

# ANALYSIS OF “BEOWULF AND GRENDEL: THE FIGHT”

The text is an extract from the epic poem “Beowulf”, a superb example of Anglo-Saxon literature.

In the present work a structural analysis of the text will be carried out followed by a linguistic scrutiny of the use of language made by the composer, in order to find out how literally language conveys the idea of what made a hero in Anglo-Saxon culture. The text communicates the nature of the fight between Beowulf and the monster Grendel. It consists of four component parts having different functions.

The first section immediately sets the atmosphere pervading the setting and right from the start displays the typical features of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Indeed, alliterative verse and the use of kenning contribute to help the reader up a mental image of the fight and, last but not least, to characterize the actors of the fight. From the first line “moors” and “mist bands” contribute to the idea of dark environment where finding directions is hard. In addition, the repetition of sound “s” seems to invoke silence from the reader as if he were in front of a difficult, hard and tragic event.

The scenery is suitable to introduce the monster, one that scares human beings because he is, as the kenning suggests, “*God-cursed*” (line 2). Not only does the kenning create suspense and mystery, it also plays on the level of sound when the intelligent reader can perceive the harsh sound of his name “Grendel” that is an alliteration with “*God-Cursed*” (line 2). In addition the effect is highlighted by the following adverb “*greedily*” that adds to the greedy nature of the first character introduced. It goes without saying, that the phrase “*God-Cursed*” (line 2) hints at the religion code as well as the coming kenning “the bane of the race of the man” and therefore just from its very first appearance in the present text, the reader cannot but create a negative idea of the monster. But what does “the monster” show? His nature is very well conveyed by the semantic choices of the composition. He is “*God-Cursed*” (line 2), he loopes and therefore it must be huge, besides he is “the bane of the race” and he is desperately looking for a pray. As a result, Grendel is characterized as half man and half animal. The narrator tells the reader all that he does and therefore Grendel’s characterization is made up through action verbs. “He loopes, he roams, he fourth, he hunts for a prey, he moves in search of a prey”, in a few words he shows the same behaviour of a predator. The setting he moves around is a gloomy and dark one. It is full of “*cloud murk*” (line 5), but where does Grendel head forth?. He wants to reach “*the high hall*” (line 4). A place that differently from his environment “*shown about him*”. Furthermore it is “*a sheer keep of fortified gold*”(lines 6-7) as the run-on-line displays.

Again, the intelligent reader may early realize that the composer of the poem probably wanted to create a contrast between the place of the monster, a dark moor and the light of the “high hall” (line 4) where human beings are peacefully spending their time. Eventually, black and dark colours are associated with negative, devilish values, the ones that imply damnation, on the contrary, the fortress not only is sheer but it shines and is golden. It follows that the forest, the moor and the cloud-murk are associated to Hell while the golden hall is high, shining and full of light as in Paradise.

But one more feature adds to the monster making him a character of exceptional creature: this is not the first time he approaches dwelling where he goes “scouting”. He is therefore huge, strong, fearless, an exceptional predator.

The second section makes the reader become gradually aware of the qualities that make of Grendel the exceptional monster he is. In this section he is referred to as “the creature” that has become the monster he is thanks to his instinctiveness. He did not leave any time to his preys.

Indeed, he “*struck suddenly*” (line 10) and therefore his preys were taken by surprise and had no escape.

The verbs chosen add concreteness and realism to Grendel’s actions: “*grabbed and mauled*” (line 11), “*bit into his bone-lappings*” (line 12), “*bolted down his “blood”*” (line 12), “*gorged on him lumps*” (line 13), and “*eaten up and and foot*” (line 14). The monster’s hunger comes to surface vividly and conveys to the reader all its strength, fast action and desire to kill his preys. But when it comes to Beowulf the devilish creature that the composer calls “*the captain of evil*” (line 12) resorting to a kenning once again, is taken by surprise by a “*handgrip harder than anything he had ever encountered in any man on the face of the Earth*” (lines 21-22).

He is worth underlining the use not only of the run-on-line that adds a frantic rhythm to the description of the fight but also the way Beowulf is characterized by the composer “any man on the face of the earth”. The phrase

makes of Beowulf the hero he is; he distinguishes himself from the rest of mankind and this is why he becomes the legendary hero and the protagonist of the epic poem itself. He stands for the man of courage, brave and ready to defend his race from any enemy. Beowulf's features are well expressed in lines 23-24 where the monster's reactions are conveyed in a vivid way. "*His body quailed and recoiled*" (line 24) and "*he could not escape*" (line 24). Once and again, Beowulf's outstanding personality comes to surface as well as the values of mutual help and solidarity of his men.

Beowulf's warriors display their heroic qualities through their actions "*laying about them*" (line 27) with "*ancestral blades*" (line 28) and they reveal to be "*stalwart in action*" (line 29) and "*kept striking out*" (line 29) in view/with the aim of capturing "*straight to the soul*" (line 31). The composer insists on the extraordinary features of Beowulf and his warriors as the repetition of expressions that underline their singularity, well exemplified "*there was no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art could ever damage their demon opponent*" (lines 32-33).

Time and again the monster is compared to a devilish creature almost close to one supernatural power "*he had conjured the harm from the cutting edge of every weapon*" (line 35-36). The reader can easily understand that Grendel is being portrayed with words and expressions that belong to the religious code and he or she can rightly think the composer of the poem might be a Christian one.

An example is offered by "*straight to the soul*" (line 31), one more is "*demon opponent*" and, last but not least, also the phrase "he had conjured" hints at supernatural power. But all the same "*the monster's whole body was in pain*" (line 37-38). The wound is "*tremendous*" (line 38) and "*the sinews split*" and "*the bone-lappings burst*". Beowulf's victory appears to be therefore not only one that highlights his strength once more. It is also the victory of good over the evil, according to a maniacal vision of the world.

The composer shows up the image of the fight reinforcing the idea of Grendel's defeat saying that he is "*fatally hurt*" (line 42) and the use of the adverb "fatally" brings to surface the supernatural nature of the vision of the fight. The monster is sent back "under the fen "*banks*" (line 32) and to "*his desolate lair*" (line 43). The reader's sensitivity brings home the image of Beowulf's winning glory but the solitude of the monster as well. The monster is alone while the protagonist of the epic deeds is supported by the solidarity of his warriors. This explains for the relevance of solidarity, unity and community in winning the fight, thus providing the reader information about the values of Anglo-Saxon civilization.