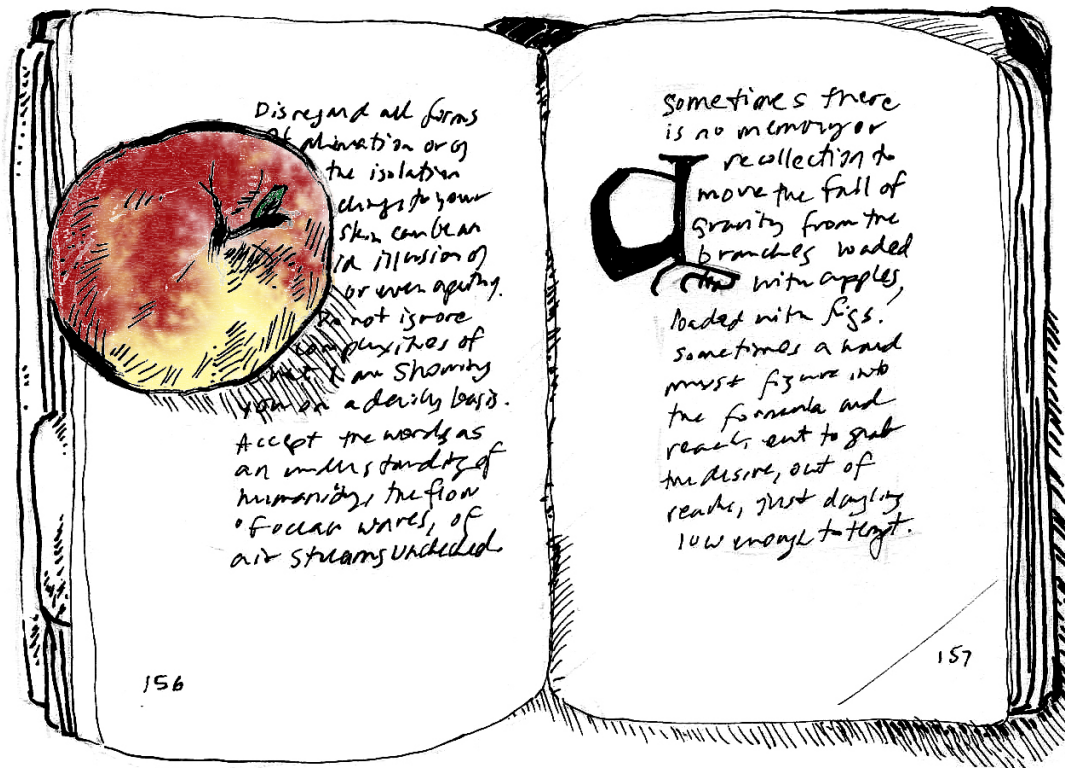


Beowulf- part 3



Beowulf

The final part of the story picks up with Beowulf fifty years later.

He is shown as older man, a king himself in his seventies or eighties.

- A parallelism should be made by the reader showing similarities between Beowulf and Hrothgar.
- Both kings at this stage of their careers are in the winter of their years: old men with gray hair and less agile limbs.
- A further correlation should be seen between the pairing of subjects:
Hrothgar (winter) and Beowulf (summer) *parts 1 and 2*
Beowulf (winter) and Wiglaf (summer) *part 3*
- Both younger figures will inherit a portion of the glory of the older figure; Beowulf needs Hrothgar's fatherly acknowledgment just as much as Hrothgar needs Beowulf's aid in removing of two monstrous pests.
- Beowulf will need Wiglaf's assistance at the close of his adventure.

The Dragon

Multiple suggestions exist to the significance of the Dragon within the narrative.

On a basic level it represents the last challenge for Beowulf during his long life; he provides proper closure for the hero, based on the culture of the times.

