

Beowulf

One of the most important things I took from *Beowulf* is in the creation of the fenmine, whose eyes when they change into serpent-like creatures begin to shine “like lanterns in the darkness.” In *Beowulf*, Grendel’s eyes are described like “two dots of fire against a veil of blackness.” This is a common motif amongst monsters in the Icelandic sagas. Many medieval images of the Devil included glowing eyes as one of his characteristics, as well.

The passage Lisandra is reading in the Old Language in the opening of Chapter One is from *Beowulf* lines 99-101: *Swa tha driht-guman dreamum lifdon. Eadiglice, othæt an ongan fyrene fremman feond on helle.* “So times were pleasant for the people there until finally one, a fiend out of hell, began to work his evil in the world.”

The first chapter of *The Charm of Urizen* is called The Scylds. It has connections with Beowulf’s dealings with Grendel. The following characters make appearances:

Aesher is adapted from the name of Aeschere, a Dane (Scylding) and favorite retainer, battle-companion, and counselor of Hrothgar; he is killed in the poem by Grendel’s mother, and his head is left near her mere for Beowulf to find.

Freawaru is the daughter of King Hrothgar of the Scyldings (Danes), and will be married to Ingeld, King of the Heatho-bards to stop the bloody feud between the Danes and the Heatho-bards.

Froda is Ingeld’s father and King of the Heatho-bards, killed in the early part of the feud between the Danes and the Heatho-bards.

Grendel terrorizes the Scyldings (the Danes) in Heorot hall at night for twelve years. He is a monstrous descendent of Cain, who murdered his brother. He is eventually killed by Beowulf, and is avenged by his mother, who is then also killed.

Hart Hall comes from Heorot (OE for Hart) Hall, which is an elaborate hall built by King Hrothgar and later terrorized by Grendel.

The Heathos are based on the Germanic Heatho-bards tribe that is ruled by Froda, then by Ingeld, to whom Hrothgar will marry his daughter. The poem foreshadows a feud that will take place between the two tribes.

Hrunting is a sword with an iron edge and striped with poison lent Beowulf by Unferth to use against Grendel’s mother.

Ingeld is the son of Froda, and King of the Heatho-Bards. He will marry the daughter of Hrothgar to put an end to the feud between the Danes (Scyldings) and the Heatho-bards, but the attempt to end the feud will fail.

Rothgar is based on Hrothgar, King of the Danes.

I took Scyld from Scyldings, which are the Danes. Hrothgar is King of the Scyldings.

Unferth is one of King Hrothgar's retainers. He taunts Beowulf at a feast in the same way Unferth taunts Cærwyn. Later he lends Beowulf his sword, Hrunting.

Wealhtheow is the wife of King Hrothgar.

Wulfgar is the herald of King Hrothgar.

For a verse translation of the poem, I recommend the bilingual edition by Seamus Heaney. For a prose translation, I like the Norton Critical Edition by Nicholas Howe.

An excellent Hypertext resource for the poem can be found here:

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~beowulf/main.html>