetry is the two-part line
separated by a pause. Each part has
two strong beats. Alliteration joins
the two parts: An important word in
the first part of the line has the same
initial consonant sound as an important
word in the second part of the line.
Notice the alliteration of reign
and ruled.

86
A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing
Call and the poet's clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making 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;
The corners of the earth were made lovely with tre
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And thei
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:

90
So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall
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 earth. He was spawned in that slime,
Conceived by a pair of those monsters born
Of Cain, murderous creatures banished
By God, punished forever for the crime
Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove
Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,
Shut away from men; they split
Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits
And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
A brood forever opposing the Lord's
Will, and again and again defeated.
Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in gēar-dagum
þeow-cyninga þröm gefrūnon,
hū dā þēlingas ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Seæfing sceafena þrēatum,
monegum mægnum meodo-setla oftēah;
egsode Eorlæ, sūðōn ðērest weord
fēasceaf fundena; hē þæs frēre gebåd;
wēx under wolcenum, weord-myndum þāh,
oðæt him ēghwilc þāra ymb-sittendra
ofer hron-rāde hīrān scolde,
gomban gyldan: þæt wæs gōd cyning!
Dēm esæra wæs æfter cenned
geong in gerdun, þone God sende
folce tō frōre; fyren-ðēare ongeat,
þæt hē ær drugon aldor-lēase
lange hwtē; him þæs Līf-frēa,
wulde Wahlend, worólde ære forgeaf;
Bēowulf wæs brēme — blæd wīde sprang
Scyldes esæra, Sceδe-landum in.

Swā sceal geong guma gōde gewyrcean,
fromum feoh-gifftum on fēder bæarme,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts
beyond the whole-road had to yield to him
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
by God to that nation. He knew what they had tholed,
the long times and troubles they'd come through
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.
Shield had fathered a famous son:
Beow's name was known through the north.
And a young prince must be prudent like that,
giving freely while his father lives
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts.

Hear me! We've heard of Danish heroes,
Ancient kings and the glory they cut
For themselves, swinging mighty swords!
How Shild made slaves of soldiers from every
land, crowds of captives he'd beaten
Into terror; he'd traveled to Denmark alone,
An abandoned child, but changed his own fate,
Lived to be rich and much honored. He ruled
Lands on all sides: wherever the sea
Would take them his soldiers sailed, returned
With tribute and obedience. There was a brave
King! And he gave them more than his glory,
Conceived a son for the Danes, a new leader
Allowed them by the grace of God. They had lived,
Before his coming, kingless and miserable;
Now the Lord of all life, Ruler
Of glory, blessed them with a prince, Beo,
Whose power and fame soon spread through the world.
Shild's strong son was the glory of Denmark;
His father's warriors 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,
A steadfast companions will stand by him
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired
is the path to power among people everywhere.

Shield was still thriving when his time came
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.
His warrior band did what he bade them
when he laid down the law among the Danes:
they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.

A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,
laid out by the mast, amidsthips,
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures
were piled upon him, and precious gear.
I never heard before of a ship so well furnished
with battle tackle, bladed weapons
and coats of mail. The massed treasure
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far
on out into the ocean's sway.

They decked his body no less bountifully
with offerings than those first ones did
who cast him away when he was a child
and launched him alone out over the waves.
And they set a gold standard up
high above his head and let him drift
to wind and tide, bewailing him
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran
knows for certain who salvaged that load.
Cain and Abel

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Cain made an offering to the Lord, but Abel made an offering of the firstborn of the羊 and of its fat. The Lord looked favorably on Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was angry and his countenance fell.

Cain said to Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know;" and he heard ringing in his ears.

The Lord said to him, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you. When you are cursed, you will be a wanderer and a vagabond on the earth." Then Cain said to his brother Abel, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground, and from thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me shall slay me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain to mark him from the rest of men. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch, and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

2.4: Enoch was five years old, and the Lord put a mark on Cain to call him. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain and Abel

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Cain made an offering to the Lord, but Abel made an offering of the firstborn of the羊 and of its fat. The Lord looked favorably on Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was angry and his countenance fell.

Cain said to Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know;" and he heard ringing in his ears.

The Lord said to him, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you. When you are cursed, you will be a wanderer and a vagabond on the earth." Then Cain said to his brother Abel, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground, and from thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me shall slay me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain to mark him from the rest of men. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch, and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

2.4: Enoch was five years old, and the Lord put a mark on Cain to call him. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain's wife conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.
The novel Grendel, written in the twentieth century, sheds new light on stereotyped roles and attitudes in Beowulf. This chapter from the novel begins as Grendel enters the great meadhall where he will have his fatal confrontation with the Germanic hero.

I touch the door with my fingertips and it bursts, for all its fire-forged bands—it jumps away like a terrified deer—and I plunge into the silent, hearth-lit hall with a laugh that I wouldn't much care to wake up to myself. I trample the planks that a moment before protected the hall like a hand raised in horror to a terrified mouth (sheer poetry, all) and the broken hinges rattle like swords down the timbered walls. The Geats are stones, and whether it's because they're numb with terror or stiff from too much mead, I cannot tell. I am swollen with excitement, bloodlust, and joy and a strange fear that mingles in my chest like the twisting rage of a bone-fire. I step onto the brightly shining floor and angrily advance on them. They're all asleep, the whole company! I can hardly believe my luck, and my wild heart laughs, but I let out no sound. Swiftly, softly, I will move from bed to bed and destroy them all, swallow every last man. I am blazing, half-crazy with joy. For pure, mad prank, I snatch a cloth from the nearest table and tie it around my neck to make a napkin. I delay no longer. I seize up a sleeping man, tear at him hungrily, bite through his bone-locks and suck hot, slippery blood. He goes down in huge morsels, head, chest, hips, legs, even the hands and feet. My face and arms are wet, matted. The napkin is sopping. The dark floor steams. I move on at once and I reach for another one whispering, whispering, chewing the universe down to words, and I seize a wrist. A hock goes through me. Mistake!

It's a trick! His eyes are open, were open all the time, cold-bloodedly watching to see how I work. The eyes nail me now as his hand nails down my arm. I jump back without thinking (whispering wildly: jump back without thinking). Now he's out of his bed, his hand still closed like a dragon's jaws on mine. Nowhere on middle-earth, I realize, have I encountered a grip like his. His whole arm is on fire, incredible, searing pain—it's as if his crushing fingers are charged like fangs with poison. I scream, facing him, grotesquely shaking hands—dear long-lost brother, kinsman-thane—and the timbered hall screams back at me. I feel the bones go, ground from their sockets, and I scream again. I am suddenly awake. The long pale dream, my history, falls away. The meadhall is alive, great cavernous belly, gold-adorned, blood-stained, howling back at me, lit by the flickering fire in the stranger's eyes. He has wings. Is it possible? And yet it's true: out of his shoulders come terrible fliny wings. I jerk my head, trying to drive out illusion. The world is what it is and always was. That's our hope, our chance. Yet even in times of catastrophe we people it with tricks. Grendel, Grendel, hold fast to what is true.

Suddenly, darkness. My sanity has won. He's only a man; I can escape him. I plan. I feel the plan moving inside me like thaw-time waters rising between cliffs. When I'm ready, I give a ferocious kick—but something's wrong: I am spinning—Wat—falling through bottomless space—Wat—snatching at the huge twisted roots of an oak... a blinding flash of fire... no, darkness. I concentrate.

