

# Theme essay: beowulf

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Allen Saunders once said that “ Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans”. In life people do all they can do so as to fulfill their dreams, but fate always pulls the rings behind the curtains and what finally happens is often a far cry from what was initially planned. The epic Beowulf is the epitome of how fate always lurks behind the scenes of what happens. Despite all the odds, fate always seems to have its way in this epic, right from the first fight to the final fight. It is possible to precipitate a pattern where fate takes the upper hand in all the events in which Beowulf engages. This article will examine the way in which, despite all the odds, fate eventually had the final say in the events of this epic.

In the epic of Beowulf, the very first major incidence is an open display of how fate always prevails against all signs to the contrary. When Grendel begins attacking the Danes, the situation looks desperate. The Danish people are unable to hold Grendel back, and he rampages through the land killing and destroying at will. King Hrothgar and his people are distressed, and it seems that Grendel is unbeatable.

Grendel’s attacks of the Danes and his final defeat demonstrate the fact that fate always has its final say in the events of life. This is because Grendel was such a fearsome and fierce demon that defeating him was inconceivable. Grendel is described as a demon from “ Cain’s clan”, as he descends from a God-forsaken place. The following lines describe Grendel, to put into perspective the desperation that the Danes faced from his attacks on the wealthy Mead-Hall:

Grendel, a monster descended from " Cain's" clan, begins to prowl

So times were pleasant for the people there

Until finally one, a fiend out of hell,

Began to work his evil in the world.

To make matters worse, King Hrothgar, whom the Danes look up to for protection, is old and unable to protect his people from the fatal attacks of this horrid monster. In fact the King is described as distressed and helpless, because Grendel's power of destruction was plain. Not only did the monster strike and kill Danes, he kept striking again and again and the Danes had no respite.

However, in a twist of fate, Hrothgar seeks the favor of a brave and seasoned warrior, Beowulf. This is a fateful event because a long time ago, Hrothgar himself went to the aid of Beowulf's father. In fact, a line describing this indebtedness goes: " Fate goes as fate must'. Beowulf, due to his indebtedness to King Hrothgar for helping his father in a desperate situation, takes the burden of the Danes in his own hands.

Once more, fate takes its course when Beowulf engages Grendel in a hand-to-hand battle. It is almost unimaginable that anybody should even try to engage such a fierce beast without any weapons. But as fate would have it, somehow Beowulf emerged to be victorious. Of course, there is no way that logic could explain this, reason being that Grendel had single-handedly killed several other warriors. How, then, could a warrior face and kill him?

Perplexing as it might be, is the only way to have it adequately explained is that fate had its way.

The fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother also reveals the workings of fate in its very nature. Beowulf had just come from a grueling battle with a fearsome demon, and now had to face his outraged mother! It was almost inconceivable. How could Beowulf win both battles was almost unexplainable. But again, it was fate.

During the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother, all indications pointed towards the fact that Beowulf would be killed. Grendel's mother dives into the bottom of a Lake, and Grendel follows her there. There is hardly a chance that Beowulf may survive the encounter. The struggle lasts a long time, as expected. The fact that Beowulf fights in an unfamiliar territory also tilts the odds against him. The reader expects Beowulf to be killed, and so do other characters in the play. In fact, Danish warriors give him up for the dead, tired of waiting. They leave prematurely, but the Geatish warriors know that Beowulf has fate on his side. They wait for their hero patiently, their hearts throbbing with hope and expectation. The tone of the poem is optimistic at this juncture.

Another incident that tilts the odds against Beowulf is that the body of Grendel's mother is so caustic that it can melt metal. Despite this, Beowulf goes ahead to slay Grendel's mother and bring her head to the surface of the Lake, where the Geatish warriors greet him in elation and great rejoicing. This is because in spite of all events being against Beowulf, he eventually emerged the victor, as fate had dictated.

Fate seems to keep playing an important role in all of Beowulf's encounters, including the fact that he becomes the king of the Geats. Upon his return to

his homeland, the Geatish king, Hygelac and all his relatives are killed, leaving Beowulf the most probable successor to the throne, and he eventually becomes a King. Once more, it seems as though fate had preserved the fiercest battles for when Beowulf becomes a king. Although the battle with Grendel and his mother were epic, Beowulf is yet to face his most tempting and trying moments.

