**“Beowulf” – Notes by Section**

**Background:**

Setting: 6th century Scandinavia

Originally told in Old English

Who ruled the Danes?

Hrothgar ruled the Danes.

The Danes were suffering Grendel’s attacks and word of mouth caused Beowulf and 14 other Geats to go help.

Who ruled the Geats?

Higlac is king of the Geats.

Beowulf was a Geat.

What is Beowulf doing?

Embarking upon a journey to help the Danish King Hrothgar and his army as they fight the monster Grendel.

Who is Grendel?

A swampland creature that has been terrorizing Hrothgar’s mead hall (named Herot) for 12 years.

How many battles are in this epic and what are they?

3 (Grendel, Grendel’s Mother, and the Dragon)

What is the national significance of this piece?

It pays homage to the Geats and uses Anglo-Saxon bravery and loyalty as primary traits. Christianity (which later impacted the once Pagan Anglo-Saxons) is also used to show the impact of life, legacy, and afterlife.

1. **“The Wrath of Grendel” (p. 40-44, lines 1-103)**

* Description of the mead hall
* Setting is beautiful; the men are happy; celebration is taking place in Herot (the mead hall)
* The men being shown are the Danish King Hrothgar’s people (the Danes)
* Description of Grendel
* Grendel comes at night to attack Herot
* He makes away with 30 men and kills them in his lair
* In the morning, the men lament the dead
* Grendel came again the next night; it happened again; only those that run away survive
* The mead hall was deserted for years
* In the darkness Grendel haunted Hrothgar’s kingdom and people, but Hrothgar was always safe, as he was protected by God.
* Longed for a brave hero to change this
* Prayed to God for change

1. **“The Coming of Beowulf” (p. 44-48, lines 104-284)**

* Hrothgar was in sorrow and his people became violent and angry
* The Geats heard of the trouble the Danes were having
* Beowulf offered to go
* He rounded up the mightiest men he could find (14 total) and sailed off to the land of the Danes
* The trip could be seen as treacherous, but the Geats were strong and had faith in God so they made it through.
* The Danes didn’t know why they were coming ashore; they were thought to be pirates or raiders because they didn’t carry any sign of peace
* Beowulf introduces the men, their credibility, and their intentions
* The Danish soldiers warn them to “know the difference between words and deeds” (foreshadowing), as they don’t believe that they’ll be able to kill Grendel
* They offer to guide the Geats to the mead hall
* Beowulf recounts his successes in battle as a means of proving himself
* Beowulf says that he will not disappoint his king, Higlac, but that God decides the deaths
* Beowulf asks them to send his armor to Higlac if he is not victorious

1. **“The Battle with Grendel” (p. 49-51, lines 285-410)**

* Grendel leaves his lair (in the marshy swampland) to go find prey on the way to Herot
* Grendel was shocked to see the land under such protection (now that the Geats were there…)
* He raged towards the mead hall
* He was still able to sneak into the mead hall and kill many
* Foreshadowing the death of Grendel; “His last human supper” was to come
* Gruesome visual of snapping bones, drinking blood, chomping teeth
* Grendel thinks of fleeing from Beowulf because he realizes his strength
* Grendel’s skin was incapable of being scratched by the swords
* Grendel’s power eventually leaves him; Beowulf snaps his shoulder under his force
* Grendel fled to his lair to die
* Beowulf hung Grendel’s arm from the rafters

1. **“The Monster’s Lair” (p. 51-52, lines 411-448)**

* A story is being told of people seeing the monster’s mother wandering around the marshes
* Other monsters were seen too wandering through the wilderness (it appears there are male and female monsters)
* They refer to the male monster as Grendel and say they don’t know his father
* They describe the landscape over the cliffs and by the water into the dark of night. They sy that horns have been seen lying around the forest and there are signs of this monster
* The narrator speaks for the people, saying that ‘you’ are our only help now and that Grendel’s mother must be defeated
* They call upon Beowulf to “save us once more”
* The people promise a reward of treasure if the monster is defeated
* (This story is unique because it speaks about Grendel as if he is still alive and purging the land; he might as well be if his mother is not dead)