1. fire-forged: This and other hyphenated word clusters are examples of kenning, a metaphorical device common to Anglo-Saxon poetry.
2. bone-fire: An interesting archaic use of the original form of the word bonfire. In this case, it is an ancient place where the bones of sacrificial animals were burned for fuel.
3. bone-locks: a “kenning” for the joints of human limbs.
4. middle-earth: the human world, halfway between heaven and hell.
5. thane: warlord.
“Mama!” I bawl. Shapes vague as lurking seaweed surround us. My vision clears. The stranger’s companions encircle us, useless swords. I could laugh if it weren’t for the pain that makes me howl. And yet I address him, whispering, whimpering, whining.

“If you win, it’s by mindless chance. Make no mistake. First you tricked me, and then I slipped. Accident.”

He answers with a twist that hurls me forward screaming. The thanes make way, I fall against a table and smash it, and wall timbers crack. And still he whispers.

Grendel, Grendel! You make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point. Feel the wall: is it not hard? He smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes.

Now sing of walls! Sing!

I howl.

Sing!

“I’m singing!”

Sing words! Sing saving hymns!

“You’re crazy. Ow!”

Sing!

“I sing of walls,” I howl. “Hooray for the hardness of walls!”

Terrible, he whispers. Terrible. He laughs and lets out fire.

“You’re crazy,” I say. “If you think I created that wall that cracked my head, you’re a lunatic.”

Sing walls, he hisses.

I have no choice.

The wall will fall to the wind as the windy hill will fall, and all things thought in former times.

6. “The world... want”: a parody of “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” from Psalm 23. Here “my bone cave” probably means “my source of energy” or possibly “my possession.”

7. transmogrify: trans muhr’ga if to change strangely or grotesquely in appearance or form.
Grappling with Grendel or What We Did When the Censors Came

Kenneth L. Zezima

The mother was not convinced and demanded the book be removed from the curriculum, claiming that she was typical of many parents in our community who would find the book offensive. The principal informed her that he didn't think she represented the community, but she was welcome to file a formal request for reconsideration of the work if she wished, and he provided her with a form for the request designed by the National Council of Teachers of English.

Despite the few sensitive parts, our faculty believed Grendel was highly moral, and so we felt confident the parents would concur upon closer examination. Within a few days our principal received a phone call from a prominent man in both church and community who demanded to know why we were teaching "such filth." We also heard rumors that a member of the school board had examined the book, was properly shocked, and had declared his intention to get the book out of the school.

When the(samples) complete copies of "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of A Work" (Edward R. Gordon et al., 1982, 12-13) arrived, we were dismayed. "How could a ground-swell of feeling against Grendel have come about?" we wondered. It became clear, however, when we obtained a copy of a paper the protesting mother had published. Extracting several passages from the book containing virtually every profane, crude, or shocking statement made by the monster Grendel, she had listed them in order, with page references, claimed they typified the book's tone and message, and encouraged anyone who was offended to protest by filling out the NCTE form—which she had kindly duplicated and attached. These she had circulated among acquaintances, in some cases distributing them at local church buildings. Had it been submitted such a list, and had I not been familiar with the book, I, too, would have been shocked.

Indeed, how do we safeguard ourselves against prejudiced attacks of censors which for most of us are not a matter of if, but when. People for the American Way (a national First Amendment advocacy group) researchers found 338 incidents of attempted censorship in public schools last year. Many people think the published cases are only the tip of the iceberg, since many challenges go unreported. In their most recent findings, People for the American Way indicate even the classics are not immune:

The Classics and young adult standards in use in literature classes were among the books challenged in 1994-95. Titles included Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck, The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Diary of Anne Frank by Miep Gies, A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, and Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Off the top twenty books challenged in 1991, the Viewmont faculty was teaching seven.

Not all challenges come from the conservative Right, however. According to People for the American Way, "A small number of challenges this year can be described as coming from the political Left. Students this year, or about five percent, involved charges of racism against African Americans or Native Americans." In the past, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been challenged because of racism, Oliver Twist because of its depiction of Fagin, the Jew, The Merchant of Venice because of Shylock, for the same reason, Little Black Sambo for racist stereotypes, and others because of sexist language and stereotypes of women.

We learned that the monsters were real, numerous, and extremely vigilant, and liked to strike under cover of darkness. Through calls to our principal, various patrons applied subtle pressures urging that he forbid the use of the book according to the parents' wishes. Had he acceded, his job would have been far easier, and so would ours have been. However, as I explained to the principal, we were morally required to defend a principle here. Before we would submit to such a blatant censorship attempt, we would make sure the press learned what was going on. To his credit, the principal privately supported us while publicly taking neutral ground, working for a just solution.
PUBLICITY, PRESS, AND PARENTS

Fortunately, we didn’t have to notify the press; they found out on their own and published our situation throughout the state and eventually to the nation. Soon the “Letter to the Editor” columns in every major paper in the state published discussions of Grenndel and the censorship attempts at Viewmont High, and bookstores couldn’t keep Grenndel in stock. In this climate administrators were required to appease patrons on both sides of the issue and couldn’t make the problem go away by quietly banning the book they had been so inclined. Subsequently, the superintendent appointed a committee of teachers and parents to study the matter and make a recommendation. The committee members read the book, heard from our faculty, the protesting mother, and some of her sympathizers, then they deliberated.

In the meantime, as department chair, I was besieged by reporters and forced into an unwelcome spotlight. As I considered the possibility of a negative decision from the committee, I wondered what we should do next. I firmly believed this battle was one we could not afford to lose.

I called NCTE and received information about past cases similar to ours along with advice about how to be prepared in case the committee came to a decision (which I wished we had known about earlier). I called our state professional organization and received similar moral support, but what I longed for were champions to come from higher sources. The next day, a group of parents who had fought Grenndel before and won, who would take up our fight and make it their own, but no Beowulf materialized. We soon realized that we would have to become our own Beowulf—armed with more than virtue and courage since these alone would not defeat the monster, though they were our first line of defense.

Through this experience I realized that many parents had found us completely with their children’s minds. I learned the value of our reputations as moral people, conscientious, and caring teachers. One father, on a radio talk show, said that he hadn’t read Grenndel but if it were a particular teacher thought it was a good book for young people, he had confidence that it was. Later, when he had read the book, he said that he wasn’t disappointed in either the book or us. Many parents felt similarly, giving us the benefit of the doubt until they could read the book for themselves.

Many parents seemed to understand that we selected literature that fulfilled specific educational goals, literature that helped students examine the world, that helped them better understand the classic Beowulf while learning more about themselves. Our books had always been chosen with sensitivity and integrity, chosen to inspire student thinking and chosen to open possibilities for them. In the case of Grenndel, we could offer a strong defense by elaborating worthwhile educational goals driving its use.

DEALING WITH CENSORSHIP

However, having specific goals in mind for a book is not enough; schools need a plan for dealing with process. The literature indicates that censorship most often win when there are no procedures for selection of materials and for curriculum design, or for reviewing the same when someone challenges them. On the other hand, if procedures are in place and followed, Grenndel seldom has his way (People for the American Way 1995, 10).

