

BEOWULF'S WEAKNESSES

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is wide critical agreement that *Beowulf* should be regarded as a heroic poem from which the great Geatish warrior majestically emerges as an embodiment of the characteristic features of Germanic heroism. Thus, Beowulf is always ready to show his extraordinary strength and courage in the face of the fiercest enemies; he is proud of his glorious deeds, which allow him to achieve fame; he willingly fulfils his role within the *comitatus*, both as a loyal supporter of his king and as a generous protector of his warriors (of his people, when he becomes a king himself). These traits may sometimes be at odds with the obvious attempt to add a Christian element, but heroic values are nonetheless easily recognizable throughout the poem.

I will begin here by further commenting on how those values are projected onto Beowulf. After this preparatory section, however, special attention will be devoted to analyzing whether some gaps can be found inside that idealized cluster of virtues. By way of illustration, it is interesting to note the poet's suggestion that, at some moment of his hazardous fight with Grendel's mother, Beowulf may feel fear for his life. We know that a Germanic hero should always value military honour over anything else, even his own life, but it is arguable that such symptoms of occasional weakness should bear upon the character's human dimension. In examining Beowulf's potential defects, I will expand on lack of judgement, the one that possibly gets closest to the so-called tragic flaw. In the last section, therefore, I will try to show how the fatal ending of the poem is related to Beowulf's inability to come to terms with the intricacies of the human condition as well as to grasp the unstable nature of the forces underlying the heroic world and the position he is required to occupy within it. Yet it should be left clear that the purpose of this essay is not to deny the heroic status of Beowulf's figure. What I intend to do is rather to provide an interpretation of the poem based on the necessary limitations of the hero's human understanding.¹

Before proceeding with the discussion, I would like to comment briefly on the additional risks that must accompany any new attempt to produce literary criticism on *Beowulf*. Modern readers are confronted with a work created by a distant culture with which, quite often, they feel they have very little in common. At a time when, at least in Western societies, military values are apparently on the wane and life is regarded as a supreme human right, we may have some difficulty in accepting the assumptions on which the

¹ For an alternative account of Beowulf's limitations as a hero, see Yoo (1998).

heroic world is founded. Similarly, what original audiences probably found impressive about the figure of the central hero may elicit an indifferent response nowadays. The problem of ideological predisposition on the reader's part adds to the inherent complexity of a work in which conflicting sets of values come into play. Although several proposals may be considered in this respect, we can look upon the poem as the rehandling by a Christian poet of previous Germanic material. This should account for inconsistencies such as the coexistence of God and pagan fate in narratorial comment. These variations also occur within the world of the poem itself; as explained below, the values that rule Geatish society during Hygelac's kingdom are substantially different from those prevailing under old Beowulf's power. This tapestry of assumptions and beliefs must be taken into account before jumping into far-fetched conclusions. Post-structuralist schools of criticism tend to underline the unsteady nature of signification and the importance of the reader's individual response to a literary work; which should not involve losing sight of that work. I will attempt to base my analysis of Beowulf's weaknesses on textual evidence. But deciding whether the text of the poem endorses a given reading or not is frequently a matter of judgement and degree.

2. BEOWULF AS A GERMANIC HERO

The first reference to Beowulf within the poem is not to be found until line 194, where the hero is introduced as "a thane of Hygelac, excellent among the Geats" (p.30). Significantly enough, the individual is first identified with regard to his position in society. The *comitatus*, the personal bond of loyalty and kinship between a lord and his retainers, is the basic social structure of the Germanic world; the poem allows us to judge Beowulf's behaviour on both sides of the agreement. Beowulf is also referred to from the beginning in terms of his unusual strength: "he who was strongest of mankind in might in this life's day, noble and stalwart" (p.30); observe the apparent connection between the hero's physical strength and moral qualities such as nobility and valour. It is not until line 343 that we actually get to know the hero's name, from his own voice: "Beowulf is my name" (p.37). Initially, young Beowulf is characterized as a bold warrior who, in assisting Hrothgar in the defence of his kingdom, does not hesitate to fight with two fierce monsters, Grendel and his mother. In the final part of the poem, Beowulf is no longer a young warrior seeking adventure on foreign land; he has become "an aged king, a veteran guardian of his people" (p.132). Beowulf's leadership has brought peace and prosperity to the Geats. When his people's security is threatened by a dragon, the old king has resource to his heroic courage and decides to fight alone against it. Beowulf, abandoned by all his retainers but Wiglaf, dies in his combat with the dragon; the destruction of his people is anticipated. The implications of this closing episode will be explained in detail in the following section.

