WOLFNOTE SUMMARY OF...

BEOWULF

CONTEXT
Beowulf, a mighty noble from Geatland (Sweden), arrives in Denmark to aid King Hrothgar rid a monster called Grendel. He has fourteen hand-picked horsemen with him and the King who regards them as God-sent welcomes them warmly.

King Hrothgar lives in a Mead Hall called Heorot. It is a symbol of warmth and comfort during the winter when the outside is cold and harsh.

The Danes love to feast and this has annoyed Grendel and he visits the hall at night and slaughters the King’s men. Beowulf tells his host to feast as normal so as to attract Grendel. The plan works and the monster is drawn to the hall by the noise and the delicious odors of the meat. Grendel has a particular taste for men and he thinks he will feast well again tonight. Grendel arrives at the hall and Beowulf springs the trap. He is so confident, that he faces this monster without weapons, but unknown to him, the monster is immune to man’s weapons. Beowulf will rely on his almost superhuman strength.

However, Grendel is a formidable force and he flies out with his feet and fists, knocking half a dozen of Beowulf’s men to the floor. Grendel is now very angry. He sees one of the men struggling on the ground and he picks him up and crushes him in his mouth and eats him.

Beowulf grasps Grendel’s wrist and his fingers close round like a vice. He pulls with such force that he pulls the monster’s arm off. Grendel flees the hall, moaning, clutching his injured shoulder.

Beowulf’s men are bruised and dazed, but once they recover, they set off in pursuit of the monster. By the light of the moon, they follow the trail of blood that leads to the edge of a small lake. The water is red and they assume that the monster has drowned. The lake is the home of the monster and he has died, but Grendel’s mother vows revenge on the killers of her son.

King Hrothgar holds a great feast in celebration of the victory over Grendel. Poets recite verses praising Beowulf and his companions.

Suddenly, there is a mighty roar and at first they think it is Grendel that has returned, but it is his mother who roars at the men, cursing them for killing her son. She quickly kills one of the Thanes and retreats to her lair. Beowulf follows and dives into the lake after her, and is then dragged down by Grendel’s mother. The monster takes Beowulf to her lair under the water and although she is not as powerful as her son, she is highly motivated.

Inside the dry cave, Beowulf regains his senses and finds, to his surprise, that he still has his sword. He draws this and attacks the monster, but his sword has no effect on the ogre. The mother moves to stab Beowulf with her knife, but he wears stout armor and this protects him. Suddenly, Beowulf sees another giant sword and this weapon is magical, and he succeeds in decapitating the monster. The sword melts to its hilt and Beowulf returns to the lake’s surface carrying the head and the hilt of the sword.

Finally, the Danes can celebrate the death of two monsters.

Beowulf returns to Geatland, having enhanced his reputation.

On the death of King Hygelac, and also his son, Beowulf is named King of the Geats.

He rules successfully for fifty years and then in his twilight years, a fiery dragon ravages his land. The dragon carries out a campaign of burning because someone has stolen part of his treasure, in particular a valuable cup.

Beowulf sets out with eleven men to find the whereabouts of the dragon’s barrow. He insists on challenging the dragon alone, but is soon in trouble and one of his Knights, Wiglaf, aids his master. The pair kills the dragon, but the mighty King is mortally wounded. Beowulf leaves his Kingdom to Wiglaf, the only Knight to come to his aid.

Beowulf is cremated on his funeral pyre overlooking the sea, and then he is buried in a barrow containing the dragon’s treasure. It is said that he still lies there with his gold.

HISTORY
‘Beowulf’ is the earliest major work in English.

The earliest manuscript copy of the poem is stored in the British Library, and is dated around 1010. Through the ages, there have been many translations, notably one by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Beowulf has always been regarded as a classic, and has inspired many writers over the ages including W. H. Auden, Jorge Louis Borge, and J. R. R. Tolkien.
We use, in this wolfnote, the translation of 1973 by Michael Alexander. Although there is no evidence to show that Beowulf is an actual historical character, other names mentioned in the poem are certainly historical, including Hygelac, King of the Geats. The poem is set in an area of Europe prior to the arrival of Christianity. Its written format has been adapted for the Christian audience to which the 1010 manuscript refers. We are never likely to know who the original author of the poem was, but although it has been adapted for a Christian English audience, the setting of Northern Europe has not been changed. Reference is also made to King Offa of the Angles, and it is widely agreed that King Offa of 8th Century Mercia in England was a descendent. There was much coming and going over the North Sea between the lands of Beowulf and England, and the two geographic areas are strongly linked.

CHARACTERS

THE GEATS:-
BEOWULF
One of the highest-ranking nobles from Geatland (Southern Sweden), he comes to the aid of the King of the Danes, Hrothgar, who is plagued by an ogre. He is described as a mighty warrior whose grip is superhuman. He becomes King of the Geats.

HEARDRED
He is the son of Hygelac and Hygd, and is unfortunately killed in a feud, despite Beowulf’s support. On his death Beowulf becomes King of the Geats.

HYGELAC
King of the Geats at the start of the poem, he is Beowulf’s uncle. There was a King Hygelac who died in battle around 520 A.D.

HYGD
Hygelac’s Queen, she is a perfect hostess and demonstrates the entire royal graces.

WIGLAF
The only Knight who stands firm with Beowulf against the dragon, he succeeds Beowulf as King of the Geats.

THE DANES (SCYLDINGS):-

HROTHGAR
The ageing King of the Danes who is menaced by Grendel the ogre, he regards Beowulf as being sent by God to rid him of this evil. He is characterized as a civilized monarch.

SCYLD SCEFING
The epic poem starts with the ship funeral of this mythical figure who is the founder of the tribe called the Scyldings.

UNFERTH
One of King Hrothgar’s top Thanes, he insults Beowulf when he is drunk, but later gives crucial aid to Beowulf in the thick of battle.

WEALHTHEOW
The Queen of the Danes, she along with her husband Hrothgar, gives a warm welcome to Beowulf and his party.

MONSTERS

GRENDL
Described in the poem as a descendent of Cain in the Book of Genesis, Grendel is the epitome of evil. Translating Cain back into Hebrew, we have the word “Qayin” which means “creature”. It is a common part of folklore that all such monsters and freaks that roam the earth are descended from Cain. He resents Hrothgar and the Danes enjoying themselves, and subjects them to twelve years of terror before Beowulf arrives.

