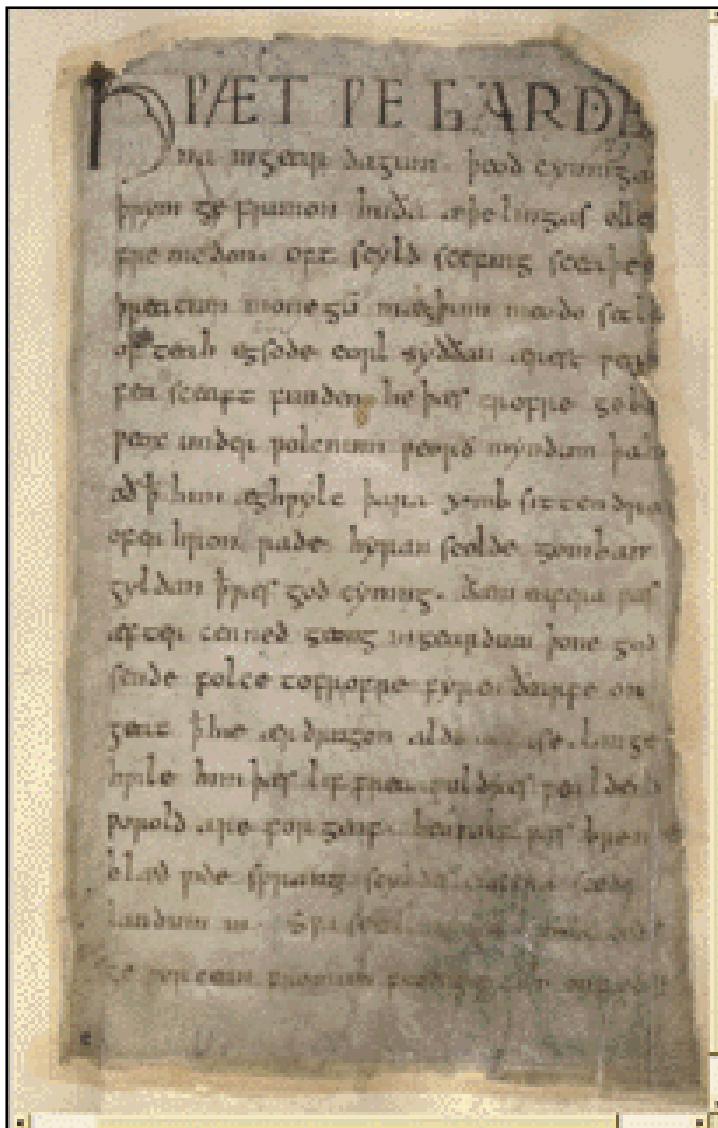


BEOWULF



Background Information



- Written c. 700 C.E.
- Author unknown
- Often called the beginning of English literature
- Written in what is now called Old English
- Only one complete original copy remains

Beowulf : The Epic Poem

- An EPIC is a long narrative poem which follows a hero's struggle against universal issues.
- The epic will contain 3 elements:
 - A larger-than life hero
 - The Supernatural
 - Elevated language style

Shield, son of Sheaf
Took many an enemy's chair



Elevated Language

Look for:

- **Kennings**
(two-word phrase for a common word)
ex: world-candle for sun or whale-road for ocean
- **Symbolism**
- **Highly descriptive passages**