Beowulf's physical appearance certainly stands out, and just by looking at him the watchman becomes aware of his extraordinary qualities: "Never have I seen a mightier noble upon earth, a warrior in armour, than is one of you; that is no retainer dignified by weapons, unless his countenance, his peerless form belies him" (p.32-3). Wulfgar is also impressed by Beowulf's heroic appearance, as shown by his words to Hrothgar: "Assuredly

the chief is doughty who has led these battle-heroes hither". The stress is then upon a certain sense of inevitability; Beowulf is not only a hero, he also looks like a hero. The references to his strength are often on the superhuman side. Thus, the word is that "he, the famed in battle, had in his grip of hand the force of thirty men" (p.39). We may get the impression that perhaps this should not be taken too literally, since it is doubly detached from the reality described from the poem; the information is provided by Hrothgar, who in turn reproduces seafarers' comment. Beowulf has undeniably become a kind of legendary figure in his own time. But, as the poem advances, the truth of the statement gradually takes shape: the hero is a consummate monster-killer; he slays Grendel's mother with "an ancient giant-made sword" (p.100); he manages to swim back home with thirty mail-coats on his arm (p.139); he crushes Dayraven's body to death (p.146). Beowulf is no young David killing the giant Goliath by throwing a stone with his sling; skill and wit may be useful in battle, but it is physical strength that is regarded as the main asset of a Germanic warrior. Nevertheless, we will see below that one of the weaknesses in Beowulf's character may ironically be his incapacity to control the effects of his own force.

Bravery in battle is also a central quality of the hero. "I will show the courage of a hero" (p.52) or other words to the same effect. When Beowulf is getting himself ready for his fight with Grendel's mother, the poet draws attention to the warrior's heroic attitude by remarking that "no whit did he feel anxious for his life" (p.94).

As pointed out by Bravo (1983) and others, the quest for lasting fame and glory is a distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon heroes. The poem itself, which sings of his glorious deeds, could be metafictionally interpreted as longstanding evidence of Beowulf's achievement in this respect.

3. HUMAN BEOWULF: UNDERSTANDING AND FORETHOUGHT OF MIND

Vidal Tibbits (1984: 267), when comparing Beowulf with El Cid, labels the Castilian soldier as "hombre heroico" (heroic man) and Beowulf as "héroe sobrehumano" (superhuman hero). I will not deny that most human aspects of Beowulf's figure are largely ignored by the poet, who prefers to focus on his exceptional exploits and structures the work around three episodes of monster-killing. As a consequence, for instance, we know little about the character's daily activity, the relationship with his anonymous retainers is chiefly understood in heroic terms and the description of feelings is often sketchy. However, Beowulf's outstanding qualities will not prevent him from undergoing human suffering, getting older or dying. Furthermore, some attitudes rather close to fear may be detected in the hero's behaviour, especially at those moments when he becomes aware of his vulnerability. A brave Germanic warrior should never fear for his life, but it is not always easy for Beowulf to live up to the great demands which the heroic code makes upon him.

Thus, for instance, we may stop to think about the reasons that impel Beowulf to cut off dead Grendel's head after slaying his mother (p.100-1). In contrast to previous fights, this has been a difficult ordeal for the hero; the monster has been about to stab him with her dagger. Ogilvy and Baker (1984:64) explain this violent movement in psychological terms and relate it to Beowulf's human nature:

... Rage is a natural reaction to a bad fright. Beowulf had struck his last blow against Grendel's mother in almost hopeless desperation (*aldres orwena*, despairing of life, line 1565). The blow that decapitates Grendel is a release of this pent-up terror. Nowhere else do we see more clearly that Beowulf is a mortal man—not a fearless demigod—than in this passage. For such a man courage is more often the conquest of fear than the absence of it.

Until this moment, the hero had not found real enemies for him, but Grendel's mother certainly puts his courage to the test. The idea that, in this way, Beowulf manages to check the triumph of his own anxiety is quite attractive, since it allows to include an element of human weakness in the hero's personality—potential fear, at least—without depriving him of his heroic status.

