

Grendel Essay

In *On Moral Fiction* Gardner states:

It is a fact of life that noble ideas, noble examples of human behavior, can drop out of fashion though they remain as real and applicable as ever—can simply come to be forgotten, plowed under by “progress”...

I agree with Tolstoy that the highest purpose of art is to make people good by choice... (106-7)

So, then what is Gardner’s purpose in writing *Grendel*?

The lovable little monster is funny, sarcastic, witty, very observant, and not a little disappointed. While trying to make sense of this crazy, mixed-up world he comes up with (or dreams up) theories that attempt to make sense of everything. We do this, too. If we didn’t we would be overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of experience every single day (and sometimes we are!).

But that not so lovable monster also eats people! He also loves to spread mayhem, chaos. He loves to shatter others belief systems. He feels glee in his paradoxical creation of destruction.

So, what then?

It is *my* theory that Grendel is a character type that represents modern humans: lonely, disconnected, inundated with stimuli, frustrated with Mom... you know the routine. But most importantly, for John Gardner, is that we are most likely philosophically unprepared for the existential problems that we must face. If we approach the world without philosophical “armor,” then we are likely to revert to a Hobbesian “dog-eat-dog” mentality. But at the same time, this philosophical “armor” can constrict as well as protect: we can be limited by our theories, become close-minded, unyielding, unwilling to deal with the demands of a modern technologized world.

These two extremes are both dangerous. How do we walk the “razor’s edge,” so to speak, and hold on to our sanity and our humanity?

Other forms of the same question: How can we be flexible and grow while yet being strong in our convictions? Can we be strong enough to change our own understanding when we are confronted with new and persuasive information/ideas? Why should we be good by choice when the universe seems so lonely?

Write an essay (3-4 pages) which answers this question. You must refer to *Grendel* in your text as well as at least 3 other thinkers/philosophers that we have covered in class: this includes, John Donne, Emerson, Hawthorne, Hobbes, Nietzsche, etc. You may choose to reference more, but the goal is to be clear, not exhaustive. If you would like to include more sources, you may. Please include a Works Cited page and parenthetical citations (MLA Style).