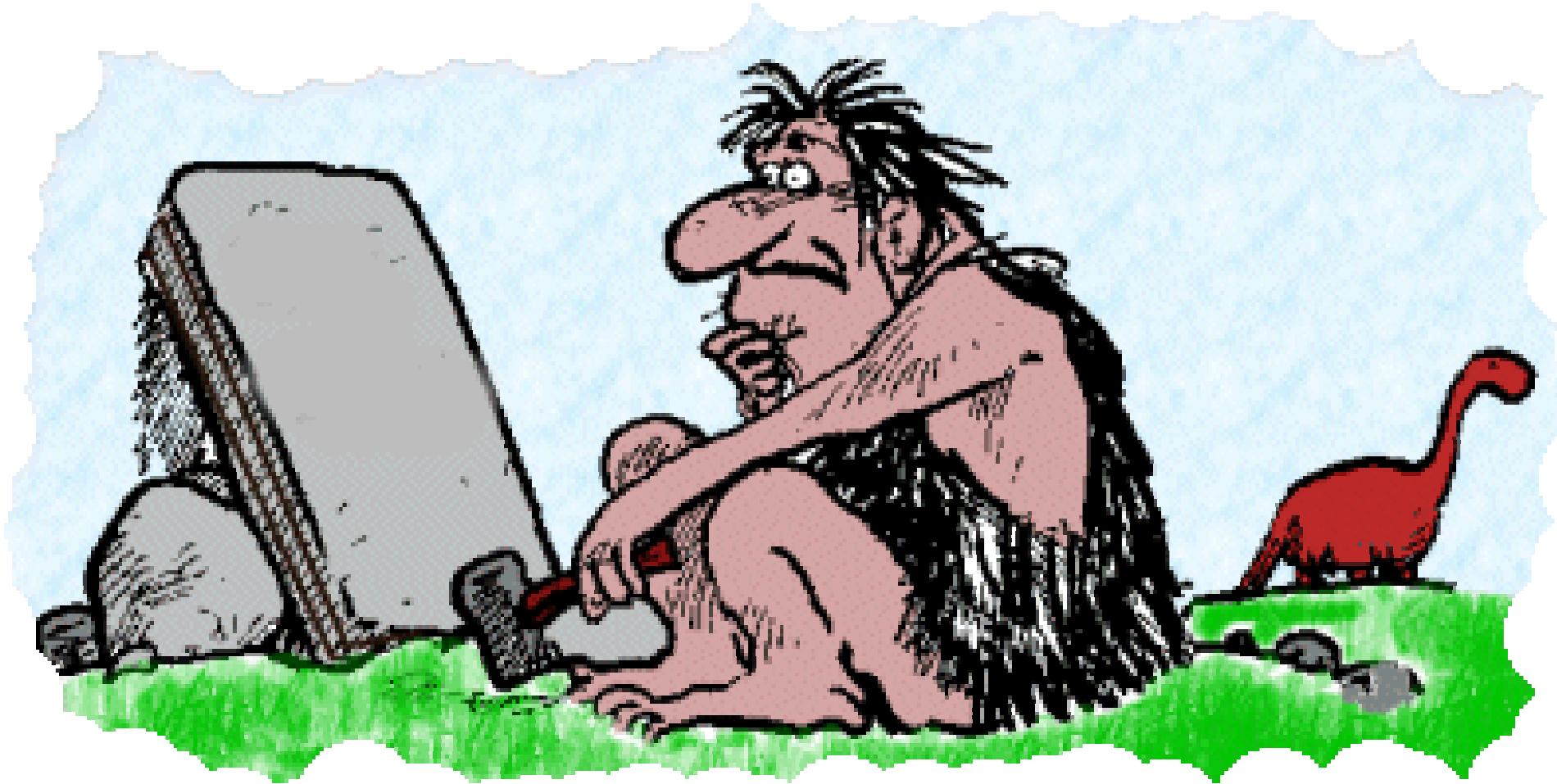
Other Epics

- ☒ Gilgamesh (Babylonian, unknown)
- ☒ The Odyssey (Greek, Homer)
- ☒ The Iliad (Greek, Homer)
- ☒ The Aeneid (Roman, Virgil)

Epics often tend to follow a similar pattern
in their plotlines.



But what was an aspiring author to do?



Especially if nobody can read !