In my opinion, however, the most illuminating insights into the question of Beowulf's fallibility can be obtained by paying attention to the character's position with regard to the Christian values in the poem. I am not really concerned here with the old discussion whether Beowulf is a Christian hero or not. Nevertheless, it is my belief that the results derived from analyzing attitudes and tendencies from this perspective may help us to account for the hero's troubled relationship with his environment.

At some points within the poem, Beowulf seems to show some reluctance to fully acknowledge divine intervention in his deeds, and this is particularly so after they have already taken place. Occasional inconsistencies may betray that Beowulf's main trust should be located in his own might rather than in any external influence. It is as if the hero, proud of his prowess, did not want to share praise for his success with anyone else. Thus, God is referred to just in passing in Beowulf's account to Hygelac about his adventures among the Danes; the stress is mainly on personal reputation. In Tolkien's words (1977: 43), "Hrothgar is consistently portrayed as a wise and noble monotheist", whereas "Beowulf refers sparingly to God, except as the arbiter of critical events, and then principally as *Metod*, in which the idea of God approaches nearest to old Fate". Moreover, when Beowulf does refer to God, he often tends to bridge the gap between human and divine power. In this unorthodox vein, the dying hero asks God to replace him as the lord of his people: "Now that I have given my old life in barter for the hoard of treasure, do ye henceforth supply the people's needs,—I may stay here no longer" (p.160).

Beowulf seems to place his role as a king of the Geatish people on the same level as God's sovereignty over mankind. However, this should not lead us to accuse Beowulf of hubris; such an inference would necessarily prove partial. In a work in which both Christian and pagan values are frequently mixed up even in narratorial comment, the description of the character's personality from just one of these codes would not be consistent with a comprehensive interpretation of the poem as a whole. I prefer to draw the conclusion that Beowulf misconstrues man's relationship with divinity; therefore, it may be argued that this is not so much a matter of overbearing pride as a matter of misjudgement. And, according to my reading of the outcome of the poem, it should be understood in terms of a more general lack of penetration that pervades the episode of Beowulf's fight with the dragon and the hero's subsequent death.

In the middle of the celebrations that follow Beowulf's victory over Grendel, before the attack of his vengeful mother, the poet stops to moralize on the importance of

“understanding” and “forethought of mind”: “The Creator guided all the race of men, as he still does now. Wherefore understanding, forethought of mind, is best in every way. Much shall he experience of good and evil, who here, in these troublous times, long makes the earth his dwelling-place” (p.74).

The point made by this gnomic passage is mainly that we should not rejoice too much in our moments of joy, since prosperity does not last forever. It is taught by human experience that good and evil quickly succeed each other; this dialectic movement is depicted in the poem as an inherent characteristic of the unstable heroic world. The omniscient poet enjoys a more general perspective of the events than his characters and it is for this reason that happy scenes are usually accompanied by some kind of reference –a direct statement or an allusive jarring note– to prospective degradation. For instance, the passage on the building of Heorot, which is looked upon as a sign of the prosperity of the Danes under Hrothgar, includes a hint at its eventual destruction out of the evils of marriage policies: “Nor was the time yet near at hand that cruel hatred between son-in-law and father-in-law should arise, because of a deadly deed of violence” (p. 24).

Against this background of constant anticipation, farsightedness becomes an essential condition for wise judgement. A character’s decisions are to be praised when they go beyond the carefree “now and here” to allow for the demands of future –and probably less favourable– situations. In such personalized forms of power as those we find in the Germanic world, the necessity for prudence manifests itself most dramatically in the figure of the social and political leader. His behaviour is not just a matter of strictly individual choice; it will also have an immediate effect on the lives of many others. Heremod’s depravity (p.66; 107-9) probably constitutes the clearest example within the poem of strength and courage put to wrong use by a bad king; the Danish tyrant forgets about the binding obligations of the *comitatus* and even kills his own men. Hrothgar draws attention to Heremod’s excessive delight in his welfare and how “in his folly he himself thinks it will never end” (p.108); the old monarch warns Beowulf not to make the same mistake.