Fortunately, we have a few things right. In addition to educational justification for the literature we taught, we had specific procedures for adopting new texts:

1. The teacher who introduced Grenndel presented and defended it to her peers. During that defense she cited sound educational and administrative support for the book.
2. Peer teachers read the book and engaged in further discussion with her.
3. The department voted on the adoption.
4. The purchase request was reviewed by the district language arts supervisor and approved.
5. An alternate book was offered to students who, in consultation with parents and the teacher, found the book objectionable for justifiable reason.

Though I had sought help from professional organizations, none of them volunteered willingness to commit funds or expertise if the decision had gone against us. I have learned since that People for the American Way operates a toll-free censorship hotline and offers a variety of technical and legal assistance (People for the American Way 1995, 10). NCTE notes:

Lawsuits are expensive, tedious, and unpredictable; hard, fast, and divisive. If at all possible, they should be avoided. But if last all other measures fail, then the agencies that recommend the best and legal for defense for teachers and that publish lists of the best books and films to use with those methods should be prepared to give teachers legal defense for their use of those materials. (Runes and Jenkins 1992, 63)

RESOLUTION

Fortunately, our selection procedures and the district review process were respected by the Board of Education and finally by the censors. The review committee ruled that we could continue using the book if we limited its use to twelfth-grade students and offered an alternative for those who found it objectionable, restrictions which we were already following. Subsequently, the district published our next adoption procedure, recommending it to all schools throughout the district.

CONCLUSION

We learned much from this experience. We have always recognized that parents have the right to question our materials and methods. However, we defended the philosophy that no individual or special interest group has the right to dictate curricula or infringe on another student’s educational rights. In fact, parental and community involvement is the key to insuring that censors do not win. People for the American Way (1995) has said:

When teachers or administrators are left to battle censorship groups on their own, the chances for the worst outcome increase dramatically but when a community comes together and forms alliances that include parents, business leaders, clergy and educators, the censors are hard-pressed to prevail. (11)

The community ultimately did come to our defense, though the Community Council now in place at our school could have diffused a very painful experience had it been organized earlier.

In John Gardner’s Grenndel, the monster, not able to understand his role of either what his relationship to humans might be, goes to the wise dragon for advice:

The dragon tipped up his great rusted head, stretched his neck, sighted fire, "Ah, Grenndel!" he said... "You improve them, my boy! Can’t you see that yourself? You stimulate them? You make them think and scheme? You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last." (Gardner 1985, 62)

Did Grenndel visit our school improve us, stimulate us, make us think and scheme? Decisively yes. Because we have met the monster, we know ourselves better, we know our curriculum better, and we’re prepared to defend our poetry, our science, and our religion.

In his struggle with the monster (Beowulf) at the end of Grenndel, the monster is forced to see that his end was the result of his nihilistic behavior, his choice to be monstrous.

Grenndel, Grenndel! You make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point. (Gardner 1985, 150)

As department chair, I was besieged by reporters and forced into an unwelcome spotlight.

Works Cited


Kenneth L. Zerman is an English teacher and department chair at Viewmont High School in Roy, Utah. He is a member of the National Education Association Network on Censorship.

February 1997

English Journal
After reading Beowulf, read this and react to them/draw some connections in your journal.

"Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony"

I cannot listen to Mahler's Ninth Symphony without anything like the old melancholy mixed with the high pleasure I used to take from this music. There was a time, not long ago, when what I heard, especially in the final movement, was an open acknowledgment of death and at the same time a quiet celebration of the tranquility connected to the process. I took this music as a metaphor for reassurance, confirming my own strong hunch that the dying of every living creature, the most natural of all experiences, has to be a peaceful experience. I rely on nature. The long passages on all the strings at the end, as close as music can come to expressing silence itself, I used to hear as Mahler's idea of leave-taking at its best. But always, I have heard this music as a solitary, private listener, thinking about death.

Now I hear it differently. I cannot listen to the last movement of the Mahler Ninth without the door-smashing intrusion of a huge new thought: death everywhere, the dying of everything, the end of humanity. The easy sadness expressed with such gentleness and delicacy by that repeated phrase on faded strings, over and over again, no longer comes to me as old, familiar news of the cycle of living and dying. All through the last notes my mind swarms with images of a world in which the thermonuclear bombs have begun to explode, in New York and San Francisco, in Moscow and Leningrad, in Paris, in Paris, in Paris. In Oxford and Cambridge, in Edinburgh. I cannot push away the thought of a cloud of radioactivity drifting along the Engadin, from the Moloja Pass to Fian, killing off the part of the earth I love more than any other part.

I am old enough by this time to be used to the notion of dying, saddened by the glimpse when it has occurred but only transiently knocked down, able to regain my feet quickly at the thought of continuity, any day. I have acquired and held in affection until very recently another sideline of an idea which serves me well at dark times: the life of the earth is the same as the life of an organism: the great round being possesses a mind: the mind contains an infinite number of thoughts and memories: when I reach my time I may find myself still hanging around in some sort of midair, one of those small thoughts, drawn back into the memory of the earth: in that peculiar sense I will be alive.

Now all that has changed. I cannot think that way anymore. Not while those things are still in place, aimed everywhere, ready for launching.

This is a bad enough thing for the people in my generation. We can put up with it, I suppose, since we must. We are moving along anyway, like it or not. I can even set aside my private fancy about hanging around, in midair.

What I cannot imagine, what I cannot put up with, the thought that keeps grinding its way into my mind, making the Mahler into a hideous noise close to killing me, is what it would be like to be young. How do the young stand it? How can they keep their sanity? If I were very young, sixteen or seventeen years old, I think I would begin, perhaps very slowly and imperceptibly, to go crazy.

There is a short passage near the very end of the Mahler in which the almost vanishing violins, all engaged in a sustained backward glance, are edged aside for a few bars by the cellos. Those lower notes pick up fragments from the first movement, as though prepared to begin everything all over again, and then the cellos subside and disappear, like an exhalation. I used to hear this as a wonderful few seconds of encouragement: we'll be back, we're still here, keep going, keep going.

Now, with a pamphlet in front of me on a corner of my desk, published by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, entitled MX Basing, an analysis of all the alternative strategies for placement and protection of hundreds of these missiles, each capable of creating artificial suns to vaporize a hundred Hiroshimas, collectively capable of destroying the life of any continent, I cannot hear the same Mahler. Now, those cellos sound in my mind like the opening of all the hatches and the instant before ignition.

If I were sixteen or seventeen years old, I would not feel the cracking of my own brain, but I would know for sure that the whole world was coming unhinged. I can remember with some clarity what it was like to be sixteen. I had discovered the Brahms symphonies. I knew that there was something going on in the late Beethoven
quartets that I would have to figure out, and I knew that there was plenty of time ahead for all the figuring I would ever have to do. I had never heard of Mahler. I was in no hurry. I was a college sophomore and had decided that Wallace Stevens and I possessed a comprehensive understanding of everything needed for a life. The years stretched away forever ahead, forever. My great-grandfather had come from Wales, leaving his signature in the family Bible on the same page that carried, a century later, my father's signature. It never crossed my mind to wonder about the twenty-first century; it was just there, given, somewhere in the sure distance.