GRENDL’S MOTHER
She lives with her son in a dry cave beneath a lake. Although not as powerful as her son, she is still a formidable adversary.

DRAGON
This monstrous beast lives in Geatland and is angered when a fugitive steals a gold flagon from his hoard. Beowulf slays the dragon with the help of Wiglaf, but is mortally wounded.
LINES 1 – 63 : Introduction

Summary
The first lines of the poem provide a brief history of the Danish Royal family, which was founded by Scyld Scefing. He conquered the surrounding area to form the land of Denmark, acquiring many Mead Halls. He became the first Danish King and was regarded by his subjects as a kind leader. He was succeeded by his son Beowulf, not to be confused with Beowulf the Great from Geatland who is the hero of this poem. The poem then describes the funeral of Scyld Scefing who was placed on a ring-proud ship full of treasure and set adrift on the tide. Scyld’s beloved son Beowulf then ruled the Danes for a long period of time, followed by a line of noble Kings, to the present day ruler Hrothgar.

Interpretation
The format for this poem was originally recited from memory by storytellers, or it may even have been sung. In this respect it is similar to Homer’s ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The Odyssey’. It is regarded as an epic narrative poem because of its length and its sophisticated style. It deals with the adventures of great heroes against evil, supernatural monsters. It is believed to have been composed in England some time in the 8th Century A.D., and was written down some two hundred years later. Although there are some historical truths contained in the poem, much of it has been derived from a mixture of folk tales and themes from other stories. However, the poet that brought all these elements together was indeed skilled, for he took the time to characterize the main players in the poem. There was also an interesting Christian feel to the story, which suggests that some editing has taken place by the scribes.
The purpose of these initial lines is to set the scene for the rest of the poem. The poem runs for 3,182 lines, and the remaining part mainly deals with Beowulf’s adventures. From this introduction, we obtain an insight into the noble Danish Royal heritage, which indicates that these Kings are civilized and God-fearing. The poem has been composed with the express view of entertaining the aristocracy and is not aimed at the man in the street. Although the Danes are viewed as civilized, their main activity is to conquer their neighbors and their status is based on their success in battle. Their King is regarded as a virtuous man because of his courage and leadership on the battlefield, coupled with a generous nature.
We also discover that the Danes love to feast and the Mead Hall is the centre of their recreation, and this is regarded as the prize to be won when conquering your neighbor. The poet also tells us about the funeral of Scyld and there is also a funeral at the end of the poem, thus the main story is framed by the deaths of heroes. The reader also discovers that this is a very masculine poem and very few women appear in the story, and when they are referred to it is as somebody’s daughter or wife.

LINES 64 – 193 : King Hrothgar and the Ogre

Summary
King Hrothgar is the ageing King of Denmark and he resides in a magnificent Mead Hall called Heorot. He is famous for his feasting and dispensing treasure to his subjects. Nearby in a small lake, a powerful ogre lurks who can no longer endure the sounds of happiness coming from Heorot. One night after a great feast, many of Hrothgar’s warriors lie about the hall deep in a drunken slumber. Grendel, the ogre, comes to the hall and kills thirty of these men in their sleep, taking their bloody corpses to his lair. For twelve winters, King Hrothgar is visited by Grendel, and the monster’s evil becomes known throughout the land.

Interpretation
We see contrasts here concerning the civilization, warmth and light of the Mead Hall, opposed to the cold, damp lair of the evil Grendel. There will be further contrasts in the poem concerning the age of King Hrothgar and the youth of Beowulf. Hrothgar represents one of the main characters of the story, but he is unable to rid his land of this evil ogre. Here we have a further contrast between joy and sadness, and this is another theme that runs throughout the story.
This is a serious narration and you will find no comedy in its lines.
Hrothgar is shown to have a reputation for holding lavish banquets, and giving his warriors gifts of treasure for their valor on the battlefield. He would often give them rings, and thus he has the title of "Ring Giver".
We obtain an insight into life in these harsh lands. That is why, perhaps, the Danes feast so much, for the periods of joy in their lives are short at the best of times, but now they have this dark shadow over them in the form of Grendel.

LINES 194 – 319 : Beowulf comes to Denmark
Summary
In Geatland King Hygelac sits on the throne, and one of his Thanes, Beowulf, hears of the plight of King Hrothgar of the Danes.
Beowulf decides to cross the sea to help Hrothgar and he selects fifteen men to accompany him. When he arrives at the Danish harbor, he is met by guards who can see immediately that Beowulf is of noble bearing, and they allow him to pass. He tells the guards that he is here to help the Danish people get rid of the terrible monster. A guard tells Beowulf that he will take care of his ship and hopes that God will keep him safe on his expedition.

Interpretation
Some of the author’s finest poetry describes Beowulf’s sea voyage as follows:-
"He bade a seaworthy wave-cutter be fitted out for him;
he would seek, he said, over swan’s riding
that Lord of great name, leading men......
time running on, she rode the waves now,
hard in by headland. Harnessed warriors
stepped on her stem; setting tide churned
sea with sand, soldiers carried
bright mail-coats to the mast’s foot,
war-gear well-wrought; willingly they shoved her out,
through-braced craft, on the craved voyage.
Away she went over a wavy ocean,
boat like a bird, breaking sees,
winds-wetted, white-throated,
till the curved prow had ploughed so far."
This lyrical passage provides a clear picture in the reader’s mind regarding the type of voyage in these narrow, open boats. After all these centuries, we can still get a feeling for what life was like on the seas in this area.
The reader will also note the long passages of spoken dialogue between the guard and Beowulf. This is typical of epic poetry, and provides the audience with a clear picture regarding the character of Beowulf, and also provides easy understanding of the plot.
We already have a feeling that Beowulf is on a religious campaign. He epitomizes good and he has come to conquer evil.
You also have to realize that Beowulf has many motives for carrying out this task. He clearly has all the physical attributes to be successful. He is described as a mighty warrior with a crushing grip, and he resolves to grapple with the ogre and crush it, rather than kill it with his sword. Beowulf also hopes to gain glory from this campaign and no doubt, a reward as well. Finally, he hopes to enhance his reputation both in Denmark, and back home in Geatland.

