

The monster, Grendel, is more human than he or the reader knows. He feels the things humans feel and searches for the same truths we do. In fact, on a subconscious level, we empathize with Grendel because we have all felt and thought the way he does throughout the novel, making it hard to separate humanity from Grendel.

Although constantly criticizing the humans for their ignorance of what reality really is, Grendel himself never comes to terms with his reality. He learns that he is meant to be a monster and he accepts that, but he never stops trying to be a part of some community, never stops believing in the words of the Shaper which he knows to be false. “[The Shaper] provides an illusion of reality—puts together all their facts with a gluey whine of connectedness. Mere tripe, believe me. Mere sleight-of-wits. He knows no more than they do about total reality—less, if anything...” Grendel reminds himself that he is more advanced than them because he does truly understand reality; he understands it as a place devoid of purpose and true happiness. But even he, in all his enlightened glory, still hopes against all hope for things he knows will not happen.

Grendel hopes he will be accepted into the human community, he hopes they will understand his language, he hopes to believe the lies of the Shaper and he hopes to give purpose to his life. These are all absurd ideas to him, knowing it is not possible that any of these things come to fruition. Yet, he becomes the absurd hero of his own story, wanting to believe in something other the mechanical, cyclical nature of the world, which he says is “merely what pushes [him], or what [he] push[es] against, blindly....” The Shapers tales of love, beauty, art, religion and heroism are all made up by humans, according to Grendel. He says all these things are only constructions by the humans so they can distract themselves from their meaningless existence. He says “I had hung between possibilities before, between the cold truths I knew and

the heart-sucking conjuring tricks of the Shaper...” referring to his desire to separate himself from the emotions of humans but being unable to. And so, the monster of the story does in fact find himself in conflict, much like humans do, having hope where there should be none—filling his life with distractions, like becoming “Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings.”

Much like the humans, although Grendel says they do not do this, he is always, tirelessly, searching for truth and purpose. Grendel visits the Dragon and looks for answers from an omniscient being. The humans search for the same things but from an omniscient and omnibenevolent God. He finds his answers from the Dragon. He is told that he and the humans, existence really, is a “swirl in the stream of time. A temporary gathering of bits, a few random dust specks...” This philosophy, although clearly nihilist, is not the kind of answer Grendel was searching for. Like the absurd humans who refuse to see reality, Grendel did not want to accept that this was all there was. He is in the end left to believe blindly in the Dragon, like the humans do in their gods, no matter how ridiculous the idea, as when the priest Ork believed Grendel was indeed one of their gods, the Destroyer.

As readers we are horrified by Grendel’s terrible actions—eating children, terrorizing people, wreaking havoc—but, we also find ourselves understanding his acts of rage and moments of total confusion. We can recognize some bits of ourselves in Grendel. Sure, he is the worst of us all put together, but there is an inescapable human quality to his confusion, his anger, his hope, his absurdity.