Epics: An oral tradition



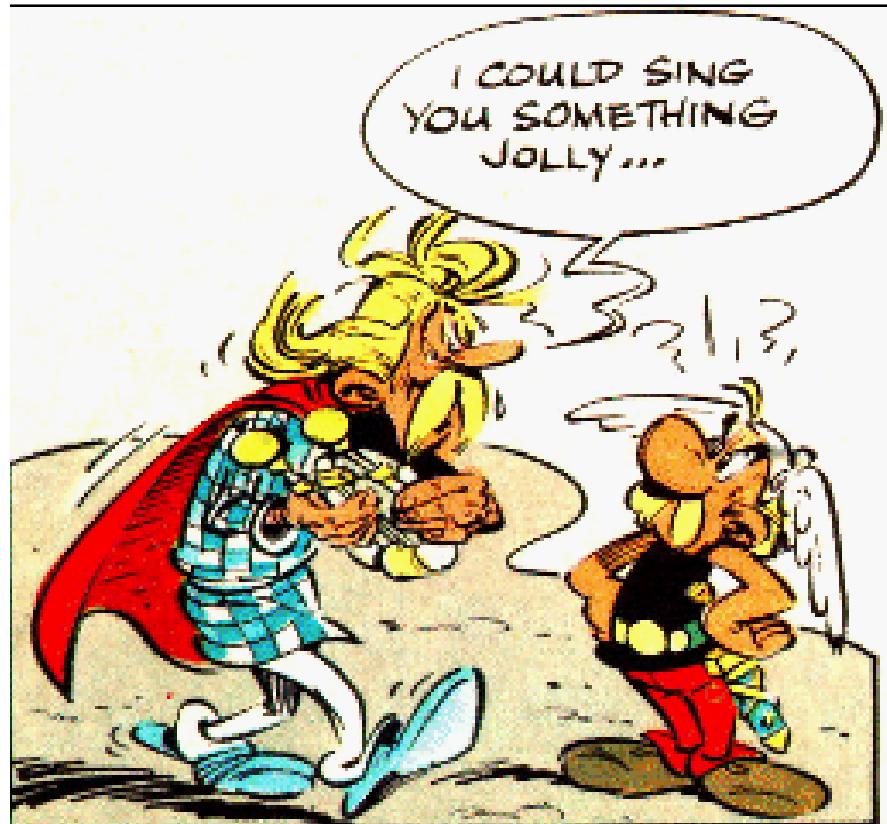
Many epics were not originally written down by their authors.

Instead, they were memorized and retold or sung by wandering entertainers.

- Some sections of epics were retold from time to time. It helped the storyteller learn the epic and also caught up any audience member who may have missed a part.



The Storytellers



These entertainers also served to bring news from other areas. Often, if a heroic deed had occurred in the area, it might be blended into the stories he told.

