

## Role of Queen in Beowulf & Grendel

In both texts, Beowulf and Grendel, the main purpose of the Queen's are to serve the courts as "weavers of peace". In Grendel however, Queen Wealhtheow is described in much greater detail and serves a further purpose. The reader gains insight to a part Grendel that is not present in Beowulf, his desire for a human.

It was not unusual for women to be offered as tokens of peace within the noble courts. In the novel Grendel, Wealhtheow's brother, King of the Helmings, bestowed her to King Hrothgar to promote peace amongst the Helmings and Scyldings. "She had given, her life for those she loved. So would any simpering, eyelash batting female in her court, given the proper setup, the minimal conditions"(Grendel, p.102). It is ironic how she promoted peace from her arrival because she was an essential part in keeping peace, as the "weaver of peace" in the later of both texts. Queen Wealhtheow however is not the only woman in the texts that was forsaken to encourage appeasement amongst feuding courts. Queen Hygd was offered to Hygelac under very similar circumstances as told in Beowulf, and portrayed the same role in Hygelac's kingdom. There is reference in both texts concerning this tradition, and it is evident to the reader that this is not an unusual Anglo-Saxon custom.

Queen Wealhtheow and Queen Hygd served as excellent role models for the courts in which they served. They exemplified the mannerisms and etiquette of the noble people. Queen Wealhtheow showed excellent poise from the very beginning of both texts. She was admirable as she passed the mead bowl around Heorot. The offering of the bowl was symbolic, being that the bowl was first given to Hrothgar and then passed to Beowulf, as if she presented him with her trust. Beowulf gave Wealhtheow his guarantee that he would be successful or die in battle. After she presented Hrothgar and Beowulf with the mead bowl she served the Scyldings, and did so as if they were her own people. She was not a Scylding, nor did she desire to be one, but she never made her unhappiness known, as described in Grendel. There is not great detail on Queen Hygd in Grendel, but from what the reader can gather from Beowulf, she is as much of a female role model as Queen Wealhtheow. She was young but very intelligent. In fact King Hygelac felt intimidated by Hygd's intelligence. Queen Hygd was unlike Wealhtheow in the way in which she did not bare many gifts. Hygd was more concerned about the future of the people of her kingdom succeeding Hygelac's death than Wealhtheow. Hygd offered Beowulf the kingdom because she believed it was in the best interest of the people, she loved the warriors and wished peace amongst all the people. Wealhtheow on the other hand felt that the kingdom should be preserved for her sons.

Wealhtheow spoke after the "fight at Finnsburg" about the importance of her sons taking over the kingdom in the poem Beowulf, and this reminds Hrothgar of his age. This same speech affected Hrothgar in both texts. It forced him to contemplate his worthiness of Wealhtheow. He realized that she was young and beautiful, and need not be with an old man. Which made his sorrow even worse is the fact that she knew all this as well.

Queen Wealhtheow put up an excellent disguise when hiding the pain she experienced from being forced to be Hrothgar's wife. Unlike in Beowulf, in Grendel the reader was given insight into Wealhtheow's sorrow. The only time she would display her unhappiness was when she would lie in bed at night with Hrothgar with her eyes full of tears. Sometimes she would leave the kingdom to dwell in her sorrows but she

would be immediately surrounded by guards, and escorted inside. Wealhtheow was homesick, she missed her land, and her brother. When her brother visited Heorot she paid no attention to Hrothgar, and Hrothgar fulfilled passing around the mead bowl. In Grendel, it told of Hrothgar's love for wealhtheow. He would often stare at her in admiration. Despite her resentment she treated Hrothgar with much respect, she always looked up at him and referred to him as "my lord".

Although Wealhtheow has much resentment towards serving the Danes, she puts all that beside her and fulfilled her duties as an praiseworthy queen. In Grendel it told how she came between drunken men in the mead hall, as if she was their mother. Her intervention reminded them of their responsibilities toward the kingdom. Her presence "brought light and warmth, men began talking, joking and laughing, both Danes and Geats together"(Grendel, p.163). She created a positive feeling throughout the kingdom. In her presence the Shaper vocalized on a positive note about comfort and joy. Wealhtheow gave Beowulf advice about proper etiquette , how to speak to the Geats with "mild words". She advised him to make sure he shared his gifts. After all that was a rule by which she lived. Before Beowulf left the Danes, Queen Wealhtheow gave Beowulf a precious collar , the Brosing necklace, in appreciation for his duty. She gave him the gifts so that he could make known who he was, to be proud of his accomplishments. She wished him the best of luck and asked him to take care of her sons. There was much focus on Queen Wealhtheow's outer beauty in the novel Grendel. It went into much further detail than in the poem, Beowulf. From Wealhtheow's entrance into the novel, the reader was told in great detail of her physical beauty. Beowulf primarily focused on her inner beauty. She was described as "having hair red as fire, as soft as the ruddy sheen on dragons gold. Her face was gentle, mysteriously calm" (Grendel p.100). This combination made her a very desirable woman. So desirable that Unferth was attracted to her. Unferth flirted with Wealhtheow often in Grendel. When she would offer him the mead he would glance at her and look down and smile. Unferth felt embarrassment after he made a comment about men killing their brothers while they were drunk. Few people in Heorot found the comment humorous, the queen was caught off guard. He respected the queen, as did every one throughout the kingdom. He was humiliated at what he had said, he felt regret and ridicule by his mistake and glanced at the queen without looking away. Being the kind person that she was she forgave him, and he was put at ease.

The lust for Wealhtheow did not stop with Unferth. Perhaps the most significant difference in the two texts is that in Grendel, the monster, was attracted to Wealhtheow. There is no suggestion in Beowulf that Grendel posses any feelings toward the humans. This desire for Wealhtheow gives the reader better insight into Grendel's character. Up until this point the reader was given no hint that Grendel possessed anything except hatred toward the human race. Grendel was touched the first time he saw Wealhtheow, he was struck by her innocence and beauty. He wanted to sob at the sight of her; the reader had never been introduced to this sensitive side of the monster. The reader wasn't the only one who had a problem understanding Grendel's feelings, Grendel couldn't understand them either. He was "tortured by the red of her hair and the set of her chin and the white of her shoulders". There is definitely a sexual overtone in Grendel's desire for Wealhtheow. Upon his attack of her he ripped her out of bed by her feet as if he was going to split her in half. He wanted to kill her but he was torn by his feeling for her, all the pain he wanted to inflict was sexual. He wanted to "cook the ugly hole between her legs, and squeeze out her feces with his fists".

His motive for killing her was justified by wanting to teach the Danes reality, but he refrained because it would be "pointless pleasure". Grendel was clearly unhappy about his desire for Wealhtheow, and was disconcerted. He contemplated killing her because he wanted to get rid of these feelings, instead he decided to focus on the undesirable side Wealhtheow, "her unqueenly shrieks" and "the ugliness between her legs (the bright tears of blood)."

Although the two texts are fundamentally the same, there is a significant difference in how Queen Wealhtheow is portrayed. In the novel Grendel, the reader is given not only further insight to the beauty and charm of Wealhtheow, but the sensitivity and needs of Grendel. Both texts allow the reader to gain a further understanding to the position of women in the Anglo-Saxon society by means of the development of the characters, Queen Wealhtheow and Queen Hygd.