J.R.R. Tolkien – The poem is “essentially balance, an opposition of endings and beginnings. In simple terms, it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and old age, first achievement and final death.”

If examining the poem’s binary structure...

• Where would a logical division fall?
• What might the meaning of the poem be?
II. TRIPARTITE STRUCTURE

Three Distinct Sections – each concludes with the confrontation of a monster

• Grendel
• Grendel’s mother
• The dragon

If examining the poem’s tripartite structure...

• What is revealed about the progress of the hero’s journey?
• How does this reflect Anglo-Saxon ideals?
• What might the poem’s meaning be?
According to scholars who advocate interlace structure, the main plot is interwoven with digressions, narrative episodes, and lays. If examining the poem’s interlace structure...

- How does this reflect what we’ve seen in Anglo-Saxon culture?
IV. MAGNETIC STRUCTURE

In this structural view, EVERYTHING reflects the hero and his journey.
The hero is THE subject of the poem, and everything is drawn to him like metal to a magnet.
Everything in the poem provides an opportunity for comparison or contrast with the hero, revealing his nature and character.
V. RING STRUCTURE

Yep, we already know what ring structure is and what it does, SO... we must ask ourselves: What meaning can be derived from examining the parallels created by the ring structure of the poem?
A. Panegyric for Scyld
B. Scyld's funeral
C. History of Danes before Hrothgar
D. Hrothgar's order to build Heorot

- Grendel's unexpected night attack
  - Sea voyage to Denmark
- First fight
  - Greeting by hosts
    - Hrothgar
    - Unferth
    - Wealhtheow
  - Fight with Grendel (see Diagram 3)

- Interlude (Great banquet, nightfall)
  - Grendel's dam's unexpected night attack
    - Fight with Grendel's Dam (see Diagram 4)
  - Banquet, nightfall
  - Farewell to hosts
  - Sea voyage home
  - Reception in Geatland

- Third fight
  - Dragon's unexpected night attack
    - Fight with Dragon (see Diagram 5)
  - D. Beowulf's order to build his barrow
  - C. History of Geats after Beowulf
    - "messenger's prophecy"
  - B. Beowulf's funeral
  - A. Eulogy for Beowulf