
Beowulf: Is Grendel Evil?

From the poem Beowulf, we first hear of the character Grendel and how Beowulf defeated him. The writer, John Gardner inspired by the poem, Beowulf, he created a novel that showed Grendel's past and what made him the creature he was in that poem. Pretty much like making a prequel to a movie. And in that novel, Grendel by John Gardner, Grendel is a human-like creature who is intelligent and capable of thinking and having emotion, first glance Grendel seems to be an evil monster but he is much more than that he is a creature misunderstood and isolated this is shown by the author through textual evidence, symbolism, imagery, and allegory.

Grendel is a monster terrorizing Danes for the past 12 years. After seeing how terrorizing and menacing he is towards the people of Danes you would think he is a horrendous monster but behind that façade he's struggling with issues with himself, his family or the world. Every other monster in the novel, Grendel, is your typical monster they are ugly and have human like features. Physically Grendel and the other monsters including his mom are the same. But what makes Grendel stand out in his own kind is his ability to talk and have rational thoughts. Not only is his ability to speak and understand language is the fact he doesn't use simple words but bigger and intricate words. The same languages humans and noblemen are using. Grendel uses his thoughts and words to create the world around him. But those same abilities make him different from other monster causing him to get isolated. A man full of thoughts has no one to speak to. This is shown in "Of all the creatures I knew, in those days, only my mother really looked at me." (Grendel,17).

But later as he grows through life and throughout the novel, he starts feeling distant from his mother. This happens because not only because the language barrier, but Grendel gets more and more invested in human world. Terrorizing the Danes becomes an addiction for Grendel that he controls because without having Hrothgar's people there to kill he will have no purpose. You see this start of isolation from his mother stated in "She hurls herself across the void and buries me in her bristly fur and fat.....I can't breathe, and I claw to get free. She struggles." (Grendel,29) This gesture his mother would usually do would comfort him you can see the difference in reaction to this gesture shown in " I would ball and hurl myself at my mother and she would reach out her claws and seize me,..... and she would smash me to her fat, limp breast as if to make me a part of her flesh again. After that, come forward, I would gradually ease back out into my games." Reading these two different experiences with same action shows how Grendel now instead comforted by his mother feels suffocated. His mother seeing this freak out and tries to make him come back. She tries to always stop him from going to Danes for the fear he will not come back. Grendel pays no mind and continues to feel alone and separate himself from others. This feeling of separation was so bad for Grendel's mother that she tried to speak to him. She had not spoken in decades and with this feeling of isolation tried to talk to her son. To Grendel while him and his mother looked alike the barrier of thought and languages made him feel like she doesn't understand his view on the world. Causing a separation. "When her strange eyes burned into me, it did not seem quite sure. I was intensely aware of where I sat, the volume of darkness I displaced, the shiny-smooth span of packed dirt between us, and the shocking separateness from me in my mama's eyes. I would feel, all at once, alone and ugly, almost—as if I'd dirtied myself—obscene." (Grendel, 17). This shows Grendel is aware of this feeling of separation how while he feels close to his mother but also feels worlds apart. Grendel

knows his mother loves him and that he loves her, but he feels so misunderstood causing him to pull back and stay to himself. This separation makes him to start hating his mother.

While other monsters seem to be more like animals. Grendel behavior is more humankind. He still has looks of a monster but mind of a human. Causing him not to just be estranged from his kind but also animals. Grendel struggles to grow through life and seeing animals just going through life with not care or worry angers him. The novel begins with spring season starting and there being an old ram looking over rockslides. And Grendel finds this annoying and tries to get ram to go away from his cave. You see the way Grendel feels about the ram when he says, "Do not think my brains are squeezed shut, like the ram's, by the roots of horn" (Grendel, 6) stating the difference between them two. While most considered monsters and animals similar. To Grendel he is different. The old ram does one thing and never changes. Spring to Grendel signifies another year of his war with Hrothgar. Spring to the ram means mating season. Grendel annoyed screams out to sky, "Why can't these creature discover a little dignity.",(Grendel,6) Grendel hates ram because of the way it mindlessly follows its instincts and mechanical urges. When Grendel talks about his childhood, he remembers a time when he got his foot stuck in between two trees and how a bull attacked him to protect its calf. He hates how animals followed instinct and never went away with it. Like someone told them their purpose and what to do. And in that moment of having the bull attack him he understood the world. "I understood he will always be struck too low: he fought by instinct blind mechanism ages old." To Grendel he didn't fit with his kinds because of his ability to talk and understand. But he didn't fit with animals either. Later in the story you read about a goat who has to climb Grendel's rocks even if his head is cracked open, he mindlessly climbs. They have a purpose that was wired into them a purpose he felt like he didn't have till he started attacking Danes. But also, with monster and animals what made him be alienated is his mind how they did whatever they did mindlessly. No thought was given.

His looks made him different from humans and his mind from monsters and animals. Causing him to feel isolated everywhere with everyone. This is shown when he falls asleep being attacked by the bull. He wakes up to 3 human wondering what the hell he is. Of those three humans was young king Hrothgar. They think he is a fungus at first then believe he is a God. They offer him a pig to feast on. His ability to understand and speak languages set him different from monsters but it also sets him different from human. He tries to speak to human but there misinterpret that as him being angry, "I laughed. They jerked away and stood up shaking, looking up.....The king snatched an ax from the man beside him and, without warning, he hurled it at me."(Grendel,27) Languages makes him feel so isolated from everyone. He has no one to talk. And if he does people avoid him or try to kill him. Animals are mindless creature doing a task even if they are half dead. While human is mix of mindless and intelligent. Grendel doesn't relate to anyone. When humans were having their wars with other tribes. He didn't understand the point of wasting animals this is shown in "I was sickened, if only at the waste of it: all they killed--cows, horses, men—they left to rot or burn." (Grendel,36) He doesn't understand human behaviors making him confused. Their action of killing each other and lying and making it sound glorious shocks him. But through knowing the same languages he feels related to them but also just like mother isolated from them this is shown "I was safe in my tree, and the men who fought were nothing to me, except of course that they talked in something akin to my languages, which meant we were, incredibly related." (Grendel,36) He is alone in this world it is him alone that exist. He later runs into the mead hall asking for forgiveness. He entered with a dead man over his shoulder and asked everyone to forgive him and for mercy for Cain's sins. They guard and everyone attacked him this made him to start hating Hrothgar and the people. He wanted to be

one of them but they attacked him and showed him he will always be different. The shapers songs gave Grendel hope that he would be welcomed with open arms. But instead people screamed at his appearance and started attacking him. Grendel's reaction to this is "I understood, as shocked as I'd been the first time, that they could kill me they would if I gave them a chance." (Grendel, 52) With this revelation of how he will always be alienated he starts his 12 year war.

Throughout this whole story you see Grendel upset or yelling at the man in the sky.

Grendel is upset that everyone has someone to talk too. How the people are able to pray to a god and talk to him but Grendel can't talk to him. He shows this hate for a God. "The sky says nothing, predictably. I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick. The sky ignores me, forever unimpressed. Him too I hate, the same as I hate these brainless budding trees, those brattling birds." (Grendel,6) He hates the fact he comes from cursed ancestors. The sky not answering makes him feel not important and alienates him from human even though not all believe in a God they have someone to talk to making Grendel alone and jealous.

In conclusion throughout this whole book you can see Grendel is being isolated. The author portrays this through the use of textual evidence, symbolism, imagery. and allegories. His looks made him different from humans and his mind from monsters and animals. God not answering him made him feel unworthy. Causing him to feel isolated everywhere with everyone.