The man on television, Sunday midday, middle-aged and solid, nice-looking chap, all the facts at his fingertips, more dependable looking than most high-school principals, is talking about civilian defense, his responsibility in Washington. It can make an enormous difference, he is saying. Instead of the outright death of eighty million American citizens in twenty minutes, he says, we can, by careful planning and practice, get that number down to only forty million, maybe even twenty. The thing to do, he says, is to evacuate the cities quickly and have everyone get under shelter in the countryside. That way we can recover, and meanwhile we will have retaliated, incinerating all of Soviet society, he says. What about radioactive fallout? he is asked. Well, he says. Anyway, he says, if the Russians know they can only destroy forty million of us instead of eighty million, this will deter them. Of course, he adds, they have the capacity to kill all two hundred and twenty million of us if they were to try real hard, but they know we can do the same to them. If the figure is only forty million this will deter them, not worth the trouble, not worth the risk. Eighty million would be another matter, we should guard ourselves against losing that many all at once, he says.

If I were sixteen or seventeen years old and had to listen to that, or read things like that, I would want to give up listening and reading. I would begin thinking up new kinds of sounds, different from any music heard before, and I would be twisting and turning to rid myself of human language.
More about Mahler...

NOTE: The hammer sound is described by Mahler in a footnote as a "short, powerful, heavy-sounding blow of unmetalllic quality (like the stroke of an axe)." This, however, was never achieved to the composer's satisfaction in his own performances. It is realized here by striking in unison (1) a raised piece of platform with a wooden mallet and (2) an extra-large bass drum originally procured by the New York Philharmonic for Verdi's Requiem.

SYMPHONY NO. 9

Mahler composed his Ninth Symphony, the last he was to complete, during the first of his two seasons as conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Finished on April 1, 1910, the score reflects the complex emotions of a morbidly sensitive artist who knew that he had little time to live—that he was, in fact, killing himself.

Mahler had been warned that he would have to change his strenuous way of life entirely, avoiding all strain and even the long walks in the country he so loved. But Mahler was temperamentally unable to follow his doctor's counsel. Not only did he accept an invitation to conduct the Metropolitan Opera for the following seasons, continuing meanwhile to compose and conduct extensively in Europe during the summers: In the fall of 1909, he added to his duties with the Metropolitan the direction of the New York Philharmonic concerts while continuing work on his gigantic Ninth Symphony. As he had been warned, the strain was too great. He collapsed before the end of his Second Symphony season— he conducted his last concert on February 21, 1911—and was taken back to Vienna to die.

The works of Mahler composed during the New York years: Das Lied von der Erde, the Ninth Symphony and the sketches for the unfinished Tenth, are obsessed with the mood of farewell, not only in the music but also in the words that abound in the sketches. Those for the Tenth Symphony, for example, conclude with a verbal explosion including the words: Leb' wohl, mein Saitenspiel... (Farewell, my musical making...).

But long before Mahler's final illness, a sensitive friend, the composer Alban Berg, felt the power of this mood in the Ninth Symphony. When he was permitted to study the score of the first movement, six months before Mahler was stricken, Berg wrote to his future wife:

...Once again I have played through the score of Mahler's Ninth Symphony: The first movement is the most heavenly thing Mahler ever wrote. It is the expression of an exceptional fondness for this earth, the longing to live in peace on it, to enjoy nature to its depths—before death comes.

For he comes irresistibly. The whole movement is permeated by premonitions of death. And again and again it crops up, all the elements of terrestrial dreaming culminate in it: most potently of course in the colossal passage where this premonition becomes certainty, where in the midst of the höchste Kraft ("utmost intensity") of almost painful joy in life [at the climax of the movement, about two thirds of the way through], Death itself is announced mit höchster Gewalt ("with the utmost violence").

Bruno Walter, the devoted friend and disciple of Mahler, wrote in his book "Gustav Mahler":

The movements are not classical in form, tempo or key relations. first and last movements are slow, with two quick intervening movements. Each movement is in a different key: D major, C major, A minor, and the finale is in the remote key of D flat.

I. Andante comodo. The first movement begins very softly with a syncopated three-note rhythm in the bottom of the orchestra (cellos and horn), a rhythm to which Mahler attached special importance, since he brings it back "with the utmost violence" at the climax of the movement, the passage that Berg called "Death itself."

After a delay of six measures, the principal melody makes its first, timid appearance in the second violins. This melody appears and reappears in a dozen different guises. Very soon, the first two descending notes of the melody are extended to three. By imperceptible degrees, they begin to recall the motto-theme of Beethoven's "Lebewohl!" (Farewell) Sonata for Piano, Op. 81a. By themselves, of course, three descending notes may recall nothing more mystical than the melody of Three Blind Mice. But used as Mahler uses them, they come so close to Beethoven's treatment of the "Farewell" theme in a famous passage of the "Lebewohl!" Sonata that the resemblance can hardly have been accidental.

The melancholy associations of Mahler's principal melody are further borne out by the orchestral sketch, where the return of the melody in almost its original form is sung very tenderly by a solo horn. At this point, the sketch is labeled: "O vanished days of youth, O scattered love...". Finally, the movement dies away with ever slower and softer reiterations of the melody's first two notes.

II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers, etwas tüppisch und sehr derb. The principal theme announced by clarinets and bassoon has the character of a peasant Ländler dance. The middle of the movement brings a melody for the horn that obviously derives from the principal melody of the first movement. There is a return to the opening material, but the dance mood palls. "A tragic undertone sounds in the joy," wrote Bruno Walter, "and one feels that 'the dance is over.'"

III. Rondo. Burleske. Allegro assai: sehr trotzig. Mahler's sketch for this movement bears the title Meinen Brüdern in Apollo (To My Brothers in Apollo). It is a wild, defiant, grotesque movement, often bitterly humorous. Toward the end, it becomes a contrapuntal maelstrom of many themes, and there is a frenzied, presto coda.

IV. Adagio. Sehr langsam. In the last movement, as Bruno Walter heard it, Mahler "peacefully bids farewell to the world." It opens with a broadly flowing melody in which the violins are soon joined by the remaining strings. The Italianate melodic "turn" plays an important part in this melody and its development, which is the thematic basis of the whole movement. The poignant conclusion, with its increasingly diaphanous fragments of the melody, fades to an almost inaudible pppp marked ersterben ("dying away"), "like the melting of a cloud into the ethereal blue," to quote Walter again.

The Symphony was first performed under the direction of Bruno Walter in Vienna in June 1912, thirteen months after Mahler's death.
The famous lines of the American poet John Greenleaf Whittier appropriately fit Mahler's last and unfinished symphony: "For all sad words of tongue or pen/The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" Mahler had completed his Ninth Symphony in the summer of 1909. Despite his serious illness, the heavy conducting schedule of 1910, and his preparation for the first performance of his unfinished Ninth Symphony (the last of which was of Adagio and Rondo- Burleske in A Minor), he also managed to sketch out his Tenth Symphony. By February 1911 it was clear that he was seriously weakened by an infection that had already debilitated his frame would not long withstand. So, since he wished to die in Vienna, he left his conducting appointments in New York and returned home, stopping only for a visit to a medical specialist in Paris who was unable to do more than confirm that there was no chance of recovery. Mahler died in Vienna on May 18, 1911. He would have attained his fifty-first birthday on July 7.