The Storytellers

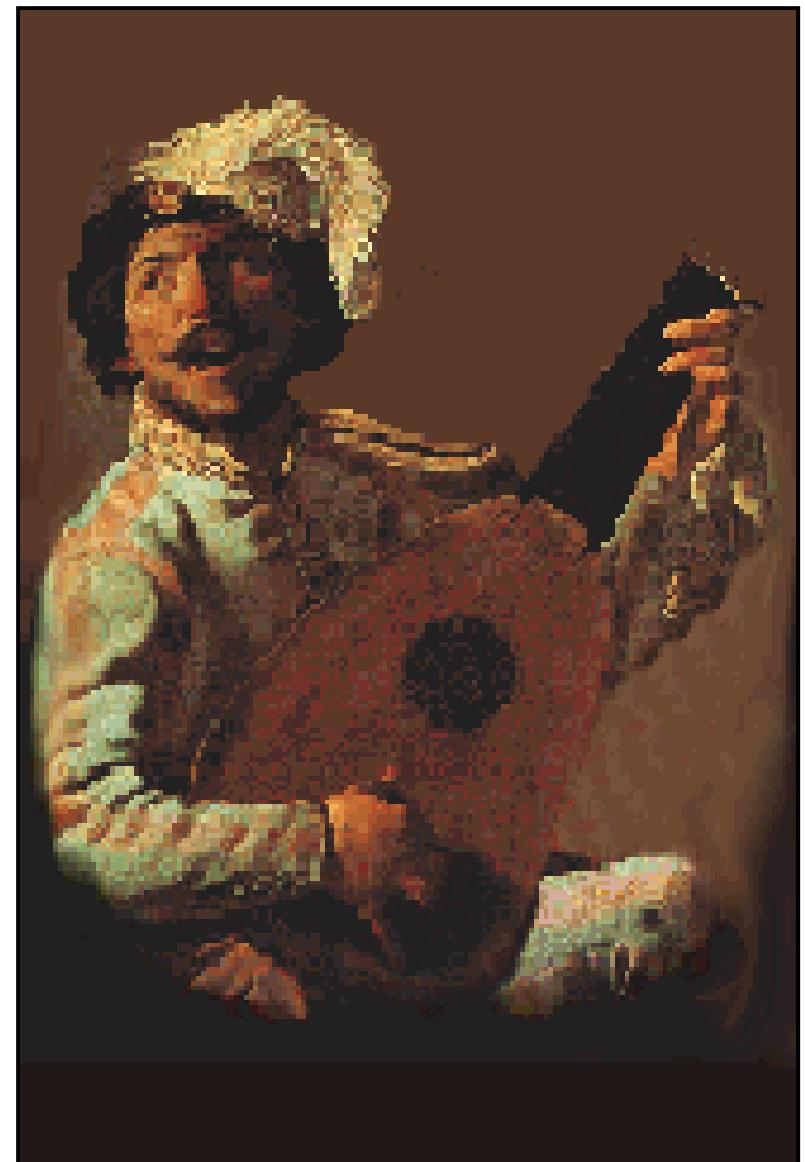
The names changed by area:

- Scop (pronounced shop) in Anglo-Saxon lands
- Troubadours in France
- Minnesingers in Germany



Changing Stories

- Other influences also played a part in changing the epics.
- The text of Beowulf shows both Norse pagan belief and Christianity, often in the same line.
- This may have evolved as the storytellers encountered villages with different beliefs.



Writing it Down

When these stories which had been orally passed on were finally written down, they were also subject to many changes.

- Mistakes in translations
- Misunderstanding out-of-date slang
- Political correctness
- or even intentional changes in the text