LINES 320 – 498 : Beowulf arrives at Heorot
Summary
Beowulf arrives at the Heorot Mead Hall and is welcomed by Wulfgar, the King’s messenger. Wulfgar asks Beowulf what his business is in Denmark, but he wishes to speak personally with King Hrothgar. Wulfgar takes the message to the King, telling him how noble Beowulf looks.
King Hrothgar recalls that he met Beowulf when he was a child. He was the son of Ecgtheow who married the daughter of Hræthel the Great. The King has heard of Beowulf’s heroism and the fact that he has the strength of thirty men in his handgrip.
The King welcomes Beowulf who discloses his intent to rid the King of the ogre Grendel. He has previous experience of combat against water monsters and he intends to take the beast on in hand-to-hand combat.
Hrothgar considers Beowulf's arrival as God-sent. The King recounts to Beowulf the evil deeds that Grendel has inflicted on him.

In the evening the household sits down to a banquet discussing past glories concerning the House of the Danes and Geats.

Interpretation
The two main heroes of the poem have now met, the young Beowulf and the ageing Danish King, Hrothgar.

We again note the reference to Beowulf's campaign as being a holy endeavour.
We also note that the outcome of the battle will be left in the hands of God or fate.
We discover Beowulf's intention to fight Grendel without a weapon. He does not know at this stage that his sword would be useless against the ogre. Beowulf's intention is to be totally chivalrous, not wishing to have an unfair advantage over the ogre.

LINES 499 – 701 : The Trap is Set
Summary
At the banquet, one of the Danish lords, Unferth annoys Beowulf by reminding him that he was defeated by Breca in a swimming match, and that Beowulf faces a worse outcome when he meets Grendel. Beowulf responds by saying that although Breca won the race, he was delayed by fighting nine sea monsters, all of which he killed. He then belittles Unferth by saying that he does not recall the Danish lord having achieved anything heroic on the battlefield.

In a show of nationalism, Beowulf states that the Danes have failed to kill Grendel and it is now up to the Geats to show their worth.

Hrothgar's Queen, Wealhtheow joins the feast, and showing due courtesy, she ensures that her guests have sufficient to drink and she passes round the cup of Hrothgar for them to share. The Queen is dressed in her finest clothes adorned with gold.

The feast ends, and the King and Queen retire to bed closely followed the other guests.

Beowulf gives his battle clothes to his servant and then taking a cushion, he goes back down to the hall to await the arrival of Grendel.

Interpretation
We get the first inkling that not all the Danes welcome Beowulf and his men, and Unferth attempts to undermine Beowulf's position. However, this backfires, for Unferth's only claim to fame is the fact that he murdered his own brother and has no heroic deeds to fall back on.

We also see how civilized and rich the King is and his wealth is duly displayed by his Queen when she shows off the gold that she possesses. She is a perfect hostess and she is very attentive to the guests within her husband's home.

Beowulf prepares himself for the battle with the ogre by stripping off his battle togs and giving them to his servant to look after.

This is a predominantly masculine tale. At this time in history, women were regarded as mere chattels and used as pawns in the form of arranged marriages in order for feuding warlords to obtain peace.

The lines describing the Queen provide a soft passage of poetry as a prelude to the harsh lines that will follow describing the conflict between Beowulf and Grendel.

For example:

“There was laughter of heroes, harp-music ran,
words were warm-hearted. Wealhtheow moved,
mindful of courtesies, the Queen of Hrothgar,
glittering to greet the Geats in the hall,
peerless lady; but to the land’s guardian
she offered first the flowing cup,
bade him be blithe at the beer-drinking,
gracious to his people; gladly the conqueror
partook of the banquet, tasted the hall-cup.”

The lines provide a picture of this gracious Queen being the perfect hostess to her guests, but these are more than guests. The final lines indicate that Hrothgar is passing authority over to Beowulf symbolized by the cup transferring from him to Beowulf, conveyed by his Queen. He has failed to rid his people of this evil demon. He accedes to Beowulf, considering him to be God-sent, and Hrothgar will retire from the scene, leaving Beowulf on guard to face Grendel.
LINES 702 – 852 : The Monster Comes

Summary

Beowulf prepares to do battle with Grendel. All the other warriors are asleep, recovering from the feast. The door of the hall is barred, but this is of no consequence to Grendel, who bursts into the High Hall. He grabs a sleeping Thane and consumes him, drinking his blood and biting his bones, but then Beowulf grabs him. Grendel has never felt such a force laid on him before. He had come to the hall expecting another easy feast. He planned to devour all the sleeping warriors there. Now he only wishes to retreat to his fen lair, but Beowulf will not let go his grasp. This grip destroys Grendel. He has to flee without his arm, which Beowulf keeps as a trophy of his victory. He nails it on the hall wall for everyone to see.

When the sun rises, the warriors follow the bloody trail to the lake, which is red with the blood from Grendel.

Interpretation

This is probably the most dramatic and exciting section of the poem, and the shadow that Grendel has cast over proceedings has suddenly been lifted.

Our anonymous poet uses vivid language in describing this scene, and it still is full of power in its translated form.

"Gliding through the shadows came
the walker in the night; the warriors slept
whose task was to hold the horned building,
all except one. It was well-known to men
that the demon could not drag them to the shades
without God’s willing it; yet the one man kept
unblinking watch. He awaited, heart swelling
with anger against his foe, the ordeal of battle. ....
forward he stepped,
stretched out his hands to seize the warrior
calmly at rest there, reached out for him with his
unfriendly fingers: ....
Then Hygelac’s brave kinsman called to mind
that evening’s utterance, upright he stood,
Fastened his hold till fingers were bursting.
The monster strained away: the man stepped closer.
The monster’s desire was for darkness between them,
direction regardless, to get out and run
for his fen-bordered lair; he felt his grip’s strength
crushed by his enemy. It was an ill journey
the rough marauder had made to Heorot."

If you can get a hold of the original passage in Anglo-Saxon it is worth an overview in order to obtain a taste of the language. Some of the words are lost to us, e.g. sceadugenga which means walker in the darkness; banlocan which means bone-locker; unlyfigende which means un-living. We also note the clever use of metaphors throughout this section, in particular when Grendel enters the hall and sees the whole band of warriors asleep he delights at the prospect of a feast and he is described thus, "In his heart he laughed then, horrible monster”.

The power that is involved in this battle is intense, and the famous Mead Hall is in danger of destruction from these two adversaries, but we know (and so does the audience) the fate of the Heorot Hall is that it will be consumed by fire. This has already been referred to earlier in the poem, and it comes about when the warring Heathobards destroy it some time later. They are a warring, Germanic tribe with whom Hrothgar seeks peace and offers his daughter in marriage to Prince Ingeld.

