
Beowulf

The Sea Hag Attacks

Everyone drank deeply of mead and celebrated the great victory. But that night, Grendel's mother, the sea hag, begins a journey to avenge her son. Rushing into the great hall, she seized Aeschere, Hrothgar's dearest counselor and a famed and heroic warrior, snatched Grendel's severed, bloody claw from the rafters, and flees into the darkness. Asleep in quarters at some distance from the hall, Beowulf did not learn of the she-monster's visit until the next morning.

After vowing to rid the people of this second, even more wretched demon, Beowulf attempts to comfort the King with his sage philosophy of life and death:

*Grieve not, wise warrior. It is better
to avenge one's friend than mourn too much.
Each of us must one day reach the end
Of worldly life, let him who can win
glory before he dies: that lives on
after him, when he lifeless lies.*

These warriors believe in revenge and think a "straw bed" death is not an honorable way to die. The best way to die is in battle with your sword in your hand. The "straw death" is dying in one's bed, death on a battle field is honorable; thus, Valkyries (the war goddesses of death) will come to take you to Valhalla to await the last great battle.

The story comes forth that there is a he and a she monster. They know the monsters inhabit a murky swamp region. Therefore, the warriors track the bloody trail to the shores of the lake where the monster's dwell.

With Hrothgar leading the way, the Danes cautiously approached the dreaded marsh-lair. Arriving at the moor's edge, the warriors see the head of the ill-fated Aeschere perched on an overhanging cliff. Next, the warrior see a bloody gore and gobs of flesh floating on the surface of the nearby pool of water.

Beowulf prepares to descend to the home of the foe. The Herald of Hrothgar (Unferth) nobly offers the Geat Beowulf his own blood-hardened sword Hrunting (The Thruster) - the finest in the kingdom--thus forfeiting a chance to win for himself great glory and fame. (This also show the new respect that Unferth has for this Geatish warrior.)

As Beowulf sank beneath the murky waters, he was immediately encircled by enormous and vicious creatures. He descends for a day and final comes into the cave of Grendel's mother, "where the water did no harm" (he could breath). After an immense struggle, he came to the cave of Grendel's mother and began to do battle. Beowulf, never lucky with weapons, failed in his first attempt to wound the she-monster with Unferth's sword and turned to his mighty handgrip, strong enough to "match the strength of thirty men." Though he was able to grasp the monster by the shoulder and throw her to the ground, a hand-to-hand battle ensued. Beowulf was almost overcome, but fate intervened.

AP English Notes
September 22, 2004