Selective Editing

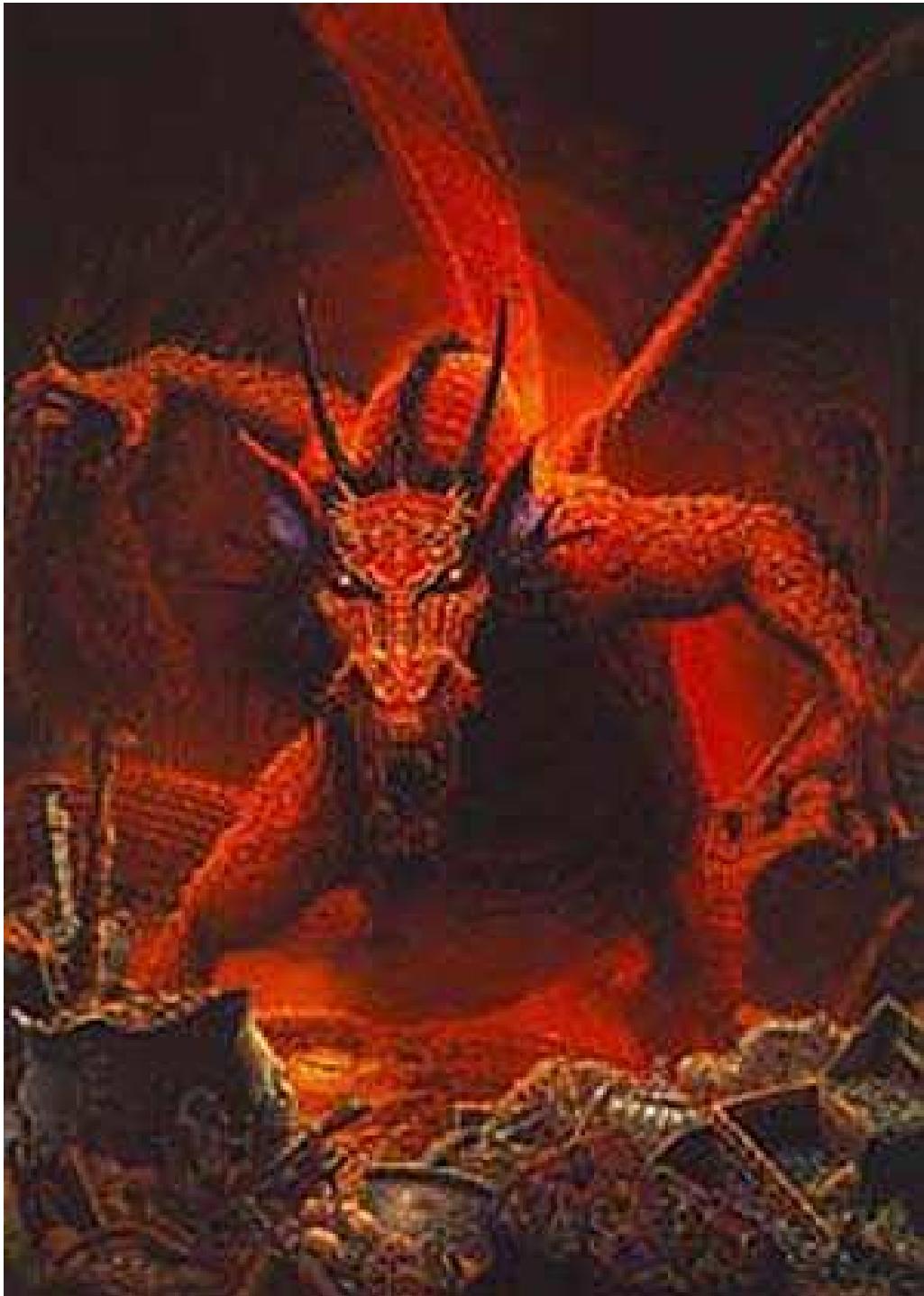
It all depended on
who did the writing
and their feelings
about the texts.



“Christianizing” the old text

- Some parts of **Beowulf** seem not to match the style of the rest of the text. Other areas seem to be as if a narrator feels the need to stop and make a comment. Much of these areas involve various comments and concepts of Christianity. It is likely that some monks, while copying texts, put in their own views about their work.





The Setting





Iberoc

The Mead Hall

- Social, governmental, emotional center of the village
- Mead = honey-based wine

Beowulf: The Epic Hero



An epic hero
must face
challenges and
opponents that
the ordinary
person could not
handle.



HOWEVER...

There is often a character flaw or other weakness
which brings problems to the epic hero.

Top 10 Problems Women Have About Dating Beowulf

- 10. Hangs out with dragons.
- 9. Chain mail rips up bed sheets.
- 8. Throws his swords around apartment.
- 7. Wakes up in the middle of the night screaming "She's gonna eat me!"
- 6. Carries a **long** knife to compensate for feelings of inadequacy.
- 5. Only washes twice a year.
- 4. Experiences mead-induced delusions of grandeur and heroism.
- 3. Smells like Grendel breath.
- 2. Freezer full of dragon meat.
- 1. Leaves the toilet seat up.

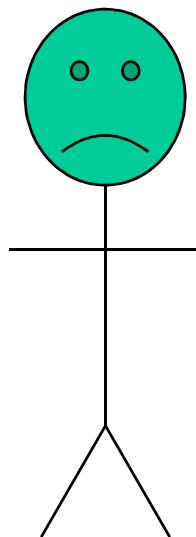
Unferth

- Man vs. Man



Staznoski Principle

- To prove he is truly larger than life, authors often introduced other characters who were fated to die.



