Finally, some columnists chose to focus on the music and the production. Grendel has a libretto by Taymor and J. D. McClatchy based on John Gardner’s 1971 novel of the same title, which retells the 8th-century epic Beowulf.

Critical opinions differed. The New York Sun described the production as, like its subject, a “monstrous and magnificent” work, while the Philadelphia Inquirer wrote, “Grendel’s megalomaniac vision is too much for the stage to accommodate.” The Philadelphia Daily News agreed, saying that the show’s musical and dramatic specificity “has its patches of generic modernist lurching, offset by considerable epic excitement.”

The Newark Star Ledger said, “The work has a compelling middle, but its long, exhausting story is not without its flaws.” The New York Times reported that the “structureless” libretto was “not always convincing,” and noted that the production was “too-widely reported technical hitches and consequent delays in presenting the work’s world.”

Critical opinion differed rather widely. The New York Times thought that the role of the Dragon, sung by mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, “is a fearlessly engaging part for Graves, who, according to all reports, was excellent.” The Washington Post thought that while Act I was unconvincing, “Act II got through it, summoning power when called for and inhabiting the part of the behemoth. The dollar behemoth. The rotating edifice to the left for the first scene was, truth be told, a behemoth of gadgets; Garden’s clashes deliberately; confronted with the wall, Julie Taymor, following affecting acting moments, leapt to the right side of the behemoth. The behemoth grudgingly advised Grenel on the wherefores of the wall.”

The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote, “in comparison to so many well-made, well-acted, and well-conceived operas that have crossed the stage of late, Grendel is the set for the debut run at Lincoln Center Festival. It seems like much attention as American composer Elliot Goldenthal’s Grendel opera opens in New York, with abandon, even while wearing a body-encasing monster outfit.”

The New York Sun said that “the music was captivating.” The Washington Post thought that the music was “exciting and imaginative” and that “the results are magnificent — one stunning scene after another, and nothing out of place.”

The paper added that the role of the Dragon, sung by mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, “cruelly keeps her singing in a chesty, almost baritonal range, before leaving her to soar above the wall.”

The Washington Post thought that while Act I was unconvincing, “Act II got through it, summoning power when called for and inhabiting the part of the behemoth. The dollar behemoth. The rotating edifice to the left for the first scene was, truth be told, a behemoth of gadgets; Garden’s clashes deliberately; confronted with the wall, Julie Taymor, following affecting acting moments, leapt to the right side of the behemoth. The behemoth grudgingly advised Grenel on the wherefores of the wall.”