

AP English Notes
28 September 2004

Here are the sites that our students found interesting:

<http://www.albion.k12.mi.us/~kstudley/beowulf/>

<http://www.jagular.com/beowulf/book-images.shtml>

<http://www.csis.pace.edu/grendel/proj20004f/beowulf/definitions.htm>

Below is a short summary of the material we studied today.

Beowulf Returns in Triumph to Heorot

[Novel Guides from <http://www.novelguide.com/Beowulf/summaries/html>](http://www.novelguide.com/Beowulf/summaries/html).

The warriors make their way home. It takes four men to hoist the head of Grendel's mother on a spear and bear it back to Heorot. At the mead-hall, everyone is shocked by the sight of the head. They stare at the decapitated head in horror.

Beowulf tells of the battle, and attributes his success to the help God gave him. He pledges that the Danes can now sleep in their hall without fear, and presents the sword-hilt to Hrothgar.

Hrothgar studies the hilt. It is engraved with scenes from the Old Testament. It is also marked with the name of the warrior for whom it was first made. Hrothgar then repeats his promise of friendship to Beowulf, and contrasts the Geat with the bad king Heremod. God had given Heremod power, but he had misused it, killing his own men, ceasing to give gifts, and bringing destruction to his own people.

Hrothgar then goes on to speak of the dangers of power. After God rewards a man with power and happiness, that man sometimes becomes prideful and complacent. He starts to covet what he does not have and becomes resentful. He gives no gifts to his people. Then when he dies the treasure he has hoarded is inherited by someone else who dispenses it more liberally.

Hrothgar warns Beowulf to be wary of this trap and not give way to pride. He must remember that his strength will not last long. Soon illness, old age or the sword will take it from him.

He gives an example from his own life. He ruled for fifty years and believed he had defeated all his enemies. But then came Grendel and his life changed from pleasure to grief.

The banquet takes place and then the warriors retire to bed. The following morning, Beowulf and his men are ready to depart. Beowulf expresses his appreciation to Hrothgar for how well they have been treated, and says that if he can ever perform another favor for him, he will do it swiftly. He will be Hrothgar's ally in war, and is confident that Hygelac, the Geat king, will support him.

Hrothgar thanks Beowulf and says that if Hygelac should die, Beowulf would make an excellent king of the Geats. Hrothgar promises to preserve the new friendship between Danes and Geats, even though

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there has been hatred between them in the past.

Beowulf is presented with more gifts, and Hrothgar, realizing that he will never see Beowulf again, is overcome with emotion.

The Geats march back to the shore and load their ships. They give a sword with gold fittings to the man who had guarded the ships. Then they set sail from Denmark and arrive safely in Geatland, where they immediately head for Hygelac's stronghold on a cliff. The hall is a magnificent building, and Hygelac's wife, Hygd, is an ideal queen.

Beowulf and his men arrive at Hygelac's hall. Hygelac greets Beowulf warmly and wants to hear all Beowulf's stories of his travels. He had not wanted Beowulf to go to help the Danes, and dreaded the outcome. So now he is especially glad that Beowulf has returned safely home.

Beowulf tells of what happened after he arrived in Denmark. He has nothing but praise for the hospitality of Hrothgar and his queen. He also mentions Freawaru, Hrothgar's daughter, and her proposed marriage to Ingeld, of the house of Heathobard. The marriage is to pay for the Danes' killing of a prince in a feud, but Beowulf fears that there may still be bloodshed over the matter.

(This foreshadows Ingeld's mistreatment of Freawaru and his return to burn Heorot.)

He imagines what will happen when the Danes attend the wedding, wearing the spoils they looted after the battle in which the Heathobards were defeated. The young Heathobards will be stirred up, and there will be more deadly violence. The violence will escalate; Ingeld will no longer love his bride and the old feud between Danes and Heathobards will be resumed.

Beowulf recalls the gifts bestowed on him, and the feast at Heorot, when a minstrel sang stories accompanied by the harp. Then he recalls Grendel's mother, and how he defeated her. He tells of the extra gifts presented to him, which he now presents to Hygelac. He reveals that the gift of the war-gear indicated Hrothgar's special favor.

Beowulf then gives to Hygelac a boar-crested headpiece, the towering helmet, and steel-gray sark (shirt of mail), and splendid war sword.

Hygelac gives Beowulf a sword which is an heirloom (the sword of Hrethel his grandfather), a hall (mead hall), a stately seat, and 7,000 hides.

The narrator praises Beowulf's character. He is courageous and honorable, the possessor of every virtue. This marks a change in how he had been perceived before his adventures in Denmark. He had then been regarded as a weakling. But this judgment is now reversed.

Analysis

The way of life at the court of King Hygelac of the Geats is largely the same that of Hrothgar's Danes. The society has the same warrior code, the safe haven of the mead-hall, with the obligations of gift-giving placed on the king; also the loyalty of the warrior to hand over his treasure to the king, the same outbreak of feuds and their violent settlement.

Beowulf rules the Geats wisely for fifty years. He inherits the throne after Hygelac, and later his son,

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Heardred, fall in battle.

A dragon that guards buried treasure is angered when a slave, fleeing from his master, accidentally stumbles on his lair. The dragon was asleep, and the slave stole a goblet. He had not intended to steal, but was so shocked when he saw the dragon he panicked and ran off with the goblet.

The dragon, who was driven to search out and guard such hoards, discovered the buried treasure. He has been protecting it for three hundred years and is furious when he discovers the theft. He hunts without success for the thief, and plots his revenge. At night, he wreaks havoc on the people far and wide, leaving nothing alive after his attacks. Before daybreak, he returns to his lair.

The dragon also attacks and destroys Beowulf's home. When Beowulf hears the bad news, he falls into deep distress. He feels he must have sinned against God to have deserved such misfortune. He does not fear the dragon, and refuses to take a large army with him. He has, after all, always triumphed in the past.