The poet takes pains to put Beowulf’s performance as a king into the context of Germanic leadership. The so-called digressions are scattered with examples of treachery, intrigue and kindred crime, which are presented as the usual methods of satisfying one’s hunger for power. In contrast, Beowulf is not fond of power; he even rejects Hygd’s offer to ascend the throne after Hygelac’s death (p.140). And when the disturbing circumstances eventually lead him to rule over the Geats, the hero’s policy will always be shaped by his willingness to respond to the interests of his people. In this sense, Heremod and Beowulf represent opposite poles. However, some similarity may be found between the conduct of both kings in the fact that, just as Heremod unwisely clings to transient prosperity out of evil pride, Beowulf’s generosity seems to prevent him from discerning the likely effects of creating a situation of apparent harmony based exclusively on his indisputable superiority.

Very little is told about the events that take place in the long reign of Beowulf before the dragon’s attack. This is a period of peace and happiness for the Geatland and, it is assumed, there is hardly any material of enough heroic significance for the poet to sing of. Beowulf, in his double role of gift-giver and protector, provides for his people’s material needs and shields them from any external danger; his legendary figure suffices to keep

potential enemies at bay. In his dying speech, the Geatish king counts this among his virtues: "I have ruled over this people fifty winters; there was not one of the kings of neighbouring tribes who dared encounter me with weapons, or could weigh me down with fear" (p.157). As a result, the social group we find in the last part of the poem is mainly made up of whole generations of Geats that have grown up unacquainted with the violent reality of the Germanic world and, in more general human terms, with the fact that joy is often followed by sorrow. In the middle of this illusion, the dragon arrives to shed light on the abnormal nature of the situation.

As soon as the bad news is broken to him, Beowulf remembers his heroic past as a monster-killer and makes up his mind to carry out a single-handed combat against the dragon. The fierce intruder has come to menace his people's security, and it is his duty to provide solutions for any problem that may arise in his kingdom. When the time to fight has finally arrived, Beowulf asks his retainers to remain as mere observers: "Watch on the barrow, ye warriors in your armour, defended by coats of mail, which of us two can endure wounds best, after the desperate onslaught. That is not your affair, nor a possibility for any man, save for me alone, to put forth his power against the monster, and do heroic deeds" (p.147).

An interesting relationship may be established between Beowulf's active attitude and Hrothgar's wait-and-see policy at the beginning of the poem. The old Danish king patiently bears his grief and waits for help; it is then that Beowulf comes up and does away with the menace embodied by Grendel. Hrothgar's passivity is clearly not an example of heroic behaviour, but, at least, it reveals some sort of adequate assessment on the old king's part. He is conscious that there is nothing he can do to fight Grendel and acts accordingly. In contrast, Beowulf scores high in heroism but falls short of the minimum requirements of common sense; he absolutely ignores the possible effects of his decision. It could be argued against such a statement that applying unheroic values does not make any sense within the context of a heroic poem; however, it is my opinion that appreciations in this direction are perfectly consistent with the work of a poet that praises judgement and forethought of mind. My words should not be misunderstood; heroic death in battle is indeed the best ending for a warrior's life. In this respect, Alexander (1973: 39) points out that "Beowulf's desire to fight the dragon alone, however tragic in its consequences, is necessary and admirable in a hero." However, the old man's responsibilities as a king ought to take precedence over his heroic side. From this perspective, the problem becomes mainly a matter of wrong priorities. This conduct should not be looked upon as a sign of Beowulf's selfishness. He certainly believes that the decision to fight alone, which comes so naturally to his mind, corresponds to what a wise king should do in order to help his people. In attempting to kill the dragon, Beowulf acts out of generosity; heroic achievement is given only secondary importance.

A heroic death, though, would have proved satisfactory on condition that Beowulf had previously made judicious use of past prosperity to get things ready for his absence. But the old king seems to behave as if that prosperity were to last forever; the outcome of the poem will provide clear evidence against that assumption. Let us take a look at Alexander's suggestion (1973: 31-2) that we may interpret Beowulf's death by drawing attention to the fact that he has nobody to fight on his behalf:

... Beowulf dies not because he is old, still less because he is (as some critics would say) too greedy for gold, but because, now that he is king, no one will fight for him. In all his previous encounters (and this includes the fights with men as well as monster-fights) he is fighting *for* a lord and the lord's people: he volunteers to serve. In his last fight he himself has become lord: he fights for his people, but his people will not fight for him. Had not Wiglaf come to help him he would have died without having killed the dragon. The intervention of Wiglaf produces a resolution: both monster and hero are killed. But humanity, the society of the Geats, now faces complete destruction. The heroic society depends upon the honouring of mutual obligations between lord and thane.