To the genuine reader, I'll be aware of a five-move version of the Tenth Symphony, it might be helpful to give some information about the work's history following the death of its composer. At first, it was thought that only a few dislocated sketches of the Tenth existed. Then it emerged that there were five movements laid out in incomplete short score and that Mahler had directed his assistant to turn the score after his death to a complete manuscript. Alma Mahler did not do this; however, she refused to let the score be examined by anyone who might want to attempt to complete it. Then in 1924, Alma showed the score to the composer Ernst Krenek, who extracted the opening Adagio and the third movement called Purgatorio and organized performances of these became clear that Mahler had never told Alma to burn the Ter...
THOTH

Jan Raud's article, "Grendel's Grenwulf, Humanizing the Minstrel". Graduate Studies in English
GARDNER’S GRENDEL AND BEOWULF: HUMANIZING THE MONSTER

Jay Ruud

In Beowulf, the character of Grendel is a composite of three separate natures blended together into a unity whose main purpose is to inspire horror. The Beowulf poet uses images of darkness to create his monster, mixing the characters of ogre, devil, and exiled warrior into a single representation of the darkness of the unknown. It is the latter of these characters, that of the thinking and feeling outcast, to whom the title character of John Gardner’s Grendel is most closely related. Therefore, the theme of alienation provides the clearest basis on which to compare and contrast the two characters. The alienation of the Grendel of Beowulf is, taken in the context of its time, a terrifying and almost unbearable fate because it meant losing one’s niche in society and having to face the enemy and the elements alone. The alienation of Gardner’s Grendel partakes of contemporary literature of the absurd: Grendel is alienated from Hrothgar’s society by the fact that he refuses to accept the values of law and order inherent in that society, in the face of what he knows to be a chaotic and meaningless universe. Thus to compare Beowulf with Grendel is to compare the eighth century with the twentieth. Twelve hundred years of human history stand between, and the monster of the one has become the alienated hero of the other.

The Grendel of Beowulf has three distinct characters. The first and most obvious of these is, of course, that of monster. Grendel is never described to us, but when he is first introduced he is referred to as mære marcstapa (1. 103a), or “night-monster of the border lands,” for, as Nicolas Klessling has pointed out, mære in this case does not mean “famous,” but rather is related to the Scandinavian mare and our Modern English “nightmare,” and so describes a monster of the darkness. Grendel is also condemned to wander the fifeleynnes eard (104b), or the “home of the monster-race,” because he is one of Caines cynne (109a), “Cain’s kin.” As legend describes, and as the Beowulf poet acknowledges, the descendants of Cain are monsters:

* Mr. Ruud’s paper, under the title “Grendel: The Monster and the Man,” won the Frederick J. Hoffman Award for best paper submitted by an English graduate student at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in 1974.

1 Citations of Beowulf are to Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., ASPR, 4 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953), line numbers hereafter given in parentheses.

Grendel is called æglaeca (159a), or “monster,” eotan (761a) — “giant” or “troll,” and hyse (426a), or “ogre.” This latter is important since, as N. K. Chadwick points out, according to the Old English Gnomic verses the common abode of a hyse is a fen, and Grendel is called se þe moras heold / fen ond fasten (103b-104a) – “he that held the moors, fen, and fastness.” Finally, modern scholarship has determined that Beowulf is an example of the Bear’s Son or Three Stolen Princesses folk motif. Chambers and others have pointed out Scandinavian analogues to the Beowulf story in the Saga of Samson the Fair, in the story of Orm Storolfsson, and especially in the Grettis Saga, wherein the hero fights a draumar, “an animated corpse of hideous aspect and destructive habits.” Grendel, then, seems to be fellow to the entire brood of monsters. Critics see Grendel and his mother as “cannibal giants” and “English ogres,” Grendel himself as “a cannibalistic monster” and “primarily an ogre, a physical monster, whose main function is hostility to humanity.” In short, Grendel is a horrid, hairy, inhuman beast.

But he is more than that. Grendel is seen also as demonic. He is not merely an amoral beast, devouring warriors of Hrothgar’s hall whenever his hunger spurs him to do so. Grendel is also a devil, and hence a radically evil creature. When first introduced, Grendel is called feond on helle (101b), “fiend of hell,” and a little later he is among the helruna (163a), presumably those who know the “mysteries of hell.” Later, when Beowulf first grasps Grendel’s arm, the monster wants to flee and secan deófla gedrag (756a), “seek the host of devils.” He is called helle haefton (78a) – “slave of hell,” helle gast (1274a) – “spirit of hell,” and both Grendel and his mother are finally called deófla (1680a) – “devils.” Just what the poet had in mind when equating Grendel with the devil is a problem often pondered by critics. Certainly the intent was to make Grendel into something more than a devouring beast – into something quite inhumanly and powerfully evil. But are the many demonic epithets cited above meant literally, or only figuratively? O. F. Emerson, discussing Grendel’s motive in attacking Hrothgar, considers these lines:

Da se eiltengæst earfodlice
fræg gepolode, se þe on hystrum bad,
þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
hludne on healle; þæt waes hearpan sweg,
swutol sang scopes.

(Then the outcast spirit, he that dwelled in darkness, with difficulty tolerated, for a time, the joy that he heard each day loudly in the hall; there was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the scop.)

Emerson concludes that Grendel’s chief motive in assaulting Hrothgar’s hall is not mere thirst for gore, as we might suspect were Grendel described only as an ogre, but rather, as in the above lines, emvy of the Danes’ happiness — and envy was a chief characteristic of the medieval devil, who, it may be noted, fell from heaven as a result of his envy of God’s power, and his pride in aspiring to be greater than God. In the fact of his envy, then, Grendel is most certainly devilish. Other critics, however, have seen the demonic descriptions of Grendel as merely figurative. Margaret Goldsmith says that “if Grendel is a fleshly creature, as the whole story of the fight indicates, he cannot literally be a devil. An educated Christian would know this very well.” Goldsmith is here echoing Tolkien, who said earlier that Grendel is “devilish” in the

---

6Chadwick, p. 178.
8Ibid., p. 98.
12Goldsmith, p. 106.
fact that he hates mankind and loves the darkness, but cannot be taken as a real devil because he does not destroy the soul.13

Whether or not Grendel is to be taken as a literal devil is a problem just as puzzling as that associated with the third and most important side of Grendel’s character: his human nature. The question here is whether or not we are to take the many descriptions of Grendel as an outcast human being literally or ironically. Grendel is described early as wonsæli wer (105a) — “unhappy man,” who envies the happiness of Hrothgar’s Danes. Later, Grendel is a hæðstægn (142a) — “hall thane.” On the day following Beowulf’s mortal struggle with Grendel in the hall, some of the Danes trace Grendel’s trail of blood to the monster’s lair — a dark mere — wherein, we are told,

... dreama les
on fænfrede  feorh algede,
hæðene sawle; þær him hel onfeng.

(850b-852b)

(the joyless one, in his fen-sanctuary, laid down his life, his heathen soul; there hell received him.)