Sound familiar?



CURT DANHAUSER
1996

Ensign Johnson suddenly comes to the alarming realization that he is the only red-shirt in the landing party.

Grendel

- Hybrid:
 - man vs. man
 - man vs. supernatural
- Most human-like of the supernatural fights



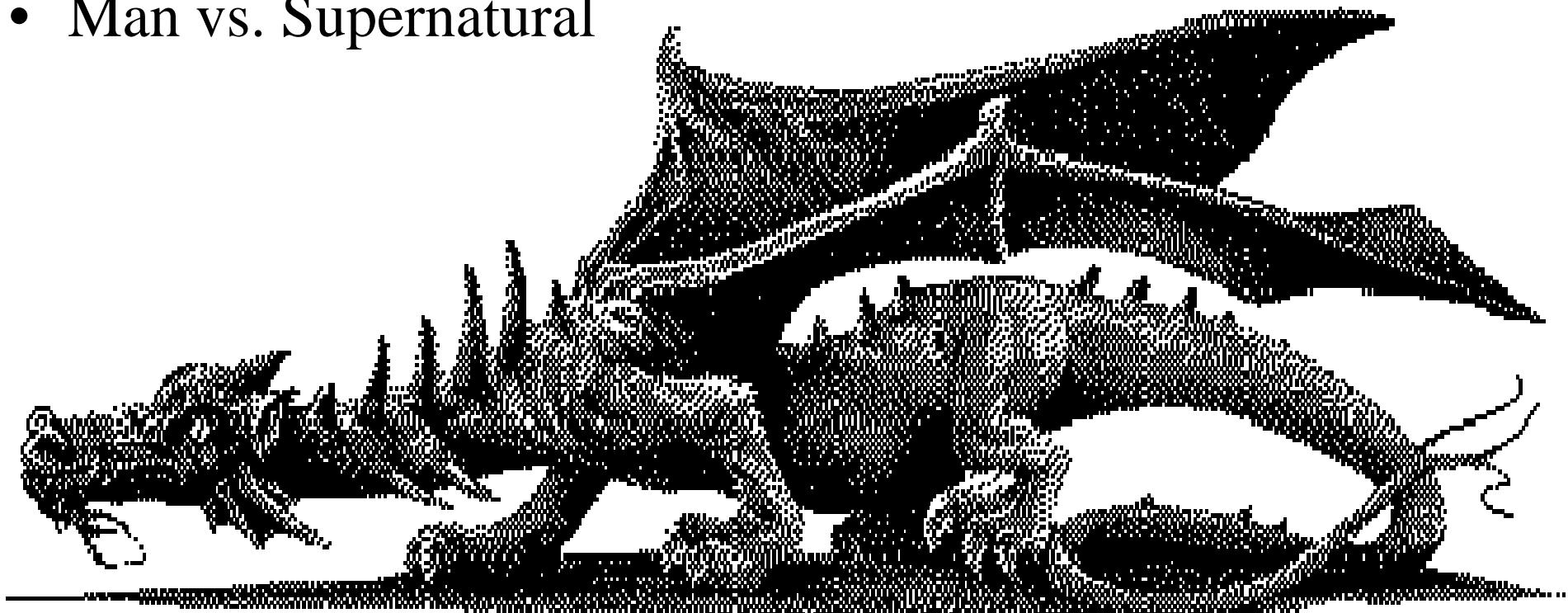
Grendel's Mother

- Less “human” than son
- An older and more animal-like evil
- Before Beowulf can even battle her, he must face the water creatures



