

Or else he may see his suffering go on
Forever, for as long as Herot towers
High on your hills.”

The mounted officer
Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:

200 “A soldier should know the difference between words
And deeds, and keep that knowledge clear
In his brain. I believe your words, I trust in
Your friendship. Go forward, weapons and armor
And all, on into Denmark. I’ll guide you
205 Myself—and my men will guard your ship,
Keep it safe here on our shores,
Your fresh-tarred boat, watch it well,
Until that curving prow carries
Across the sea to Geatland a chosen
210 Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature
Haunting our people, who survives that horror
Unhurt, and goes home bearing our love.”

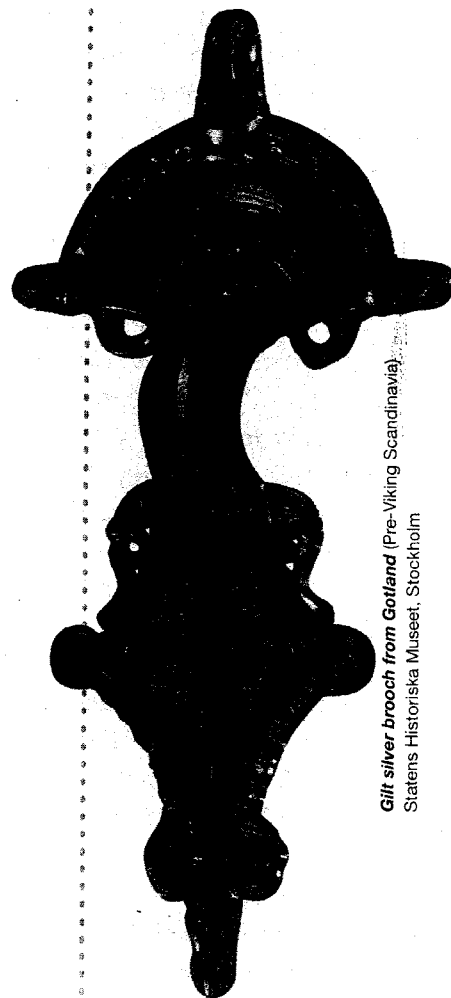
Then they moved on. Their boat lay moored,
Tied tight to its anchor. Glittering at the top
215 Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,
Shining decorations, swinging as they marched,
Erect like guards, like sentinels, as though ready
To fight. They marched, Beowulf and his men
And their guide, until they could see the gables
220 Of Herot, covered with hammered gold
And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all dwellings,
Towering majestic, its glittering roofs
Visible far across the land.
Their guide reined in his horse, pointing
225 To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best
And bravest of his men; the path was plain,
They could see their way. . . .



Beowulf and his men arrive at Herot and are called to see the King.



Beowulf arose, with his men
230 Around him, ordering a few to remain
With their weapons, leading the others quickly
Along under Herot’s steep roof into Hrothgar’s
Presence. Standing on that prince’s own hearth,
Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt
235 Gleaming with a smith’s high art, he greeted
The Danes’ great lord:



Gilt silver brooch from Gotland (Pre-Viking Scandinavia)
Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm

“Hail, Hrothgar!

Higlac is my cousin⁶ and my king; the days
 Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
 Name has echoed in our land: sailors
 240 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
 Of all mead-halls,⁷ deserted and useless when the moon
 Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
 Light and life fleeing together.
 My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
 245 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'
 Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
 Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
 Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
 Five great giants into chains, chased
 250 All of that race from the earth. I swam
 In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
 Out of the ocean, and killing them one
 By one; death was my errand and the fate
 They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
 255 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
 Lord and protector of this noble place,
 A single request! I have come so far,
 O shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
 That this one favor you should not refuse me—
 260 That I, alone and with the help of my men,
 May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
 Too, that the monster's scorn of men
 Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
 Nor will I. My lord Higlac
 265 Might think less of me if I let my sword
 Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
 Behind some broad linden⁸ shield: my hands
 Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
 Against the monster. God must decide
 270 Who will be given to death's cold grip.
 Grendel's plan, I think, will be
 What it has been before, to invade this hall
 And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
 If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
 275 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
 For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
 Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
 And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls

6. **cousin** here, used as a general term for relative.

7. **mead-halls** To reward his thanes, the king in heroic literature would build a hall where mead (a drink made from fermented honey) was served.

8. **linden** very sturdy type of wood.

Literary Analysis

**The Epic and the
 Legendary Hero** How do
 Beowulf's boasts of great
 deeds and his announce-
 ment of his plan establish
 him as a hero?

Vocabulary Builder

purge (pɜːrj) v. purify;
 cleanse

Reading Strategy

Paraphrasing Paraphrase
 Beowulf's plans in lines
 264–279.

Reading Check

What does Beowulf ask of
 Hrothgar?

Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
280 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland.⁹ Fate will unwind as it must!”