If Grendel has a “heathen soul,” and if he is to be sent to everlasting torment for his sins, then obviously he must be human — depraved, monstrous, demonic, but still human. And to the audience of Beowulf, Grendel would seem the worst kind of human ... one who was an outcast, who did not fill his place in society, but wandered the wastelands alone. Grendel fights a personal war with Hrothgar, ana wæd eallum (145a) — “one against all,” and, unlike a civilized enemy, will make no peace nor pay any wergeld — the compensation paid to a murdered man’s family, according to the laws of Germanic society, in order to avoid feuding:

sibbe ne wolde
wæd manna hwone mægenes Deniga,
feorhbealo feorran, fea þingian,
ne þær nægig witena wesan þorfe
bearhtre bote to banan folsum,

(154b-158b)

(He willed no peace with any man of the Danish host, [would not] reconcile himself with money for his life-afflicting crimes, nor need any of the counsellors expect bright compensation from the murderer’s hands)

Gardner's Grendel and “Beowulf”: Humanizing the Monster

As a result of his anti-social behavior, Grendel is prohibited from participation in the rites of Germanic society and, therefore, cannot approach the throne of any Germanic cyning, ring-giver, to receive the gifts of treasure bestowed on loyal warriors:

no he þone gifstol gretan moste,
mæðrum for metode, ne he myne wisse.

(168a-169b)

(never must he approach the gift-throne, the treasure of the creator, nor know his favor)

This passage seems to imply a double meaning: that Grendel, as an outlaw, cannot approach the throne of Hrothgar to receive gifts, and that he, as a cursed descendant of Cain, is also barred forever from approaching God’s heavenly gifstol from whence He dispenses the gift of grace.

Some critics have seen the human descriptions of Grendel as ironic rather than literal. Tolkien calls Grendel a “parody of human form” which “becomes symbolic, explicitly, of sin.”14 Edward Irving suggests that the ironic descriptions of Grendel as a human being are an invitation by the poet to his audience “to try to bring Grendel into some meaningful and familiar pattern of reference, some relationship to the structure of human society.”15 More recently, Goldsmith has said that Grendel and his dam, “though bestial in habit ... are understood to be human beings who hate their own kind.”16 Stephen Bandy dismisses the theory that Grendel’s humanity is merely figurative, and declares that “Grendel’s inner life, miserable as it is, would be unlikely for an unreflective beast.”17 It seems clear, particularly considering the fact that Grendel possesses a soul capable of sin and damnation, that the monster is more than a monster and is in fact some sort of depraved human.

The Beowulf poet, then, portrays Grendel as a three-sided figure: part monster, part devil, part human. Many critics, as noted above, have run into difficulty by attempting to reconcile the three into a logical unity. How can Grendel be a devil when he has a physical body? How can he be a man when he is so manifestly beastial? But such a reasonable reconciliation is unnecessary and, in fact, useless. The Beowulf poet is not striving for consistency, but rather for effect. His main purpose in his characterization of Grendel was the

14Tolkien, p. 42.
16Goldsmith, p. 97.
depiction of horror — the horror of the outside, the "other," the infinite circle of darkness enclosing the briefly lit beer-hall. And in his presentation of this terror the poet drew on the three most terrifying pictures his mind could conceive: first, the gigantic and powerful monster, a Fyris-like creature of the darkness wandering the fens by night and devouring warriors whole; second, the medieval Devil, portrayed by priests as a monstrous spirit thirsty for souls and dwelling in the utter darkness of the absence of God’s light; and last, the outlawed warrior, fearful to men because his was a fate to which none aspired — the lonely, distrusted, and vulnerable refugee, longing for fellowship and banished forever to the accursed darkness beyond the mead-hall. Thus the three sides of Grendel’s character are linked in their common depiction of the terrifying power of Darkness. Marie Hamilton shows that Grendel and his mother "seem to have become associated with ‘the whole company of the damned,’" while Goldsmith asserts that "the poet found no incompatibility in the simultaneous presentation of Grendel as a giant human enemy and as a devilish enemy." J. R. R. Tolkien first saw the ultimate nature of Grendel nearly forty years ago when he described the monsters of Beowulf as emblems of the chaos out of which human order sprang and to which that order eternally threatens to return: "a light starts ... and there is the sound of music; but the outer darkness and its hostile offspring lies ever in wait for the torches to fail and the voices to cease. Grendel is maddened by the sound of harps."

When John Gardner adapts Grendel to the environment of the modern novel, he is primarily interested in the creature’s human side. This is not to say that Gardner’s Grendel is an exiled warrior wandering the fens. He is not that at all. We are immediately aware of the bestial nature of Gardner’s monster — "I shake my two hairy fists at the sky and I let out a howl so unspeakable that the water at my feet turns to sudden ice," Grendel says on page 1. But what makes Gardner’s Grendel more than monster is the constant and confused throbbing of his surprisingly modern mind — the monster is human, a "thing that thinks." Grendel’s problem, like that of mankind in much medieval Christian theology, is the fact of his dual nature; half beast and half mind, he begins the book attempting to transcend his bestial side ("Why can’t these creatures discover a little dignity?") and ends it asserting his monstrous nature ("Blood-lust and rage are my character." [p. 107]). But the thinking processes which accompany the several philosophical stands at which Grendel arrives are what finally make him human.

The single element that most closely links the Grendels of Gardner and Beowulf is the fact that both are alienated from traditional Germanic society. This alienation is the chief basis for comparison of the two works. It has been indicated previously that in Beowulf, Grendel is barred from receiving the gifts of any Germanic lord, and how the monster can never be expected to pay the customary and legal wergild to the families of those he devours. Three times he is called ellwægast — "outcast spirit" (11. 86a, 1349a, 1617a), emphasizing his apartness from the world of men. Gardner’s Grendel is alienated as well. When we first see him, shouting and trying to drive away the mountain goat on page 1, he is alone — and he remains alone throughout the book, only occasionally communicating with another living being (the dragon, Unferth, or the old Priest). It is an utter aloneness of which the monster is acutely aware when, on pp. 13-17, he hangs trapped in a tree and his frenzied cries for help are answered by only emptiness. Grendel’s aloneness emphasizes his apartheid and, like the Grendel of Beowulf, Gardner’s Grendel totally rejects the values of Hrothgar’s society. Like the first Grendel, he is maddened by the song of the scop, not because it tells of a joy in which he has no part, but because it is a lie:

I knew very well that all he said was ridiculous, not light for their darkness but flattery, illusion, a vortex pulling them from sunlight to heat, a kind of midsummer burgeoning, waltz to the sickle.

(p. 40)

In the same way, Gardner’s Grendel sees through the veneer of heroic speeches and rejects the ideal of the hero. When Unferth attacks him with a long-winded speech, Grendel undercuts the verbiage with a sharp-edged point of truth:

"The hero sees values beyond what’s possible. That’s the nature of a hero. It kills him, of course, ultimately. But it makes the whole struggle of humanity worthwhile."

I nodded in the darkness. "And breaks up the boredom."

(p. 77)

And so, in both versions of the legend, Grendel is an estranged being. The vast difference between the two works, however, is a function of the contrasting attitudes held by the two periods — Beowulf’s eighth century and Grendel’s twentieth — toward the concept of alienation.
In the close-knit Germanic society portrayed in *Beowulf*, alienation was a serious and often fatal mode of existence. Unlike our modern impersonal world, wherein people shut themselves away in little boxes and communicate by computer, the Anglo-Saxon world was harsh and threatening, and survival was a community project. The society, as Alexander points out, was organized into tiny groups, each of which was called a *cynm* and centered around a particular lord.\(^{23}\) The lord's prestige was reflected in his number of retainers, and the customary social bond that united the lord and his personal thanes, his *comitatus*, was long ago described by Tacitus. The followers of the chief owed him unflinching loyalty: "to defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their own acts of heroism, are the most solemn obligations of their allegiance."\(^{23}\) In return, the lord's responsibility was the protection of his people. United for the purpose of mutual protection from disaster, "the dangers which men had originally banded together to overcome — animals, elements, enemies, hunger, disease — were never far enough away for the essential identity of interest to disintegrate . . . . a man without a lord was orphaned, outcast."\(^{24}\) One modern critic sees exile as "a much worse fate in those days when the protection of one's lord established one's place in society."\(^{25}\) Outside the warm glow of the mead-hall, the darkness was pregnant with unknown horrors — conquerable in the companionship of the *cynm*, devastating in the loneliness of exile.

