

AP English Notes
21 September 2004

I did give a quiz (Quiz 4) on air today. If you were not in class, please ask for a make up quiz.

I showed these sites on air. You may want to review these:

Nova site on the Vikings:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/diaspora.html>

If you want to write your name in runes, go to this site:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/runes.html>

Remember the prayer heard throughout Europe during this time period: _

From the fury of the Norsemen, oh Lord, deliver us.

Notes from Classic Notes.

Beowulf and his thanes march up the road. When they reach Hrothgar's castle, they meet the thane Wulfgar. Beowulf introduces himself, and Wulfgar takes the information to Hrothgar. Hrothgar is pleased he remembers Ecgtheow, and he has heard that Beowulf is very strong. He also believes that "the Measurer/ Maker of us all has urged him here." Wulfgar allows the Geats to meet Hrothgar.

Once at Hrothgar's throne, Beowulf introduces himself as a hero who can crush water sprites, among other things. Therefore he is equipped to defeat Grendel, if Wyrd (or Fate) will have it so. Hrothgar welcomes Beowulf as the son of Ecgtheow, the man whom Hrothgar had helped in settling a feud with the Wylfingas long ago. When Hrothgar did that, he was a young man and a new king. Now Grendel ravages his countryŠŠbut then is not the time to dwell upon such things. Instead, the Geats must join the Danes for a feast. Thus the benches are dragged out, the mead flows, and the minstrel sings.

During the feast, Hrothgar's thane Unferth tries to discredit Beowulf. He accuses Beowulf of losing a swimming contest with Breca. Beowulf disagrees; he not only defeated Breca, he also fought off many sea-monsters, thanks to both God and wyrd (fate). What heroic deeds have Breca, or even Unferth, done? Unferth even killed his brothers, and he has not done anything to stop Grendel. Upon hearing Unferth shamed by Beowulf, the whole company laughs.

Soon afterwards, the queen Wealhtheow enters the room, bearing a mead-cup. She offers it first to Hrothgar, then to the rest of the company. Finally she offers the cup to Beowulf. When he takes the mead, he says, "I'll give you [Grendel's] life blood / Šor finish my days / here in Heorot." His words touch Wealhtheow.

Eventually the party winds down, and Hrothgar is ready for bed. Before leaving Beowulf, Hrothgar wishes him luck and promises him all the gold he has if he can defeat Grendel. Beowulf says he will leave it to God. While his friends worry about whether they will see their homeland again, Beowulf lies down.

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The symbolic light and darkness also figure heavily into the scene. The evil Grendel ambles over the dark moors in the dead of night; Beowulf waits by the lights in the hall. Dark Grendel gazes at the glinting gold on the wall. The battle that began in darkness is completed in the dawning of day. The tension between light (symbolizing good) and dark (symbolizing evil) returns again and again in the poem.

Some have wondered why Beowulf did not run to action immediately when the monster enters. Why would he let two of his men meet such a terrible fate? Beowulf sees them as a necessary sacrifice. Again he uses the sense of a true warrior to act. Instead of rushing into battle blindly, Beowulf chooses to stand back and get a better idea of the enemy's strengths and weaknesses.

Return to the story:

As usual, Grendel plods through the darkness, heading toward Heorot for his nightly slaughter. He grips the hall door and rips it away. As he enters, his eyes fall upon the warriors sleeping. Little does he know that Beowulf is watching. Grendel reaches for and completely swallows one of the warriors (thus leaving 14 Geats, counting Beowulf).

Next the monster reaches for Beowulf, who is ready for him. Beowulf seizes the vicious claw and holds on to it. Grendel is at first confused, then fearful as he tries to pull away. Still Beowulf hangs on tight. Grendel's wrenching and bellowing brings the Danes out of their slumber and nearly breaks Heorot. Grendel desperately wants to be free and go home, but Beowulf keeps him in place. All the warriors do not know how to help. Grendel is in such agony that he finally rips from Beowulf's grasp and runs away, leaving a bloody trail and his arm behind.

Beowulf, meanwhile, "held to his promise." As the sun rises, the people gaze at the severed arm and rejoice that the terror with Grendel is finally over. Some men follow Grendel's bloody tracks to the moors, where the water bubbles over with blood as "the tomb of the dammed."