1. **“The Battle with Grendel’s Mother” (p. 52-56, lines 449-622)**

* Beowulf speaks to Hrothgar, wishing his blessing, saying he will do his best, and stating that if he dies he hopes the comrades left behind without a leader be protected and sent back to Higlac (to live with the Geats, rather than be held captive as Danes)
* Beowulf asks for the treasures he earns in battle to be sent to Higlac and promises to look over Hrothgar’s people if he dies
* He jumps into the lake and makes his way, swimming down through to the muddy water and came face to face with Grendel’s mother
* She clutches him with her claws, scratching at his armor
* In frustration, she drags him further to her home
* He tries to free his weapon but fails
* Sea beasts that the monster asked for help start attacking Beowulf
* Beowulf realizes he’s been brought to a battle hall where he can be safe from the water’s impact
* Beowulf tries to slice her head off, but her skin (just like Grendel’s) cannot be penetrated by the sword (named Hrunting)
* Beowulf is starting to feel defeat, but longs for fame, so he goes back into the battle
* Grendel’s mother tries to stab him, but the dagger is not sharp enough to make it through his armor
* Bewoulf noticed a heavier, more glorious and ornamented sword hanging on the wall; men were not meant to be able to lift it, but Beowulf could
* This sword, when all of Beowulf’s strength was applied, afforded him the ability to cut through her bones, breaking her neck, and leaving her lifeless
* Upon her death, he rejoices and a bright light lit the sky
* The waves were surging with blood in the water by the lair
* Grendel’s dead body was sitting in the corner of the lair
* (People who were with Hrothgar left, as they figured Beowulf had died and that all hope was lost, little did they know of his victory)
* Looking around, he noticed that the monster’s lair was full of treasures, but Beowulf only wanted Grendel’s head and the remains of the sword (which the blood disappears from as it drips and whose blade was partly dissolved by Grendel’s steaming blood when he chopped off his head)
* As he swam up the water was calm and clean
* People rejoiced his return
* Beowulf could deliver Grendel’s head to Hrothgar (he could carry it when prior not even 4 men could carry it)

1. **“The Last Battle” (p. 56-61, lines 623-774)**

* Beowulf was boasting at the mead hall (foreshadowing – his final boast)
* He speaks of how age has not kept him from fighting and seeking fame
* He said farewell and plans on returning to the land of the Geats
* He says that if he crosses the dragon he will use weapons because of his fiery breath
* He is enticed by the gold in the tower and states it will be his
* He gets to the cliff and finds the entryways flooding with heat (coming from the hidden entrance)
* He let out a battle cry and entered
* The monster came quickly towards him and Beowulf’s protection began to melt
* The great sword cracked on the dragon’s body, but drew some blood
* All of Beowulf’s followers fled rather than coming to his rescue (only one man stayed behind – Wiglaf)
* Wiglaf feels compelled to help Beowulf (there is some backstory about how Wiglaf got his gear and tales of his family’s status and bravery)
* It ends with Wiglaf mentally preparing and reminiscing over Beowulf’s support, so he runs into battle

1. **“The Spoils” (p. 61-62, lines 775-842)**

* Beowulf crawls his way to the top of the tower where the treasure is
* The dragon flies off to its death (the use of omission – we don’t know how it came to be killed yet)
* Light shone as Wiglaf took what he wanted from the treasure piles
* Beowulf is being referred to as a king by Wiglaf; he brings him jewels as he is wounded and can’t get them himself
* When he got to Beowulf he was gasping for breath
* He gave thanks to god for the victory and riches
* He requests Wiglaf help lead his people (the Geats)
* Requests that they build him a tomb
* Requests funeral flames burn high so that sailors can see his tomb from afar
* Narrator describes Beowulf’s soul leaving his body and him flying to glory

1. **“The Farewell” (p. 63-64, lines 843-869)**

* The Geats built the tower so that it was strong and tall
* It took 10 days to make this monument
* His ashes were sealed inside
* The riches from the dragon were buried with him (the narrator comments that these were made useless to men, illuminating the fact that the remnants tell a story, but when there is no meaning surrounding riches they are worthless)
* The 12 Geats that had fought aside Beowulf rode on horseback to the tower to tell the tales of greatness, praise, and glory, ultimately pointing out the heroic nature of Beowulf
* They claim all should aspire to be like Beowulf
* They characterize Beowulf as beloved, gentle, open, and deserving of praise