LINES 853 – 1,070 : Celebration

Summary

The news of Grendel’s death quickly spreads and Beowulf becomes the hero of the Danes. There is a significant portion of the poem in this section that deals with the story of Sigemund who, with his nephew Fitela who were renowned for their giant slaying. It has no significance regarding the plot, and was recited by a poet at the feast of celebration held by Hrothgar.

A further section deals with Hrothgar’s historic monologue regarding the woes inflicted by Grendel on his land.
Beowulf responds by expressing regret that he does not have Grendel’s whole body to display, only his claw.

Many Danish dignitaries come to the hall to join in with the celebrations. There is much drinking of mead and devouring of food.

Hrothgar presents Beowulf with a gold banner, helmet, armor and a precious sword. He also provides Beowulf with eight horses.

The poets who entertain the company support Hrothgar’s view that Beowulf have been sent by God to rid them of the evil demon.

Interpretation

Although this tale concerns lands that were heathen, much emphasis is placed on the fight between good and evil. The inference is that there is one God, although this flies in the face of historical accuracy for this part of the world.

The poem provides details of the dignitaries who attended the celebration, many of whom would later kill one another in feuds, and this irony would not have been lost on the audiences of the day, but alas today’s reader cannot fully appreciate this strange situation.

Again, reading through the lines you cannot help but be impressed by the embellished dialogue, a standard ingredient of all such ancient epic poems.

Although nothing is known about the author, it is safe to assume that he was, in addition to being intelligent, probably well traveled for it is evident that he has been influenced by the epics of ancient Greece and Rome, and the names of Homer and Virgil spring to mind.

LINES 1,071 – 1,159 : The Lay of Finn

Summary

Hrothgar’s scop (singer of songs/storyteller) heaps even more honor onto Beowulf with a song concerning another Danish victory ‘The Lay of Finn’.

Interpretation

This is a story within a story and it is cleverly woven into the main poem, but it may have derived from a different source.

The Lay of Finn stands on its own as a small literary masterpiece, and just as this story appears in Beowulf’s celebration, so would Beowulf’s story appear in subsequent celebrations throughout Northern Europe and Great Britain as well.

The Lay of Finn is concerned with battles between Hnaef and Finn, and then later Hengest and Finn, and centered on revenge and tribal loyalty. Arguably the central figure of this saga was a woman Hildeburh who made many personal sacrifices, far in excess of any of the other characters in the story, so perhaps in more enlightened times, the story would have been called The Lay of Hildeburh, but this is very much a masculine world.

LINES 1,159 – 1,237 : Cementing Relations

Summary

After hearing the sad tale of Finn, the feast reaches new heights of excess and Wealhtheow joins the company. She pays tribute to Beowulf and the nation of the Geats, and she hopes that Beowulf will take Hrothgar’s thanks to Hygelac, King of the Geats. The hope is that there will be lasting friendship between the Danes and the Geats.

Beowulf receives gifts from the other dignitaries present.

At last the feast ends and the company retires for the night.

Interpretation

Again, Wealhtheow makes a brief appearance, but it is significant. She knows only too well that relationships between these warring tribes can change in an instant. She recognizes that Beowulf would be a formidable foe to her husband and her sons. She makes a specific plea to Beowulf that he should always be kind to her sons.

Perhaps one of the features of this epic poem is the fact that the Queen is shown as being a ‘person’ rather than a chattel and the poet has taken the trouble to characterize her.

However, it is ironic that Beowulf will not be a threat to her sons. It is in fact her own nephew who will kill one of her sons, and he in turn will be killed by the other son. Anglo-Saxon audiences would be fully aware of this situation.
LINES 1,239 – 1,398 : A Mother’s Revenge
Summary
It was customary that the Mead Hall doubled as a dormitory when there were large numbers of visitors to
Heorot, so many of the Earls settled down for the night in the hall.
Seeking revenge, Grendel’s mother surfaced from the black waters and approached the hall of the Danes.
She was consumed by vengeance and she breaks open the door of the hall.
“She was all eager to be out of the place
now that she was discovered, and escape with her life.
She caught a man quickly, clutched him to herself,
one of the athelings and was away to the fen.”
Unknown to the ogress the man she had chosen was one of Hrothgar’s favorite retainers, AEschere.
Beowulf is absent at the time of the attack, but when he returns, he pledges to destroy Grendel’s mother.

Interpretation
There are clear direction lines regarding the principal characters in this passage.
Grendel’s mother is bent on revenge over the death of her son.
Hrothgar wishes to avenge the death of AEschere, his favorite retainer, and Beowulf vows to be the
instrument of Hrothgar’s revenge.
The audiences of this time liked their plots to be simple as it was not always possible to project complex
characterizations.
The poet also demonstrates the differences between Grendel and his mother. Grendel had an air of
confidence that stemmed from his belief that he was unstoppable. Grendel’s mother is more cunning in her
approach, and she realizes that if her son could not face the Danes, then she certainly could not succeed,
being smaller and not protected against human weapons. Her strategy, therefore, was a hit-and-run tactic.

LINES 1,399 – 1,798 : Beowulf’s Mission
Summary
AEschere’s head is found near Grendel’s mere, and the Danes are inconsolable. The water teems with
serpents and strange monsters, and Beowulf kills one and pulls it ashore.
Unferth, who had an earlier dispute with Beowulf, now recognizes that the Geat Lord is a true hero and
offers him his sword, Hrunting, who has never failed his owner in hand-to-hand combat.
Dressed in his armor and with the help of God, Beowulf plunges into the lake to seek out Grendel’s mother.
He swims deep down and Grendel’s mother spots him, and drags Beowulf to her lair. Because of his
corselet, he is protected from the ogress’ claws and then her dagger when she tries to stab him. Beowulf
draws Hrunting and hits Grendel’s mother’s head, but the sword is blunted and has no effect on her. He
then resorts to fighting the ogress at close quarters and the two struggles on the floor. Beowulf then
springs to his feet and notices a sword of giants among the items in the cave. He just has enough strength
to wield this huge sword and inflicts a mortal wound on Grendel’s mother. Suddenly, the lair is flooded with
light and Beowulf decapitates the body of Grendel that lies close by.
On land, those that wait see the water boiling with blood and assume that Beowulf has been slain. The
Danes return to Heorot, but the Geats remains to mourn their leader.
Beowulf decides to return with Grendel’s head as a trophy, and the hilt of the giant’s sword, the blade had
melted because of the ogress’ blood.
There is great celebration in Heorot, and it took four men to drag Grendel’s head over the floor. This was a
terrible sight.
Beowulf recounts his battle with Grendel’s mother and Hrothgar bestows more honors on the valiant
Beowulf.