It is true that after the arrival of Christianity and through the influence of the Irish hermit and *peregrinus*, some Anglo-Saxon Christians deliberately isolated themselves from the society of the *cynm* in order to endure rigorous hardships in the name of Christ — either for the sake of penance or for the purpose of forsaking material pleasures in order to contemplate unhindered the spiritual. A hint of this is present at the end of "The Dream of the Rood,"\(^{26}\) where the speaker is in solitude:

\[
\text{Is me nu lifes hyght} \\
\frac{\text{htaet ic bone sigebeam}}{\text{secan mote}}
\]

---


\(^{24}\) Alexander, p. 63.


---

"Gardner's Grendel and "Beowulf": Humanizing the Monster"

ana ofter bonne ealle men, \(126b-129a\)
well weorþian;

(The hope of life is now in me, that I, more often alone than other men, may seek to honor the tree of victory)

In general, however, alienation is an involuntary condition in Old English poetry, and its descriptions in the extant exile poetry portray such estrangement as a terrifying and disastrous condition. The speaker of "The Wife's Lament"\(^{27}\) describes the state of one in exile in all its bleak grimness:

\[
\text{Under stanhlyfe storme behrimed,} \\
\text{wine werigmod,} \\
\text{waetre beflown} \\
\text{on dreorsele, dreoeg se min wine} \\
\text{micle modoceare; he gemon to oft wynlicran wic.} \\
\text{Wa bid ham be sceal of langowe loeses abidan.} \\
\]

(48a-53b)

(48a-53b)

(Now shall the receiving of treasure, and the giving of swords, and all the delights of the homeland, cease for your beloved race. Every man of your kindred must now wander, void of his land-

---

right, after noblemen from afar find out about your flight, your inglorious deed.)

But the most poignant expression in all Old English poetry of the grief felt by the homeless exile is found in “The Wanderer.” The speaker of the poem, identified as an eardstapa (earth walker), speaks of his long search for a new home, a new lord in whose cym und under whose protection he may find a new niche. “The picture is a perfect one of the man without identity,” says one recent critic. Since burying his own lord, the Wanderer says, he has lived as an exile:

ond ic hean þonan
wod wintercearing ofer wægema gebind,
sohte sele dreorig since bryttan,
hwær ic feor ofþe neah findan meahite
bone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
obþe mec freonleasne frefran wolde,
weman mid wynnum. Wat se þe cunnað,
hu sligen þiþ sorg to geferan,
hamu him lýt hafæþ leofra geholena.
Warad hine wæcraest, naes wunden gold,
ferðloca freorig, naes foldan blæd.
Gemon he sele secgas ond sincge,
hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
wenede to wiste. Wyn eal gedreas.

(23b-36b)

(And I journeyed from there, downcast and winter-sad, over the binding of the waves. Sad for want of a hall, I sought a giver of treasure, where, far or near, I might find one who in his mead-hall would know of my lord, or would comfort me, friendless, and entertain me with pleasures. He knows, who has experienced it, how harsh a companion is sorrow to him who has too few beloved confidants. He is preoccupied with the exile-track, not with twisted gold. Frozen is his soul-enclosing breast, no glory on earth; he remembers hall-warriors, and the receiving of treasure, how in youth his goldfriend made him accustomed to feasting. All joy vanishes.)


Gardner’s Grendel and “Beowulf”: Humanizing the Monster

It is a product of the old Germanic fatalism, the belief in an all-encompassing wyrd, that the exiles of Anglo-Saxon poetry are brought to a stoic acceptance of the role of the outcast. The speakers in the poems do not rage against fortune. They express calmly the sorrow and longings of the alienated spirit, and then move to a fatalistic adoption of the state of exile, and sometimes, in Christianized poems like “The Wanderer,” to a hope for a better lot in the next life. Her bid fæð lan, her bid freond lan, / her bid mon lan, her bid mag lan (108a-109b) — “Here is property fleeting, here is friend fleeting, / here is man fleeting, here is kinsman fleeting,” the poem’s speaker realizes. But “The Wanderer” ends:

Wel bid þam þe him are secð,
froþre to fæðer on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnug stonden.

(114b-115b)

(Well will it be with him who seeks grace and comfort from the Father in heaven. There stands security for us all.)

It is in this wretched state of exile and alienation that we find Grendel. But Grendel is unique in that he is a hybrid figure — his character partakes of traits common to the exiled warrior (he is an ellorigest, he cannot approach the gift of treasure, he pays no weargold and so is not a recognized constituent of the legal system), but he is also a personification, in his bestial and demonic sides, of those very forces which so terrify the exile — he is an embodiment of the dark unknown. Again, the Beowulf poet was probably not concerned with the paradox of Grendel’s dual nature. The poet’s presentation of a frightening bogey had room for many elements which may seem conflicting to us. But what sets Grendel apart from other exiles, besides his bestial form, is his attitude toward his exile. Grendel, like the Wanderer, is unhappy in his lordless condition: he is wonsæll wer (105a) — an “Unhappy man.” What maddens Grendel to a fury is the fact that he dream gehyrde / hludne on healle (88b-89a) — “heard joy / loudly in the hall.” Grendel does not grimly accept his fate and hope for a better life in the next world, nor does he wander the wastes of this one in search of a lord who will take him in. Remember he sibbe ne woldæ (154b) — “willed no peace” with any man. Grendel doesn’t want peace; his spite drives him only to destroy those who have what he does not — joy, comfort, and security. And perhaps this is what makes Grendel so monstrous to the Beowulf poet — the fact that he simply will not accept things as they are and totally and nihilistically rejects those cherished values of Anglo-Saxon society that Hrothgar, Beowulf, and, perhaps, the poet, accept without question.
It is exactly this trait which makes the character of Grendel so appealing to a modern writer. Beowulf, hero of his own age, turns in the face of death and darkness to the consolation of the heroic ideal and of the mutual bond of loyalty and protection between lord and retainers. He defends his people against the scourge of the dragon. He kills Grendel out of his eagerness for fame — the consolation that even after death his name would live on. In this same spirit, he tells Wiglaf to build him a great funeral pyre, visible to seafarers from their tall ships, se sel to gemynund minum leodum (2804) — "that shall be a reminder to my people." But in John Gardner's treatment of the story, when Beowulf speaks about that same heroic ideal, he is seen in a quite different light:

The stranger had said it all so calmly, so softly, that it was impossible to laugh. He believed every word he said. I understood at last the look in his eyes. He was insane. (p. 142)

The modern world no longer provides an unquestioned set of values. We have no longer a closely-knit society in which one can find comfort in the mutual bond of loyalty and protection from the darkness and absurdity outside. All the gods are dead. And so those who, like Beowulf, express unflinching adherence to any absolute code, are viewed as insane. So Yosarian describes Clevinger in Catch-22:

As always occurred when he quarreled over principles in which he believed passionately, he would end up gazing furiously for air and blinking back bitter tears of conviction. There were many principles in which Clevinger believed passionately. He was crazy. 30

If the traditional hero is insane, then, who becomes the modern hero? As John Gardner realizes, it must be Grendel — the monster who totally rejects all traditional values of his world needs only a few slight alterations to become a perfect absurd hero. Gardner's novel fits neatly into the category of contemporary absurdist literature.

