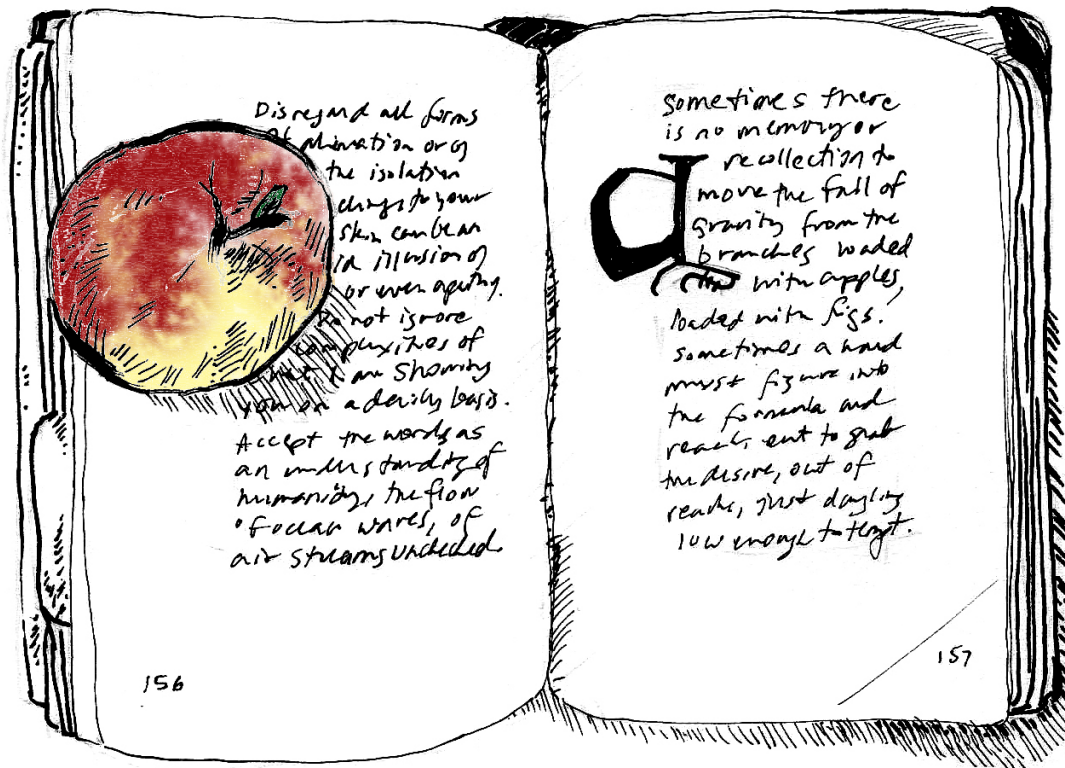


# Beowulf- part 2

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# *Grendel's Mother and wergild*

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**Ironically, wergild principles do not apply to Grendel or his mother.**

- The Danes for some reason do not suspect Grendel would have avenging family members, despite the fact the monster's heritage is presumed known by all (review ll 99-110).
- She is first revealed in lines 1254-1258 as a part two, an aftermath of the previous adventure.
- The *Longman* translation specifically describes her as “a monstrous ogress” (l 1258) and retells the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel.
- In addition, this translation describes her as “savage in her grief” (l 1276)—as a means of explaining her unfolding actions.
- Oddly enough, Grendel's mother is shown with equal honor in regards to her loss of her son: “It was an evil bargain, / with both parties compelled to batter/ the lives of their dearest” (ll 1303-1305).

# *Grendel's Mother*

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- The scene plays out with her snatching away Hrothgar's most treasured adviser, Ashere: "He was my closest counselor, he was keeper of my thoughts, / he stood at my shoulder when we struck for our lives / at the crashing together of companies of foot, / when blows rained on boar-crests" (ll 1324-1327).
- Following the mother's logic, her acts are justified for the death of her son, however, because her bloodline stems from Cain, the Danish thanes will not sympathize with her side of the situation.
- Due to the fact they are presented as monsters, the expectations from the audience is she and Grendel both are representations of pure evil and therefore compromise is not possible.

# Queen Wealhtheow

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**For the most part**, Grendel's mother is in direct contrast to the hostess-wife, Wealhtheow, who is depicted within the traditional role of a proper Anglo-Saxon queen and as a gracious hostess.