Alexander's description of the state of affairs at the end of the poem is quite accurate, but some objections may be raised as to its explanatory power. What I find particularly relevant is not so much Beowulf's forced loneliness itself as the causes which have led to that negative situation. Beowulf has not been able to train an appropriate successor prepared to occupy his place on the Geatish throne after his death. Excessive protection is Beowulf's predominant characteristic as a king; the overwhelming protagonism of the leader prevents his people from shifting for themselves. This lack of personal development is best exemplified by the cowardly attitudes of Beowulf's retainers during the king's fatal fight with the dragon. Ironically enough, it is precisely at the only moment when the hero is in real need of help when he is abandoned by all his followers but one; his kindness and generosity are answered with a plain violation of the principles of the *comitatus*. When Beowulf was a young prince fighting in favour of a foreign king, his warriors were willing to die for his lord. The circumstances are now radically different. Through his paternalistic government, Beowulf has functioned as the unconscious agent of an overall reexamination of values among the carefree Geats; the heroic code has been replaced by a more relaxed set of beliefs that commends the preservation of one's life. It may be argued that, in some measure, this is a more modern society than the one we could find in Hygelac's days.

Nevertheless, the impending catastrophe is understood in its true terms when we come to realize that this new society will need to comply, sooner or later, with the same old structures of the Germanic world. Beowulf leaves his people in a situation in which this is not possible; they have been deprived of the possibility of self-defence within a system that makes war the order of the day. For example, we know that Beowulf becomes the king of his people after Heardred, Hygelac's son, is killed by the Swedes (p.140). We may wonder why Onela, the Swedish king, allows Beowulf to ascend the throne. Is Onela afraid of Beowulf's renowned qualities? It is implied that, but for Beowulf's reputation among neighbouring peoples, the Swedes would have conquered the Geatland then. The impressive figure of the hero may delay the effects of these hostilities but, in a Germanic context, we can take it for granted that they are neither forgotten nor forgiven; Beowulf himself takes cunning revenge on the Swedes for Heardred's death, which calls for a fierce response as soon as this is made possible by circumstances. The messenger that carries the news of Beowulf's death to his people sketches out the feuds which the Geats maintain with other peoples by making reference to their historical background; and the stress is mainly on the Swedes, from whom a devastating attack is expected:

That is the feud and enmity, the deadly hatred of men, according to which the people of the Swedes will attack us, as I have no doubt, when they learn that our lord is dead. It was he who in the past guarded against enemies our wealth and kingdom—the bold shield-warriors after the fall of mighty men—advanced the people’s welfare and furthermore did deeds of valour (p.169-70)

Beowulf possesses first-hand knowledge of this complex network of conflict and discord, but he never seems to realize that his death would certainly reopen Pandora’s box. When trying to protect his people from the dangers of the Germanic world—and ultimately from the dragon—, what he does is rather to hurl them directly into the hands of the enemy. Howe (1989: 172) connects Beowulf’s failure with his vain attempt to bring peace to this violent universe: “If Beowulf attempts the impossible, it is not in fighting the dragon by himself but rather in holding to some vision of peace across the north. For there is neither the force of national identity nor the authority of religious belief to maintain peace after his death.”

Beowulf, carried away by his good intentions, proves to be incapable of understanding the frailty of the peaceful harmony he has provided for his people. A truly tragic dimension is activated within the poem when we see the old king die with the idea in his mind that, by killing the dragon even to the cost of his own life, he has managed to save his people.