Throughout his kingship, Beowulf engages in many and great battles, but none of them is as fierce as his final battle. By fate, a heinous dragon is awoken from ages of sleep. Buried under heaps of rubble for centuries, the magnanimous and terrifying creature is woken by a slave who wanted to steal a jewelled cup. Clearly, this is a fateful event, first of all that this fearsome creature should be woken up after centuries of sleep right in Beowulf's lifetime, and that the creature should be woken up in Beowulf's land. It is as if the encounter had been planned centuries beforehand. When Beowulf and the Dragon finally meet, it is a battle to remember.

When the Dragon wakes from its slumber, a heavy cloud of melancholy and hopelessness hangs over the Geats and the peace of their land has been disturbed by a creature that defies the dimensions of the human imagination. The Geats are terrified, and they now look up to their brave old King, but he has hardly any of his initial strength left. Beowulf is faced with a difficult situation here.

As Beowulf prepares himself for his encounter with the dragon, the poet makes it clear that Beowulf has to face his fate. Indeed, Beowulf seems to have a premonition that his death is nigh. As he sits on a clifftop, his heart

clouded in glum, he seems to be chatting with fate. He felt that the future was unknowable, but it was certain nonetheless.

The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.

He wished good luck to the Geats who had  
shared

his hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,

Unsettled yet ready, sensing his death.

His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain.

(ll. 2415-21)

Indeed, as the story unravels, there is no escape from fate for Beowulf. He has to face the dragon, because all the warriors that face the Dragon with him, except for one, Wiglaf, are terrified by the creature. They all flee, and Beowulf and Wiglaf alone remain to fight with the fearsome creature.

Beowulf confronts the dragon, lashing out at it with his sword. However, the dragon's scaly body is not a match for the King's puny weapon. Beowulf strikes the head of the dragon, only for his sword to snap. More and more, the reader is able to see the hand of fate in the plot of the story. Beowulf finds himself in a more compromised position every moment he struggles with the dragon. Finally, the dragon's fiery breath catches a patch of Beowulf's skin, and this is also a manifestation of the workings of fate.

In a frantic effort to survive, Beowulf withdraws a knife and stabs the dragon on its side. Out of a panicky situation, Beowulf actually manages to make a deadly strike to the dragon. This, once again, is obviously an expression of the mechanisms of fate. The dragon finally dies in the hands of Beowulf. This, is as a result of fate. It is clear that fate had planned for Beowulf to bring the fearsome dragon to the grave.

But the Dragon drags Beowulf into the grave with it. This, is a manifestation of fate. The wound of Beowulf is a fatal one. As Beowulf fades into death, he instructs his only brave aide, Wiglaf, to find the dragon's treasure and take it to his kingdom. After all, Beowulf's premonition is true. Beowulf was destined to die on this very day at the hands of the deadly dragon.

Surprisingly, there are many twists of fate in Beowulf's final contest. As life fades away from his eyes, Beowulf passes his kingdom to Wiglaf, instructing him to take care of the Geats. Wiglaf had a date with fate as well. He became a King as a result of his single act of bravery, being by Beowulf's side even in the most difficult times.

Beowulf is an epic, riddled with several turns of fate. In Beowulf's first encounter, he faces Grendel, whose description sends shudders down the spine. Despite the fierce nature of the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, and despite the fact that Grendel had killed many warriors, Fate seems to work in favor of Beowulf until he finally meets a dragon that has been awoken from centuries of sleeping. In his final encounter, Beowulf acknowledges the crucial role that fate has to play in the fight. In a

fulfillment of his qualms and premonitions, Beowulf succumbs to a mortal wound dealt him by the Dragon's fiery breath.

Indeed, fate always has the final word in all life encounters. Beowulf's fate was no different. Despite his heroic nature, he finally succumbs to a dragon that could have woken up at any other time of history, but it wakes up right in Beowulf's lifetime. The only certain fate of man is death, Beowulf eventually dies, despite his heroic life.