Interpretation
The differences between Beowulf and Unferth are resolved, and the latter gives Beowulf his sword named
Hrunting in order to help in the battle with Grendel’s mother.
We note that most warriors looked after their gear very carefully, and treated their weapons with respect,
giving their swords names. They perhaps thought more of their swords than they did of their women. We
will note that in more modern fantasy tales that this naming of swords is a recurring theme, in particular in
Tolkien’s ‘Lord of the Rings’. Therefore, Unferth’s gift of his sword is a great gesture.
The poetic description is perhaps at its peak in describing the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother. Although the ogress is weaker and smaller than her son, the match is more even because she is fighting on her own territory, and Beowulf does not have the element of surprise in his favor. In the first combat, Grendel was immune to the swords and daggers of the humans. This situation is then reversed because Beowulf's finest quality corselet makes him immune to the ogress' claws and dagger. Again the audience is reminded that this is a battle between good and evil. They are reminded that Grendel's mother was descended from Cain, and is therefore evil, and that Beowulf has right on his side and is sent by God to rid the Danes of this evil.

The action of the battle scene is expertly described as follows:

“It was then that he saw the size of this water-hag, damned thing of the deep. He dashed out his weapon, not stinting his stroke, and with such strength and violence that the circled sword screamed on her head a strident battle-song.

….. Had not the battle-shirt then brought him aid, his war-shirt of steel. And the wise Lord, the holy God, gave out the victory; the Ruler of the Heavens rightly settled it as soon as the Geat regained his feet.”

We read here the divine intervention ensuring that good will prevail against evil. The instrument of death to Grendel's mother is a combination of the wise Lord and the war-shirt. God gives man the ingenuity to construct Beowulf's corselet.

The poet makes a real attempt to build the tension in this section by creating an eerie atmosphere and plunging our hero into an unknown world where the ogress commands this watery domain. Towards the end of the passage, we note the loyalty of Beowulf's followers who remain to mourn his apparent death, while the Danes return to their hall with the prospect of having the evil return and plague them.

From Hrothgar's point of view, he is an ageing monarch and longs to live out the remaining years of his reign in peace and tranquility. Beowulf was his last hope of attaining this. The audience may think that the King will have peace in his lifetime, but the poet mentions the neighboring evil King, Heremond who Hrothgar will try and appease later in the tale.

Finally, the reader can be in no doubt that there is a strong Christian viewpoint in this poem.

LINES 1,799 – 1,913: The Geats leave for home

Summary

Beowulf returns the sword Hrunting to Unferth, being diplomatic about the futility of using this weapon against Grendel's mother.

He thanks Hrothgar for his hospitality and Hrothgar embraces Beowulf warmly, fearing they will not meet again.

Beowulf invites Hrothgar's son, Hrethric to visit the land of the Geats.

The Geats' boat is loaded with the treasure given by Hrothgar, and with favorable winds they soon approach their homeland.

Interpretation

We see a diplomatic side to Beowulf. He is keen for the two nations to be close allies, and so he makes the gesture of returning the famous sword Hrunting to its former owner. Although the parting of Hrothgar and Beowulf is full of emotion, it is not in the least romantic, as you would see in other epics, such as Homer's 'The Iliad', or the Roman works, and this poem keeps its strong masculine feel.

The reader now fully appreciates the reputation of this special sword Hrunting. Although not of the fame of Excalibur it is still a strong token of victory, and provides the warrior who wields it with great superiority.

LINES 1,914 – 2,199: Beowulf's Return

Summary

When Beowulf left the land of the Geats, he was without great fame in an empty ship. He now returns a hero, with a ship laden with treasure, and he is warmly welcomed by Hygelac and his young wife Hygd.
Here the poet digresses, and tells the story of Thryth. She was Hygelac's beautiful daughter, but untamed, and her father sent her away to be married to the Angle, King Offa. He is a good King and soon Thryth respects her husband and Offa's court flourishes.

Great celebrations are held in Hygelac's court at which Beowulf recounts his adventures in Denmark. Hygelac was of the opinion that the Danes should have handled their own problems, but Beowulf points out that Hrothgar still has a longstanding feud with the Heathobards, a Germanic tribe, but hopes that a marriage between his daughter Freawaru and King Ingeld will resolve the dispute.

**Interpretation**

So far as Beowulf is concerned, his expedition to Denmark has been a complete success. He returns to Geatland as a hero with a ship laden with treasure and his reputation enhanced. We also have reference to the low status of females in this society, being used as peace brokers between feuding tribes. Much of this section deals with the retelling of Beowulf's adventures in case any members of the audience missed the details first time round.

**LINES 2,200 – 2,400 : Beowulf, King of the Geats**

**Summary**

Following the death of Hygelac, his son Heardred took the throne, but his reign was short-lived and he too was killed.

Beowulf then became King and reigned wisely for fifty years. A plague then hit the countryside in the form of a fiery dragon that burnt the land, seeking revenge for the theft of a gold cup from his treasure horde.

Apparently a servant fleeing from his brutal master happened upon the secret entrance to the dragon's lair and stole a cup in order to make amends with his master. Although the thief escaped the dragon, the worm bent on revenge laid waste the land.

Originally the treasure horde belonged to a man, but he had no son to leave his treasure to, and so on his death, the dragon happened upon this treasure trove and took it for its own.

Even the throne of the Geats is destroyed by fire, and Beowulf resolves to rid his people of the dragon. He devises a plan to kill the dragon and he selects a small party of his best warriors to help him in this task. Beowulf is confident that he will achieve victory over the dragon, just as he did over Grendel and his mother.

From that time, Beowulf has faced many foes especially since the death of Hygelac at the hands of the Frisians. He conquered the Frankish people and his fame was such that Hygd, Hygelac's widow suggested that Beowulf should become King rather than Heardred, but Beowulf chose to support the rightful heir, rather than take the throne for himself. Heardred fell fighting against the Swedes to the north, and only then did Beowulf become King.

