

The hero comes to heorot: beowulf vs. grendel essay samples

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In the sixth-century A. D., the Anglo-Saxon culture left behind nearly 30, 000 lines of literature. Of those, 4, 000 lines formed the epic poem, Beowulf. The author of the piece remains shrouded in mystery as does the exact year of its writing. The ancient, alliterative poem tells the tale of the adventures of the strong and courageous warrior, Beowulf, who comes to the aid of Hrothgar, King of the Danes. Beowulf himself is the nephew of Higelac, King of the Geats, and is said to have the strength of 30 men in each of his arms (pace. edu, n. d.). The story centers around Hrothgar's great hall called Heorot. However, Heorot is beset by the terror of Grendel, a sea monster. Jealous of King Hrothgar and his vassals' merry-making, Grendel terrorizes Heorot for 12 years, taking Hrothgar's men one-by-one, and devouring them (beowulfandgrendel. net, n. d.).

Thematically, Beowulf can be considered one of the ultimate epics of good vs. evil in the English language. The poem pits the monster, Grendel, against Beowulf, and his 14 warriors, and features three distinct battles. The first battle of Beowulf results in victory for Beowulf, and his men. In the poem itself, this famous battle takes place in Epic 4, part 8.

On the night of Grendel and Beowulf's decisive battle, Grendel is confident as he makes his usual approach to the great hall, Heorot. " He had visited Hrothgar's/Home before, knew the way—/But never, before nor after that night,/Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception/So harsh" (Beowulf, lines 398-402). Grendel was taken by surprise when he saw that Heorot was defended well. " He strode quickly across the inlaid/Floor, snarling and fierce: His eyes/Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome/Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall/Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed/With rows of

young soldiers resting together (Beowulf, 406-410). The poet's narrative alludes to the fact that Grendel is hungry, and that his "mind was hot/with the thought of food and feasting/his belly would soon know" (Beowulf, 414-416). While the author portrays Grendel as all-evil, he is still subject to a greater force that will play out during the battle with Beowulf -- fate. "But fate, that night, intended/Grendel to gnaw the broken bones/Of his last human supper" (Beowulf, 416-418). The battle scene is gory and bloody, as Grendel sucked the blood out of one of Beowulf's Geat soldiers, and gnawed at his victim with clenched teeth. However, Fate overcomes the monster and he decides to eat another Geat. Thus, a larger dimension is introduced into the poem. It suggests that a Divine Force, i. e. Fate, is at work in the inevitable battle. And as Fate would have it: "Then he stepped to another/Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,/Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper/ —And was instantly seized himself, claws/Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm./That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,/Knew at once that nowhere on earth/Had he met a man whose hands were harder (Beowulf, 428-435). After great struggle between the two -- Beowulf and Grendel -- the young Geat prevails. Grendel's initial reaction is fear and the desire to run, but as the battle ensues between monster and man, the great hall, Heorot, shakes as the two fight. "Its benches rattled, fell/To the floor, gold-covered boards grating/As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them" (Beowulf, 457-459). As Heorot is built to last forever (it is constructed of ivory, wood, and iron), the great hall withstands the battle. "the horrible shrieks of pain/And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's/Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms/Of him who of all the men on

earth/Was the strongest" (Beowulf, 468-473).

Beowulf ultimately prevails, also landing a blow to Grendel's mother, who loses her son, and later seeks vengeance against Beowulf. Thus, the ancient epic poem of Beowulf features a great battle between man and monster, as well as the natural and the supernatural, but Fate oversees -- and pre-determines the battle's outcome --, ensuring Beowulf's victory over the dreaded, terrifying monster, Grendel.

References

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