

Beowulf Summary

The poem begins in the mead-hall of the Danish King Hrothgar, which is under attack from a monster called Grendel. Grendel, described as a descendant of Cain, has been terrorizing the hall at night for 12 years, killing Hrothgar's warriors. The Danes are in despair, unable to stop the creature.

Enter Beowulf, a young and mighty warrior from the Geats in what is now southern Sweden. Hearing of Hrothgar's troubles, Beowulf sails to Denmark with a group of his men to confront Grendel. He stays in the mead-hall, Heorot, waiting for the creature. That night, as Grendel attacks, Beowulf confronts him barehanded. The two engage in a fierce battle, with Beowulf ultimately ripping off Grendel's arm, causing the monster to flee and later die from his wound.

Grendel's mother, seeking revenge for the death of her son, soon attacks Heorot. Beowulf, once again, decides to confront this new threat. He follows her to her underwater lair and, after an intense battle, kills her with a sword he finds there, which was forged by giants.

Having defeated both monsters, Beowulf is celebrated as a hero and returns to Geatland. He is eventually crowned king and rules peacefully for 50 years.

However, in the final act of the poem, Beowulf's kingdom is threatened by a dragon after a thief steals a cup from its hoard. The aged Beowulf decides to confront the dragon himself, with the help of his men. During the battle, all but one of his warriors, Wiglaf, flee in fear. Together, Beowulf and Wiglaf manage to slay the dragon, but Beowulf is mortally wounded in the process.

He dies from his wounds, and the poem concludes with his funeral pyre and a lament for the loss of such a great hero. The Geats mourn their king, fearing the instability and potential conflicts that might arise in the wake of his death.

