

What is a monster?
are we monsters? are
humans monsters?

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When we become envious of our friend's belongings, vengeful toward those who hate, or selfish when we have plenty. Monsters strike fear within our hearts because they are giant, monstrous, ugly and uncontrollable beings. Humans strike fear in their peers because of their vengeance, race or politics.

In *Beowulf*, readers are exposed to these monsters who are uncontrollable through the ways that they fight each other. By analyzing *Beowulf*, the concept of monstrosity is parallel to some flaws of humanity. Although *Beowulf* is seen a deviant God-sent savior by the people of Heorot and Hrothgar, he is not exempt from the equivalence of humanistic flaws in the natural world.

Through the use of many parallels between the characters of *Beowulf* representing monsters and the natural world humans, the reader is left questioning what it is to be a hero and what it is to be a monster. The story uses symbolisms such as supernaturalism as the model to create specific roles for the characters in *Beowulf* that parallel humans. In this paper, I will discuss the ways in which Grendel, Grendel's Mother and *Beowulf* are parallel to humans in the natural world by looking at the ways in which monsters and humans are similar.

The epic poem, *Beowulf*, describes each of the monsters to be supernatural except Grendel and his mother who are understood to not be supernatural. He is one of three monsters in the story that is ornamented with monstrous traits such as "heathen talons, terrible spikes" (*Beowulf* 987).

Although he is described with these monstrous features, it is humanistic and emotional instinct that propel his actions. For example, in the beginning of the story, Grendel is angered by the joyous celebration of the men of Heorot (Danes), crawls out of his underground swamp and creates a deathly disturbance. This ambiguous monstrosity gives mixed views of the role of humans and monsters, allowing for overlapping representations.

He lives underground with his mother that is recognized by readers as the unnatural world-living in swamps and darkness. The grumpy Grendel attacks the Hall because it "harrowed him to hear the joyful din loud in the hall" (87-105). He is envious of Hrothgar and his people because they live in civilization-unlike Grendel-who lives in isolation. Words like "harrowing," "misery" (105), "unholy creature," and "ravenous" (120-121) are all used in the beginning of the story which alludes readers that Grendel is monstrous and envious of the Danes.

The human characteristic Grendel is portraying in the story is envy. He wants to fit in with the Danes but since he is a Cain (who kills kin) he is unable to. His physical form confuses readers in terms of categorizing him as man or beast. He has many animal attributes, a grotesque and monstrous appearance such as "beast" (425), "heathen talons" and "terrible spikes" (985), but his actions and emotions prove otherwise. When Grendel is gravely injured from the battle with Beowulf at the Hall, he is doomed to die in his underground home.

When Beowulf describes the win over Grendel, he states, " death is not an easy thing to escape-try it who will-but compelled necessity all must come to that place set aside for soul-bearers, children of men, dwellers on earth..." (1012). This further blurs the line between natural world humans and monsters because of the vernacular Beowulf chooses, " earth dwellers", " children of men". These words with specific intent towards Grendel, can overlap with descriptions of death towards humans in the natural world that death is hard to escape.

Grendel's mother in the story is relatable to every mother in the natural world. Her intent to avenge her son's death (Grendel) to kill Beowulf is a very similar instinct mothers have in the natural world humans feel remorse for the loss of their loved ones. She symbolizes the natural quality of revenge.

Grendel's mother comes into play and described as, " a woman's warfare, is less than an armed man's when a bloodstained blade, its edges strong, hammer-forged sword, slices through the boar-image on a helmet opposite" (1283). The line, " a woman's warfare, is than an armed man" to describe Grendel's mother as weak is a direct parallel to mothers in the natural world. In today's world, people assume that women are weak and less harmful than a man.

In the story, the men in the hall are not afraid of her because she is a woman. Even though she is a mother, a female, to a " weak", " emotional" monster (Grendel), she can still be violent and dangerous to others. This parallels mothers in the natural world. They can be terrifying when you make

them mad. Grendel's mother is also ornamented with monstrous descriptions, " her hostile claws, that she-wolf of the sea swam to the bottom" (1505). This puzzles the reader when trying to categorize Grendel's mother as (wo)man or " beast".

Along with Grendel's monstrosity and his mothers', Beowulf's humanity is called into question. His call for attacking and killing Grendel is only for the fame he receives from the men of Heorot, " he trusted his strength, the might of his handgrip-as a man should do if by his warfare he thinks to win long-lasting praise: he cares nothing for his life" (1535).

In this scene, the reader sees how he possess supernatural qualities of abnormal strength. This is the epitome of so many men in the natural world. Men are greedy for praise to impress a woman they like. The description of Beowulf here can again confuse the reader as to what to categorize him as, man or " beast". Men try to be heroic when a tragedy happens most of the time to gain praise from the public. This is what Beowulf does in the story, to be the hero by stopping the attack on Heorot by Grendel.

Beowulf is the example of the " tragic hero" in the story. He comes from being known as nothing but an ugly strong monster to a praised monster who killed the bad guy. He has many animal attributes and a monstrous appearance, but he seems to be guided by vague human emotions and impulses. For example, the impulse to kill Grendel for glory and fame is a remorseful killing act, Beowulf uses it as adrenaline to keep killing and attacking the " beasts" who harm Heorot.

These different monstrous personalities are seen in the natural human world which need to be addressed today when reading and exploring one's own life. Humans are monsters too. Grendel is portrayed as the man who takes the bus to work every day and is envious of happiness in people's life-maybe someone with depression.

Grendel's mother is portrayed as everyone's mother who wants revenge for a loved one's death and Beowulf is the greedy white American who wants to be praised for saving blacks in a burning house. Each of these portrayals in the human world is scary to see and understand. But it is all real.

Concepts of monstrosity, heroism, and supernaturalism in Beowulf are complex due to the parallelisms between humanity and the monsters in the story. It is easy for readers to neglect the looming allusions on humanity that Beowulf offers through its use of subtle comparison. The ambiguity of "monster" and "hero" are intermixed in both the story and world of common man.

Beowulf reminds readers to question the flaws and norms in humanity and its longing labels. We must yearn to understand human motivation before asking and claiming self-righteous glory. The difference between Grendel's mother and Beowulf is that his mother was avenging the death of her son and Beowulf kills for glory and fame. Humans are monsters.