Beowulf's heroism was widespread and he was able to negotiate peace with his neighbors rather than engage in combat, although he was still successful when peace broke down and violence was required.

Beowulf orders a battle-shield made of iron to be cast in order to aid him in his battle against the fire-breathing dragon, as a wooden shield would have no resistance.

**Interpretation**

There is a definite change of pace from the fast and furious first part of the epic. The plot now moves more sedately and there is much argument over the reason for this. Some contend that the change in pace is a direct ploy by the author to emphasize the now great age of Beowulf. Others suggest that a separate author wrote this supporting storyline and the two were added together some time later.

Just to confuse the situation further, it is clear from the original manuscript of 1010 A.D. that the second part of the story is written by a different scribe.

Like most of these riddles, the true situation is probably a combination of all these factors. We again have reference to the importance given by warriors to their equipment. The fact that Beowulf orders a splendid new battle-shield to be wrought shows that he is in no hurry to face the dragon. He wishes to pursue this endeavour being totally prepared both with equipment and with men. He will also take his sword, Naegling with him.

Again we note that the poet uses a flashback technique in bringing the audience up-to-date on the history between his arrival back in Denmark and his becoming King of the Geats. It shows Beowulf as an...
honorable Thane of the Geats, not wishing to usurp the throne by replacing Heardred, even though he would have the support of Hygelac's widow.

The poet clearly wishes to make a distinction between the Geats and the other tribes in the area where there is continued warring and dishonorable behavior amongst the hierarchy of the various houses, e.g. Heremod the Danish tyrant from line 900.

When Beowulf does come to the throne, he is clearly a King of the people, and brings peace to the land until the arrival of the dragon.

This section provides some vivid and beautiful poetry, e.g.

“...The fiery dragon’s flames had blasted
all the land by the sea, and its safe stronghold,
the fortress of the people. The formidable King
of the Geats now planned to punish him for this......
He gave orders for the making of a marvelous shield
worked all in iron;”

The style of the poetry here is more lyrical than in the first section where it was harsh and gave the reader an insight into the violent aspect of Beowulf’s deeds. The poet desires to show a contrast in the character of Beowulf. He is now not just a fame-seeking adventurer, but he has mellowed and has taken the mantle of God’s hero, in particular the passage that deals with Hygd’s offer of the crown thus,

“There Hygd offered him the horde and the kingdom,
the gift-stool and its treasure; not trusting that her son
would be able to hold the inherited seats
against foreign peoples now his father was dead......”

Beowulf: “himself to be Lord of Heardred.
Rather he fostered him among the people with friendly counsel,
with kindliness and respect until he came of age
and ruled the Geats.”

Although it is not made clear in the poem, it is assumed that Beowulf married Hygd, Hygelac’s widow, but still honored Heardred’s birthright.

It should be noted that the poet predicts Beowulf’s death at the forthcoming battle with the dragon.

LINES 2,402 – 2,710 : The dragon’s barrow

Summary

With his eleven comrades Beowulf travels to the dragon’s barrow.

They are guided by the thief who knows where the dragon guards its treasure.

Beowulf spies out the dragon and concludes that his fate lies in this challenge.

Before meeting the beast he engages in a long speech to his men going right back to the time when he first arrived in the Geatish court as a young boy of seven years of age. He covers subjects such as the battle with the Swedes, the slaying of the Frankish hero Daeghrenf, and the conflict between Herebeald who was killed by his brother Haethcyn, both being brothers of Hygelac.

He resolves that the fiery dragon will not emerge from its cave again.

He decides to face the dragon on his own while his men surround the barrow. As he approaches the worm, the heat is almost unbearable and Beowulf shouts a challenge at the dragon. He advances towards the creature and strikes it with his sword, but the cut is not deep enough, and the narrator indicates that all is not going to plan for Beowulf.

He becomes almost enveloped in flame, but his companions run for their lives to the forest seeing their leader in distress. However, Wiglaf a young warrior joins Beowulf at his side and Beowulf is able to strike again with his sword Naegling, but the sword breaks because of Beowulf’s powerful handgrip. The dragon clutches Beowulf around the neck with his talons, and Wiglaf inflicts a telling blow on the dragon, and its fire is extinguished. Beowulf draws his dagger and slits the monster a final time. Between them, the two heroes have killed the dragon.

Interpretation

The build-up to the battle continues at the start of this section of the poem, with Beowulf recounting his past glories in order to bolster his own confidence and to make sure his companions don’t forget his prowess in the past.

Just as Hrothgar was haunted by Grendel, so Beowulf faces being haunted by the dragon unless he can kill it now.
Again, like Hrothgar, Beowulf is now an aged King and in the end it is the intervention of a young warrior, Wiglaf that will rescue Beowulf, just as he rescued the grey-haired Hrothgar fifty years earlier. Part of this build-up concerns the history of the dragon's treasure horde, but eventually the poet brings us into the conflict with the dragon, and Beowulf's battle-shield enables him to get close to the dragon and to strike it with his sword.

The reader suspects that this is a more formidable adversary than Grendel, and perhaps Beowulf underestimates the strength of the dragon's hide, for his first strike is only a superficial wound. At this stage, the audience wonders why Beowulf has been foolish enough to take on the dragon single-handedly. The answer is simple – Beowulf has led a long and adventurous life and wishes to die like a warrior with a sword in his hand, but he still needs to die with the knowledge that the dragon will no longer intimidate his people.

With this in mind, he tells his companions about his distinguished past, not because they are not aware of his deeds, but this is a part of a test he is giving them. He is more or less asking whether they are worthy of this challenge. All but one fails the test by showing cowardice and running away. Wiglaf will inherit Beowulf's throne because he has passed the test, and this youth will mature in order to take on the Kingship, but at the last, it is Beowulf's shield that protects Wiglaf, his own being consumed by the dragon's flames. Together, the wise King and the intrepid youth slay the dragon, but at the cost of Beowulf's life.

So comes to the end the third great battle-scene of this epic poem. The first two encounters involved the young hero Beowulf who was in search of fame and fortune. The last battle is by the aged heroic King, protector of his realm, who sacrifices himself for the benefit of his people. The poet is at pains to emphasize the cowardice of the men who deserted Beowulf. Remember these had been handpicked by Beowulf, but they were still no match for the final test. This offence of cowardice in the face of danger was considered by this society as a most heinous offence, and they would be left without honor, lands or fortune.