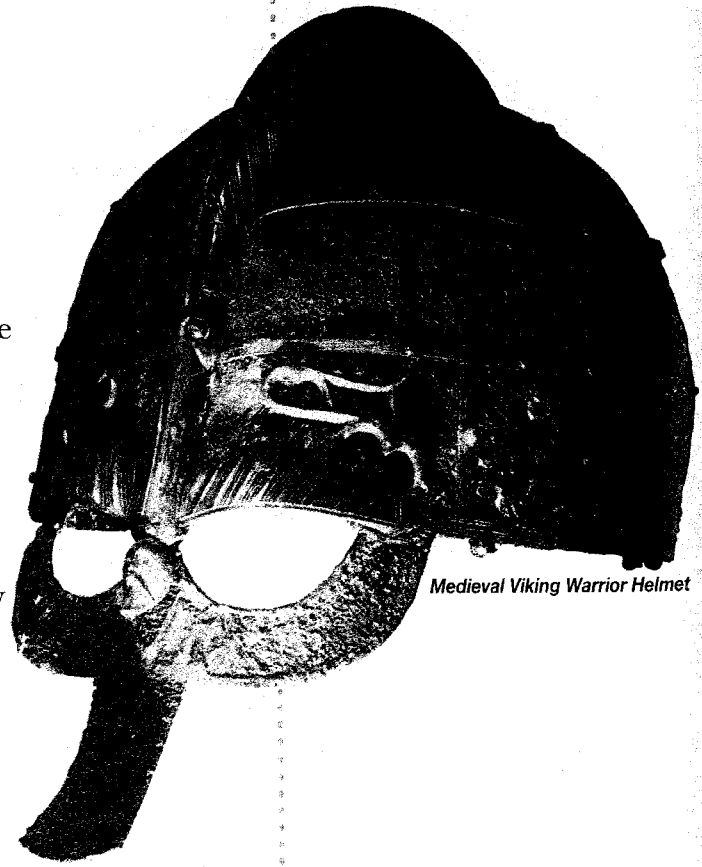
That night Beowulf and his men stay inside Herot. While his men sleep, Beowulf lies awake, eager to meet with Grendel.



The Battle with Grendel

285 Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty
Hills and bogs, bearing God’s hatred,
Grendel came, hoping to kill
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
290 Up from his swampland, sliding silently
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar’s
Home before, knew the way—
But never, before nor after that night,
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
295 So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch
And rushed angrily over the threshold.
He strode quickly across the inlaid
300 Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
With rows of young soldiers resting together.
305 And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,
Intended to tear the life from those bodies
By morning; the monster’s mind was hot
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
310 Grendel to gnaw the broken bones
Of his last human supper. Human
Eyes were watching his evil steps,
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.
Grendel snatched at the first Geat
315 He came to, ripped him apart, cut

Literary Analysis
The Epic What values and beliefs of warrior culture does Beowulf’s attitude toward death express?



Medieval Viking Warrior Helmet


9. **Wayland** from Germanic folklore, an invisible blacksmith.

His body to bits with powerful jaws,
 Drank the blood from his veins and bolted
 Him down, hands and feet; death
 And Grendel's great teeth came together,
 320 Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
 Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
 Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
 —And was instantly seized himself, claws
 Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.
 325 That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
 Knew at once that nowhere on earth
 Had he met a man whose hands were harder;
 His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing
 Could take his talons and himself from that tight
 330 Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run
 From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
 This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
 But Higlac's follower remembered his final
 Boast and, standing erect, stopped
 335 The monster's flight, fastened those claws
 In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
 Closer. The infamous killer fought
 For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
 Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
 340 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
 Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!
 The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
 And Danes shook with terror. Down
 The aisles the battle swept, angry
 345 And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
 Built to withstand the blows, the struggling
 Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
 Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
 And out, artfully worked, the building
 350 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
 To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
 As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.
 Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot
 To stand forever; only fire,
 355 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
 Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
 Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
 The sounds changed, the Danes started
 In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
 360 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang
 In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
 And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's
 Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms

Literary Analysis
The Epic How do the
 "renamings" of Grendel
 in line 325 emphasize the
 weighty significance of
 the battle that is about
 to begin?

Burton Raffel
Translator's Insight
 Like bullies, monsters
 immediately think of
 running, as soon as they
 find themselves in what
 might be a fair fight.

Vocabulary Builder
writhing (*riθi in*) *adj.*
 making twisting or
 turning motions

 **Reading Check**
 What advantage does
 Beowulf have in his fight
 with Grendel?

Of him who of all the men on earth
365 Was the strongest. That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
370 Swords raised and ready, determined
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel
From every side, trying to open
A path for his evil soul, but their points
375 Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells
That blunted every mortal man's blade.
And yet his time had come, his days
380 Were over, his death near; down
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.
Now he discovered—once the afflictor
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant
385 To feud with Almighty God: Grendel
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws
Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
390 And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder
Snapped, muscle and bone split
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
395 His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end
Of all his days. And after that bloody
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
He who had come to them from across the sea,
400 Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
405 Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
The victory, for the proof, hanging high
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's
410 Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Which details from this description of the battle between Beowulf and Grendel add realism? Which details add epic grandness?

Reading Strategy

Paraphrasing Paraphrase the sentence in lines 392–397.