- For the Nordic/Germanic cultures dying in battle was a greater glory than dying in bed of old age.
- Beowulf sacrifices himself willingly for his people, as well as permits a transition to a younger king, as shown in the figure of Wiglaf.
- The dragon also represents an outside force or unexpected catastrophe such as plague, famine, natural disaster.
- Unlike Grendel and Grendel's Mother, the dragon is non-humanoid; the narrator spends many lines describing the creature's actions and physical nature; concentration on Grendel is his bloodline and heritage.

The Dragon as Character

In a sense the dragon parallels the sole survivor of the previous race of men.

The story states how “the hoard-guard / waited the same weird. His (the dragon’s) wit acknowledged / that the treasures gathered and guarded over the years / were for his the briefest while” (ll 2236-2239).

- In this manner, the dragon is given human-like instincts, human emotions.
- He transforms to a miserly figure of greed and addiction to material goods.
- Whereas Grendel’s actions are based on heritage, the narrator does not supply a back story of the dragon’s motivations towards greed.
- In addition, the dragon does not operate as an allegorical symbol or as a flat-plot device. The dragon moves closer to a fleshed out, rounded character who acts on consequences and situations not mere formula or stereotype.

The Dragon as Character

Furthermore, the narrator enjoys describing the dragon's actions and reactions.

He showcases elaborate descriptions of the serpent's traits, as if displaying a common animal in the natural world. (See lines 2286-2322.)

- The audience discovers a series of qualities of the creature:
 - > operates primarily by night
 - > inquisitive by nature; *has wit and intelligence*
 - > lives for a long series of years
 - > hoards gold and treasures without purpose other than possession
 - > seeks revenge for loss of property after *careful deduction* of the theft through inventory

The Dragon as Character

Within this creative characterization, there is a lack of strong Christian-based concepts.

- Some critics suggest the dragon acts as a specific Christian allegory of death, with Beowulf representing the average soul fighting off fear of the unknown. Yet, notice Beowulf is not shown with a standard Roman Catholic saint's or martyr's story (hagiography). Saints are typically shown passively submitting to an aggressor. In this case, Beowulf's ending is an extreme battle.
- Some have also suggested the dragon emulates biblical references of dragons, however, the narrator never makes a connection to satanic forces or fated bloodlines as he was apt to with the descriptions of Grendel.
- Biblical dragons appear without intelligence or foresight
- In this regard, this section of the epic reads with a stronger Nordic influence than the previous adventures in the epic.

Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon

Ultimately, the fight with the dragon shows the failure of the warrior-society itself.

Ironically, the hero's earlier successful endeavors occur on foreign soil.

The failed adventure with the dragon occurs in Geatland, his home territory.

- Beowulf is shown following the heroic principles established in the traditions of his country's past history; only one thane backs him up in the end.
- The other thanes who pledged to aid Beowulf are too afraid to help out against the force of the fire-breathing monster.
- Beowulf accepts his own mortality and the consequences of his wyrd once he views the hoard of the dragon (see lines 2744-2748). Some of the objects are in a state of decay dilapidation, as shown early in this section on lines 2252-2261, and again at the closing, with lines 2759-2781. The tarnished helmets and rusted mail-shirts show the failings of past battles.

Beowulf and Wiglaf

Wiglaf remains as an important character; he represents the ideals forgotten by the culture.

He refuses to leave his lord in time of conflict, even when the situation worsens.

- When Beowulf's sword fails him, Wiglaf's blade is the weapon that eventually kills the dragon.
- Before Beowulf dies, he passes his throne on to Wiglaf; this transition of power is logical on symbolic levels as well as a closing plot device.
- Beowulf states Wiglaf is “the last man left of our kindred” (l 2810):
 - > by blood Wiglaf is a distant cousin or a nephew; Beowulf had no children
 - > Wiglaf provides the final deathblow to the dragon
 - > Wiglaf is honorable to the hero code: willing to die for the cause
 - > Wiglaf represents all that is good in the society; leaving a sense of optimism for the future