Wiglaf is in many ways very similar to the young Beowulf, except that he does not possess the superhuman grip, but nevertheless he is honest and a true man of action. The poet demonstrates Wiglaf's character as follows:

"This was Wiglaf, Weoxstan's son, well-loved shieldsman, a Scylfing prince of the stock of Alfhere; he could see his Lord tormented by heat through his mask of battle. He remembered then the favors he had formally bestowed on him, the wealthy dwelling-place of the Waymundings, confirming him in the land-rights his father had held. He could not then hold back: Hand gripped the yellow linden-wood shield, shook out that ancient sword."

Wiglaf's only concern is to aid his leader. This is not blind heroism, but genuine concern for his King, and the poet's characterization of Wiglaf is one of the most important in the whole poem. Although the poet eloquently describes Wiglaf's goodness, it is more clearly shown by the actions that Wiglaf takes. It is clear that Wiglaf is fairly young as "this was the first occasion when he was called to stand at his dear Lord's shoulder in the shock of battle."

Wiglaf's courage is demonstrated thus,

"Mail-shirt did not serve the young spear-man; and shield was withered back to the boss by the billow of fire; but when the blazing had burnt up his own, the youngster stepped smartly to take the cover of his kinsman's."

LINES 2,711 – 2,891: The death of Beowulf

Summary

Mortally wounded, Beowulf collapses down by the wall of the cave and Wiglaf brings water to refresh his master.

Beowulf tells Wiglaf that he will die contented because he has always lived a just life and has never killed a kinsman. Before he dies, he wishes to gaze on some of the dragon's treasure. Wiglaf retrieves some of the wondrous treasure including a banner made out of solid gold. Beowulf thanks God for allowing him to rid the Geatish people of the dragon.
He asks Wiglaf to ensure that his body is burned on a sumptuous funeral pyre erected at the coastal headland, and the site is to be known as Beowulf's Barrow.
The King gives Wiglaf "the golden collar from his neck, with the gold-plated helmet, harness and arm-ring; he bade the young spear-man use them well."
Then the dying old King said to Wiglaf, "You are the last man left of our kindred, the house of the Waymundings!  Weird has lured each of my family to his fated end, each Earl through his valor; I must follow them."
Wiglaf mourns bitterly the loss of his King.
Soon the other companions return to the barrow and Wiglaf vents his anger at them.  He tells them that they will now lead a shameful life.  It would be better if they had died.

Interpretation
The death scene between Wiglaf and Beowulf is one of the best of the whole poem, full of emotion and feeling, but not over-sentimentalized.
You can imagine the ancient audiences being enthralled by this section.
The heroic King gives thanks to God for a full life, which he considers he has led justly and honorably.
Beowulf cherishes his relationship with Wiglaf.  He is pleased that Wiglaf has passed the test.  This is a rare commodity in these times, and the poet has reminded us of this fact throughout the poem, even making references to Cain and Abel; Unferth's slaughter of his brother (line 587); and the dispute between Hygelac's brothers (line 2,435).
Before his demise, Beowulf issues his last instructions concerning his funeral, his pyre and mound to be called Beowulf's Barrow that will contain the dragon's horde.
There is some authenticity to this part of the story that was confirmed by the archaeological discovery at Sutton Hoo in England in 1939.  A Saxon King of East Anglia who died in 625 A.D. was found buried in a Saxon rowing boat 27 metres long, containing a vast collection of gold jewels, silver plate, armor and coins.  It was Britain's richest archaeological find and it contained Frankish coins dating to the period covered by this tale.
It seems futile to the reader that the conflict with the dragon is over the minor pilfering of a gold cup from this horde of treasure.  Being cursed, the treasure has no use for either the dragon, those that owned it before, and now for Beowulf or the Geats, although Beowulf does take comfort in gazing on this elusive treasure before he dies.  It seems to these great heroes that treasure is of secondary importance, for there was also treasure in Grendel's lair, but this was left by Beowulf.  The only trophy he took was Grendel's head.  It is interesting in this society that the heroes were of more worth than the treasure, and this is borne out by the fact that riches were buried at Sutton Hoo.
Grown in stature from his conflict with the dragon, Wiglaf faces the cowards when they return from the forest.  He says,

"Now there shall cease for your race the receiving of treasure,
the bestowal of swords, all satisfaction of ownership,
all comfort of home.  Your kinsmen every one,
shall become wanderers without land-rights…..
Death is better for any Earl than an existence of disgrace!"
The poet refers to a curse that is on the treasure trove, but that this spell was controlled by God.  This is one of the clear indications of the original poem being adapted for Christian consumption.
The poet goes on to say that the distribution of the horde would be done at God's discretion.  Apparently, the gold has lain deep in the earth for one thousand years.
We will recall that the poet prophesied Beowulf's death in this conflict, and the inference is that his death may be attributed to the curse on the horde.
The poet is at his poetic best as the poem comes to its conclusion.

LINES 2,892 – 3,182 : The funeral
Summary
Wiglaf sends a messenger to tell those waiting back at the court of Beowulf's death.
On his arrival, the messenger warns of a great disaster because the warring neighbors of the Geats may view Beowulf's death as an opportunity to conquer the land, in particular the Swedes to the north with whom Beowulf had secured a fragile peace.
It is agreed that Beowulf should be burned on a mighty funeral pyre and the curse-laden treasure buried with him.
There is much mourning in the land concerning the death of their King.
The court moves to the scene of the battle and preparations are made for Beowulf’s funeral. Large amounts of wood are brought for the pyre. Wiglaf and seven others drag the fire dragon’s body and push it over the cliff into the sea. Beowulf’s body is to be burned on the Whale’s Headland and the pyre is hung with helmets, battle-boards and other weapons of war.

An un-named Geatish woman laments the loss of her Lord in song.

It takes ten days for the Geats to prepare a mound in which to store the ashes of Beowulf and the treasure horde.

Again the poet pays tribute to the heroic deeds of their leader.

Interpretation

At the start of this epic poem we learn about the Pagan funeral of Scyld, and the epic ends with the funeral of Beowulf. Both rites are clearly Pagan in contradiction with the Christian elements throughout the main body of the poem. Perhaps the scribes recognised that to amend these sections would diminish the impact of the poem. Therefore, this Godly tale is framed by two Pagan rituals.

There is also a distinct vein of irony at the end with the inference that the death of Beowulf marks the end of a peaceful age for the Geats.