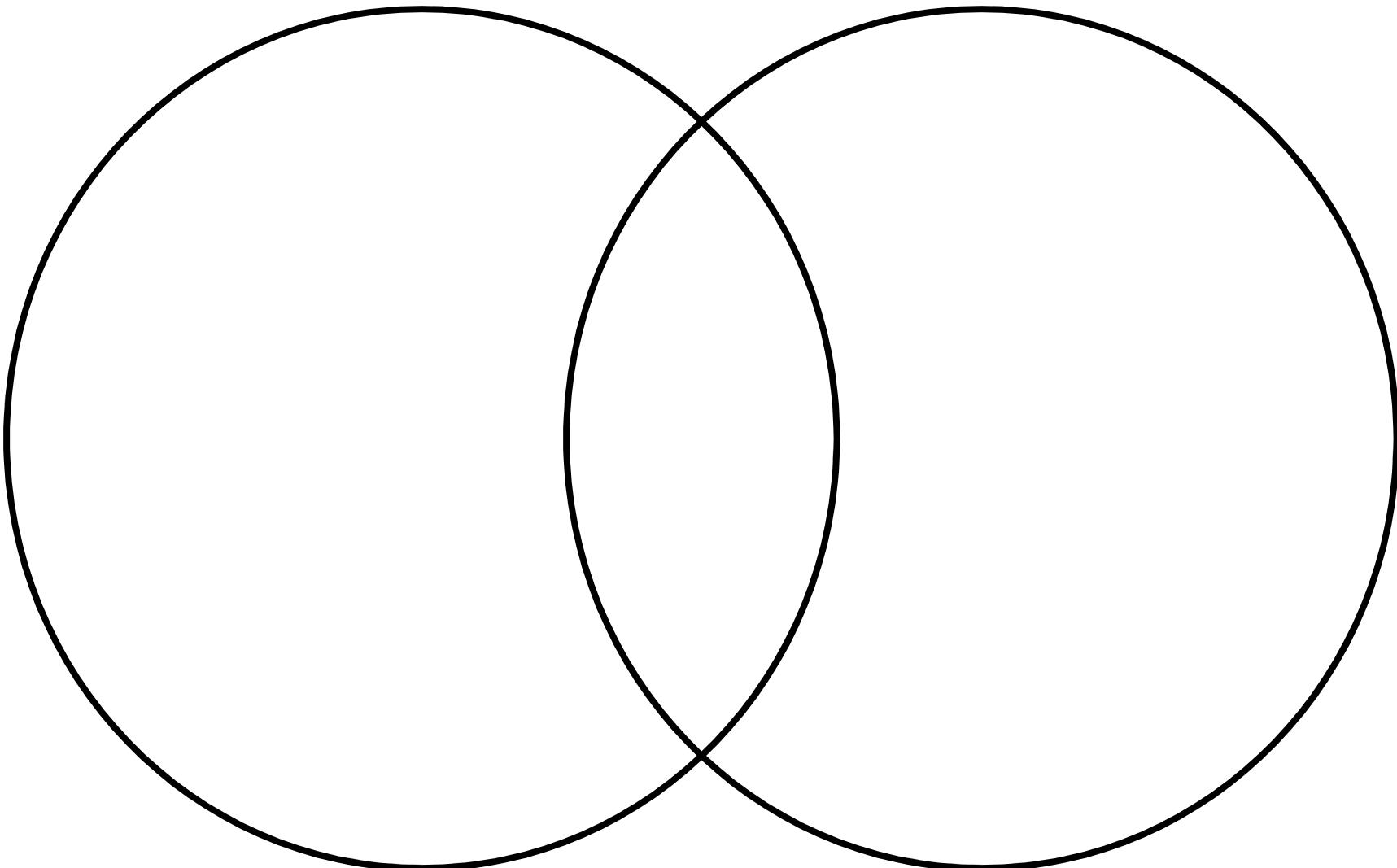
The Dragon

- The oldest and most base form of evil
- Referred to as the worm
- Man vs. Supernatural





Age vs. Youth: Norse Life





Let the journey begin...

