

Responses

Hrothulf is described as having “the manners ... of a half-tamed wolf ... already a God-damned pretender” (112). The fact that he schemes with Red Horse in the woods, secretly, while putting on a respectful and taciturn facade in public represents the crumbling of society, foreshadowing some sort of sudden change or revolution in society. Hrothulf is the embodiment of Machiavellian philosophy, a strong, duplicitous leader.

The conversation between Red Horse and Hrothulf gives a truer idea of the thoughts of the common people on the government. While the focus on humans had previously been on the powerful royalty and lords, this interaction is a new point of view, more similar to Grendel's. They expose problems with the structure of human society that the lords did not have the freedom to speak about. Gardner included the conversation in order to foreshadow sudden change, express the feeling of progression of a society. Red Horse is trying to indoctrinate Hrothulf with his ideas that are progressive for the time, questioning the current rule, and he is passing this down to the next generation in power.

Grendel's hesitation in killing Wealtheow symbolizes the balance between his monstrous and humane sides. While he was so resolute in killing Wealtheow at first, the idea of “balance” infiltrates his mind: one moment he decides to “kill her and teach them reality ... and nothing alive or dead could change my mind!” (110), while the next he thought that he would “kill himself, for love of the Baby Grendel that used to be” (110), before changing his mind once again. Gardner uses this to redefine the idea of a monster again: a being that knows how to appreciate youthful, innocent beauty but still choose to destroy it.

The inclusion of Ork emphasizes an agnostic, satirical view of religion. Ork looks up to superficial and potentially nonexistent gods that gives meaning to society. Grendel too gives humanity purpose by wrecking their property and making them more clever. The fact that both Grendel and the gods (who Grendel impersonates) have the ability to improve mankind further substantiates the nihilistic and non-religious perspective of Grendel. This relates back to the conversation of the dragon, who said earlier, “If [Grendel] withdraw[s], [he]’ll instantly be replaced. Brute exists ... are a dime a dozen” (73). The fact that Ork is blind is a metaphor for the fact that humanity is blind in who or what they put their faith in. Thus Grendel is disgusted, because he feels that religion is merely false worship and something to be made fun of (as he does when he playfully convinces the priest that he is the Destroyer, holding back laughter).

“Tedium is the worst pain” (138). 12 years. While it may seem that Grendel is a barnacle, stuck in the useless redundancy of eating people and slapping Unferth to the side, Grendel experiences many different changes of mind throughout his war (purposefully by Gardner to expose the reader to those many philosophies.) He is always bored with the latter, obsessed with finding purpose and sometimes even justice, where his nihilistic logic would allow it. If he were plainly evil, he could easily have eaten many more of Hrothgar's men, perhaps taking down the entire kingdom, slowly— instead, he chooses to wage a war of targeted destruction, taking his time to follow the dragon's offhand secondary advice of

improving them by challenging them. This in turn is why he finds humans and nature in general so beneath him. He kills a goat that keeps “climbing, mindless, mechanical, because it is the business of goats to climb” (139) because of the tedium of its actions. Grendel is repulsed and frustrated by the stagnancy of human beings, who are unable to hold off his redundant attacks. A theme of this is the bliss of the ignorant, or the monotony of the intelligent, an unfortunate phenomenon.

The death of the Shaper is the death of the ideas he embodied: an air of illusory greatness able to raise a kingdom to fame. Without the Shaper, the people are not protected and unified by his song, which was an important part of building the kingdom. The loss of beauty that left Grendel stunned—the only thing that could bring Grendel to tears and great self-disgust for being so evil — now left Grendel no reason not to attack the people. The Shaper’s loss represents the doom of the kingdom to either doom by violence or monotony, now that the people were not uplifted by beautiful poetry.