For the optimistic reader, the hope is that Wiglaf will unite his people and rebuff any foreign invaders and thereby carry on where Beowulf left off.

The Geatish woman that sings a song of lament at Beowulf’s funeral is assumed to be Hygd, Beowulf’s widow. Again the poet neglects to name her, although he does not neglect to tell us the names of the warrior’s swords, once more emphasizing the lack of status of women in these times.

Beowulf’s epitaph is contained in the last three lines of the poem thus:

“They said that he was of all the world’s Kings
the gentlest of men, and the most gracious,
the kindest to his people, the keenest for fame.”

CONCLUSION

The reader should not forget that this was originally a performance and not a piece of literature. It is described as an epic poem derived from the Greek ‘epos’, which means oration, song.

The worth of any such epic was the use of language and the skill at performing the story to the audience. This epic poem has all the standard ingredients, including a heroic character in the form of Beowulf who performs superhuman deeds, championing good against evil.

There is a distinct code of honor between Beowulf and the other dignitaries and Thanes, and the poet provides us with an in-depth study of this society’s code of behavior.

There are various themes running through this poem and this will be covered in the Questions section.

It is obvious that some alterations were made to the original poem by the Christian scribes who produced the 1010 manuscript, and although they emphasize the Christian values throughout this tale, probably as an act of propaganda, none of the atmosphere concerning the Pagan society of Northern Europe at this time has been lost.

‘Beowulf’ has stood the test of time because of its universal popularity and appeal, and will remain a key piece of early English literature for many centuries to come.

GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Drawing a rough line between Stockholm and Gothenburg, south is the land of the Geats, and north is the Swedes.

Off the south-west coast is the Island of Zealand, where modern-day Copenhagen, capital of Denmark can be found. These islands were the land of the Danes.

The Jutland peninsula belonged to the Jutes in the north, and the Angles in the south.

The area around modern-day Hamburg was ruled by the Germanic Heathobards tribe.

To the west of the Heathobards were the Frisians and Franks.

To the east of the Heathobards were the Wylfings.

Further east of the Wylfings were the Vandals.
As you can see, the Danes occupied a crucial link between the Geats and mainland Europe, and Heorot is thought to have been in the centre of Zealand Island.

It is clear that both the Angles and the Heathobards would be keen to control the Danes territory. Beowulf's approach seems to be to create an alliance with the Danes. This is an approximate guide as to the distribution of the peoples in this part of Europe during the 5th and 6th Centuries, when 'Beowulf' is set.

The Frisians, Franks, Jutes and Angles settled in Britain during the 5th and 6th Centuries, followed later in the 9th and 10th Centuries by the Danes and Vikings. The English get their name from the Angles tribe.

The culture that these tribes shared came with them on these visits to Britain.

QUESTIONS for STUDY with IDEAS for ANSWERS

Q: Give details of the themes that run through this epic poem.

Ideas:
There would be no story if it were not for the envy that Grendel has for the humans who feast at Heorot. Grendel is descended from Cain. He is an outcast and lives in a cold lair beneath the black waters close to Hrothgar’s Mead Hall. Grendel sees the men feasting and enjoying themselves in the warmth and comfort of Heorot, whilst he lives a cold, miserable life. This feeling of isolation is more pronounced during the winter, and this is when Grendel attacks with a view to spoiling the fun enjoyed by the Danes. The whole society of this part of Europe is also fuelled by envy. The warring Germanic tribes covet their neighbors’ possessions and there is constant feuding between the rival tribes. Sometimes agreements are obtained by ransom or by using Princesses as peace-pawns in arranged marriages. Having acted against Grendel’s envy, Hrothgar gets his revenge on the beast through the efforts of Beowulf who is seen as God’s instrument of retribution against the evil Grendel. The disputes and feuds between the tribes are also fuelled by revenge, the various tribes have long memories and sometimes revenge is not always swift. This is why there is a sense of unease throughout the region, and when there is a change in the balance of power, i.e. when Beowulf dies at the end of the poem, old conflicts come to the fore again and revenge is the driving force. The theft of an item from the dragon’s horde causes the worm to wreak revenge on the humans close by.

There are various examples of the generosity shown by the different monarchs and Thanes throughout the story. Not only does Hrothgar shower gifts on Beowulf when he slays Grendel and Grendel’s mother, but the Thanes of Denmark also provide him with gifts. Therefore, when he returns home he has a ship laden with treasure, which Beowulf generously gives to his King Hygelac and the Geats. Unferth, although initially at odds with Beowulf, makes amends by generously giving him his famous sword, which has never failed its owner, to aid Beowulf in his fight against Grendel’s mother.

There are other themes such as courage, loyalty and irony. Kindly expand on these.

Q: What are Beowulf’s motives for sailing to Denmark to rid the Danes of Grendel?

Ideas:
These are not in any specific order:-
The successful slaying of Grendel would enhance Beowulf’s reputation, both in Denmark and back in Geatland.
Knowing previously about Hrothgar's generosity (remember he was known as the Ring-giver), Beowulf would stand to receive a great treasure for killing Grendel. This would also increase his status back home in Geatland.

Being a noble hero, Beowulf would be considered as godly by destroying the evil descendent of Cain.

Beowulf is also in debt to Hrothgar, and he is showing loyalty to him because he had paid tribute in order to release Beowulf's father Ecytheow from his enemies, so there has been a long-standing family tie between Beowulf and Hrothgar. His actions, therefore, are repaying a long-standing debt.

Q: Comment on the treatment of women during these times.

Ideas:
This epic poem is extremely masculine in nature.
Women are rarely referred to by name.
Sometimes they are completely anonymous or are merely referred to as somebody's wife, mother or sister.
They had no control over their lives and the higher-up the social scale they were, the less control they had,
being used as peace-weavers between the warring tribes through marriage.
The women play no part in the action of the poem, the exception being Grendel's mother where it is recognised that a mother's need for revenge over the death of a son is a formidable force.
Even the language of the poem is by and large vigorously masculine, and it is only softened occasionally during times of grief or where the women are involved in roles of hospitality.
One of their main occupations in the poem is passing round the mead cup to visitors.
Although we are not given a detailed insight into the lower classes of this society, we suspect that the women here are treated more favorably, and may have a degree of equality with their male counterparts.
This treatment of women is perhaps not surprising when you consider that this poem would originally have been performed in the Mead Houses to a male audience.