- Women in Anglo-Saxon literature fit into literary stereotypes which will echo in British writing for the next few centuries.
- Rarely do female characters step outside of the patriarchal culture's control; there are a few rare, positive figures for women; we will discuss these in a few days.
- Queen Wealhtheow, although in a sense appears as a digression from the main story, does serve as a symbol of order and tradition within the plot, a counter-example to the figure of Grendel's mother, who appears as a female of resistance against structure and religious traditions.

# Queen Wealhtheow

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- Notice the Queen is never shown reacting emotionally to issues; she follows the notion of a ritualistic hostess, a concept surviving in society today in fact. When Wealhtheow is shown participating in action, she is in the act of publicly requesting political favor from a man (see *Longman*, page 63, ll 1167-1186) or celebrating a man's accomplishment (see *Longman*, page 64, ll 1215-1231).
- Historians refer to Wealhtheow as a peace-weaver between her family and the Danish clan. She is shown bound to the duty of supporting her husband and his endeavors in a social setting as well as in a political act.
- These two short scenes are strategically placed before Grendel's mother enters the story who is always shown in an emotional, *reactive* manner.

# *Grendel's Mother*

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**Immediately, when Grendel's Mother is shown to the audience,**

she is addressed as “a monstrous ogress [...] ailing for her loss” (l 1258).

- Her genealogy is confirmed as a part of the blood of Cain (see ll 1259-1267).
- It is likewise pointed out by the narrator that although as a woman she is weaker than her male son, she is still a force to contend with.
- She only manages to kill one man and to steal away the trophy of Grendel's arm.
- Further descriptions are provided of the pair of mother and son (see ll 1346-1356). But do notice the description is rather vague.

More emphasis seems to be placed on Grendel's form “in the shape of a man, / though twisted” (ll 1350-1351) rather than the mother.

- Due to loss of the Anglo-Saxon meaning for some words, there is much speculation about the manner to depict Grendel's mother.

# *Grendel's Mother*

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**In the end, her actions and reactions are central to her role as a vengeful female figure.**

She is shown in the grips of extreme emotions, reacting violently towards the Danish men.

- She is also shown with the strength to withstand Beowulf's attack.
- The sword which Beowulf uses as a defense causes no injury to her as well. This failure of a blade which until now “never / failed any hero whose hand took it up” (ll 1459-1460) raises further speculation regarding how to perceive Grendel's mother in the story.
- Either due to her ancestry, being related to the Giants and the biblical Cain, she is a demonized inhuman figure in a surreal witch-like form

—*or*—

she can be seen as a human with extreme mystical abilities.

# *Hrunting*

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**Conflicting information surrounds the weapon** Beowulf takes into the lair of Grendel's mother.

- The Anglo-Saxons highly valued their weapons. A sword held high-importance in their eyes, representing strength and family honor.
- Furthermore, such weapons remained in the family for generations; one inherited the sword used by one's ancestors. Stories linked to the weapon added higher value. This blade has a favorable reputation.
- At the edge of the tarn where Grendel's mother lies, Beowulf is given this particular blade by the character Unferth, the same man who tried to discredit Beowulf in the beginning scenes of the epic. The gesture itself raises questions.
- Unferth himself refuses to go into the lair for undisclosed reasons; he loses all his reputation at this moment.



# Hrunting

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## **Many speculations are raised due to the failure of the blade.**

- One theory suggests that Unferth knows the sword will fail in the end. He believes Beowulf is heading towards his doom with a faulty weapon.
- Another possibility is that Unferth loses his reputation and therefore the sword loses its effectiveness at the same moment; keep in mind, sword and owner are linked. Beowulf at this point of the venture does not realize Unferth's own value has lessened in the eyes of the Danes and therefore leaps into the pool with the sword.
- The question remains is Unferth's actions are sign of his cowardice, his true self or are his actions an honest, noble gesture? The sword is flawed because the owner is flawed.
- Yet another theory exists which states because the sword fails because it is made by humans, not giants, as the actual successful sword is.
- Oddly enough, when Beowulf returns the failed sword, he does not chastise Unferth. Rather he calls it a "good friend in war" (l 1809).

# *Beowulf*

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**At the close of the battle, Beowulf does not take anything of value from the lair.**

This simple act shows he is following a principle of vengeance, an eye for an eye concept, rather than treasure hunting.

- All he removes from the mere are tokens of his deeds:  
the hilt of the giant's blade and the head of Grendel.
- Both objects in themselves become trophies of his accomplishments.  
Easy identification of his valor.