The issue may become even more pathetic when compared with previous sections of the poem from which Beowulf emerges as an accomplished political analyst, highly familiar with the key questions of his time. A good example is to be found in his assessment of Hrothgar’s decision to betroth his daughter Freawaru to an enemy prince; Beowulf foreshadows the adverse consequences of that measure (p.123-6) by reproducing, broadly speaking, the same elements that we can find in the King Finn episode (p.74-8). In the same way as Hrothgar fails to foresee the dangerous frailty of his agreement with the Heathobards, old Beowulf will not be fully aware of the consequences of his death. Both Hrothgar and Beowulf firmly believe that, by marrying his daughter to Ingeld or by fighting against the dragon, they are acting wisely in favour of their people. There seems to be some kind of unconscious rejection on their part to acknowledge the seriousness of the risks they take. In plain language, we may argue that they cannot see the wood for the trees. It is interesting to observe how both kings are able to anticipate the negative implications of the other’s policy but remain blind when it is their own interests that are involved. We can draw the appealing conclusion that this apparent paradox—and Beowulf’s decision-making in general— should be explained on the basis of the inevitable deficiencies of human understanding.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to two aspects of the poem which acquire additional nuances of meaning when considered in the light of the reading proposed in this essay: Beowulf’s misinterpretation of the hoard and his incapacity to fight with swords.

There have been some attempts to regard greed as the main flaw of Beowulf’s spirit.² It is true that a modern reader may have some difficulty in understanding Beowulf’s insistence

² In this connection, consider the following excerpt from Goldsmith’s (1991/1962) well-known Christian interpretation of the poem:

on the rather secondary fact that he is battling for the hoard. A similar attitude may accompany the reading of the following lines, in which the dying king urges Wiglaf to show him part of the treasure:

Now quickly do thou go, beloved Wiglaf, and view the hoard under the gray rock, now that the serpent lies dead,—sleeps sorely wounded and bereft of treasure. Haste now, that I may see the ancient wealth, the golden store, may well survey the bright and curious gems; so that by reason of the wealth of treasure I may leave life more calmly and the people which I ruled over so long (p. 157)

However, we should be fair with Beowulf and acknowledge that his desire to accumulate riches goes hand in hand with his desire to work for the benefit of his people; there is no individual interest involved here. The Germanic king is expected to fulfil his obligations as a gift-giver, and this is just another sign of Beowulf's generosity. But, once more, the king suffers from lack of penetration. He unquestioningly thinks that the treasure will help his people to prolong the situation of prosperity that he has created; Beowulf's mistake is made evident by the fact that the treasure, which is brought back to earth, proves completely useless to the Geats. As pointed out by Schrader (1991: 493), "[t]he glory and valor shown in his climactic fight have ambiguous results, and the reburial of the treasure signifies the end of his tribe's glory, unlike Scyld's passing from the Danes".

As for the second aspect, the reader will probably find it difficult to forget how, out of his outstanding strength, Beowulf's sword snaps during his fight with the dragon: "Beowulf's old, grey-hued sword failed him in the fray. It was not granted him that iron blades should help him in the fight. The hand was too strong which, so I have heard, by its stroke overstrained every sword, when he bore to the fray a weapon wondrous hard; it was none the better for him" (p.154).

We may argue that, from a symbolic point of view, Beowulf's great difficulty in mastering his own power when fighting with a sword stands for his inability to adapt himself to the surrounding reality and, consequently, to evaluate appropriately the possible consequences of his actions. In this sense, the image of the broken blade sums up quite efficiently the points made in the body of this essay.

4. CONCLUSION

As Frye (1973: 36) aptly puts it, "the inevitability in the death of Beowulf, the treachery in the death of Roland, the malignancy that compasses the death of the martyred saint, are of much greater emotional importance than any ironic complications of *hybris* and *hamartia* that may be involved". Beowulf is a hero, and that is the overall impression that one generally gets from the reading of the poem beyond any possible shortcoming. However,

The poignancy of Beowulf's last hours is made greater by the hearer's knowledge that in bartering his life for gold, he has committed the dire folly of buying what is worthless at the greatest price. This is the supreme irony, that Beowulf, blinded by arrogance and desire for the treasure, exchanges the remainder of his length of days for short-lived possession of the dragon's gold. The deluded old man finds comfort in this preposterous bargain. (Goldsmith 1991: 116)

as I have tried to demonstrate here, looking at the character's weaknesses rather than at his heroic attributes may substantially enrich our experience of the work as a whole. By referring to the hero's human dimension, it is possible to shed some light on the weaker aspects of more traditional interpretations, which do not usually take into account Beowulf's difficulty to keep in touch with reality. And, for those who may feel unmoved by the elevated doings of an archaeological king and warrior, there is always an opportunity to ignore the heroic stuff and search the poem for the pre-existentialist figure of the human being tragically oblivious of what is going on around him.

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