To modern man, the universe has become meaningless. He is adrift in a world without certainties, rejecting religion, absolutist science and technology, even Communism, or any other system which purports to have the "answers." And if there is no longer any unifying principle to give a purpose to life, then life itself is made totally meaningless by the final, conclusive certainty of a death that is total annihilation. There is nothing beyond; hence

Gardner's Grendel and "Beowulf": Humanizing the Monster

what we do here ultimately comes to nothing. As Gardner's dragon tells Grendel, life is "a brief pulsation in the black hole of eternity" (p. 63). It seems an echo of Pozzo in Waiting for Godot, who tells us "they give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." 31 Gardner's monster muses long and often on the meaninglessness of the world. Early in the book, he says:

I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. (p. 16)

And toward the novel's end, Grendel states again that the world is chaotic, and that men merely impose a superficial kind of order upon it. But that order is only a dream, an imaginary solace, and will always break down because it is the natural inclination of chaos to return to chaos:

The mind lays out the world in blocks, and the hushed blood waits for revenge. All order, I've come to understand, is theoretical, unreal — a harmless, sensible, smiling mask men slide between the two great, dark realities, the self and the world. (p. 138)

Men, then, try to make sense out of a meaningless world. This is what Albert Camus calls absurd:

This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. 32

Gardner's Grendel realizes this. He calls men the "pattern makers" (p. 21). He is maddened by the song of the scop — the "Shaper" — just as the Beowulf Grendel was, but for, perhaps, a different reason: the Shaper recreates history into an ordered pattern, he reshapes the world with words, and this Grendel cannot stand because he sees, better than others, the chaos of the darkness in which he dwells:

What was he? The man had changed the world, had torn up the past by its thick, gnarled roots and had transmuted it, and they, who knew the truth, remembered it his way — and so did I. (p. 36)

THOTH Spring, Fall 1974

The dragon explains to Grendel the Shaper’s purpose. Men, he says,

have uneasy feelings that all they live by is nonsense . . . That’s
where the Shaper saves them. Provides an illusion of reality —
puts together all their facts with a gluey whine of connectedness.

(p. 55)

There is a danger that those who see, as Grendel does, the meaninglessness of all things, will cease to do anything. Since morality is arbitrary, then all actions are ultimately equally good or bad. Unfortunately, in this view, all actions are also equally useless, and so it is just as valuable, as in Waiting for Godot, to do nothing:

Vladimir: Well? What do we do?
Estragon: Don’t let’s do anything. It’s safer. 33

So Grendel tells himself when he is at the point of killing the Queen:

I changed my mind. It would be meaningless, killing her. As
meaningless as letting her live. It would be, for me, mere pointless
pleasure, an illusion of order in this one frail, foolish flicker-flash
in the long dull fall of eternity.

(p. 94)

The monster then resolves to kill himself, but “the next instant, for no
particular reason, I changed my mind” (p. 95). Grendel seems at this point in
the novel to be sinking into a state of mind that John Barth calls
“cosmopsis.” In Barth’s novel The End of the Road, the hero Jake Horner
remains motionless for twelve hours in Pennsylvania Station because he
cannot decide whether or not to go on a trip. The cure for “cosmopsis” is
“myotherapy,” which is, in essence, role-playing. The doctor in The End of
the Road tells Jake that “myotherapy” is based on two assumptions: “that
human existence precedes human essence . . . and that a man is free not only
to choose his own essence but to change it at will.” 34 This seems to be
exactly what Grendel does in Gardner’s novel: he identifies himself as the
personification of the chaotic darkness from which men absurdly few
patterns, and he asserts his adopted role of “monster” by gobbling up
Hrothgar’s thanes. The dragon (who seems to be an omniscient and extremely
powerful being) tells Grendel:

---


Gardner’s Grendel and “Beowulf”: Humanizing the Monster

You improve them, my boy! Can’t you see that yourself? You
stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive
them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they
are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute exis-
tant by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, capti-
vity, death they shrink from – the blunt facts of their mortality,
their abandonment – that’s what you make them recognize,
embrace!

(p. 62)

So Grendel, after he makes his first raid on Hrothg, feels a “strange, unearthly
joy,” and realizes

I was a new focus for the clutter of space I stood in . . . I had
become something, as if born again. I had hung between possibili-
ties before, between the cold truths I knew and the heart-sucking
conjuring tricks of the Shaper; now that was passed: I was
Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!

(p. 69)

Thus, what began as a nihilistic statement of the meaninglessness of the
universe becomes an assertion that there are at least relative values, like the
science and religion that the dragon mentions (and, particularly, art – as
represented by the song of the scop and by the novel itself, both rebelling
against the disorderly darkness by making patterns). Though it may be
abundant, it is at least relatively better to adopt a role to play in society than to
do nothing. It is insane to accept unquestioningly, as Beowulf does, the values
of one’s culture, but it is more desirable to become a contributing member of
society and to improve the quality of life than to commit suicide. Hence,
paradoxically, Grendel’s bloody acts in Gardner’s novel are not intended to
destroy Hrothgar but to improve him through a struggle against the
meaningless chaos that Grendel represents.

The wheel has come full circle. The villain has become the hero, the
accepted values of society have become insanity, acts of murder and violence
have become acts of creation. A comparison of Beowulf and John Gardner’s
Grendel becomes quite naturally a comparison of the eighth century with our
own. And we learn this much about the similarities between the two ages:
men now, as always, fear the darkness of the unknown, and try to make for
themselves a secure light out of the world’s chaotic gloom. But we also learn
something of how our age differs from Beowulf’s: the set of values of
Anglo-Saxon society, symbolized by the mead-hall, provided an island of
protection and security amid the tumultuous uncertainty inhabited by
Grendel. For our modern world there are no set values; there is no island.
November 7, 2005

Linda Wallenberg
Eden Prairie High School
17185 Valley View Rd.
Eden Prairie, MN 55347

Dear Ms. Wallenberg:

Attached, per your request, is a copy of my ancient article “Gardner’s Grendel and Beowulf: Humanizing the Monster,” from Thoth 14 (1974): 3-17. (Thoth was a journal put out by the graduate school at Syracuse University that ceased publication shortly after my article appeared. I’m not sure whether there was a connection or not).

Interestingly, there was an article by Robert Merrill (called “John Gardner’s Grendel and the Interpretation of Modern Fables”) that appeared in American Literature 56 (1984): 162-180, that starts out with a long quotation from my article, and then compares it to a quotation from Gardner himself in which he contradicts just about everything I said about the novel. Merrill suggests that this indicates writers are not always the best interpreters of their own work.

Anyway, I’m glad you were interested in the article and I hope your students enjoy it.

Sincerely,

Jay Ruud
Chair, Department of English