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*Beowulf*

Anglo-Saxon literature is commonly a Heroic or epic poem written with religious elements. *Beowulf* is a fictional Anglo-Saxon poem that was written by an unknown poet between the 7th and 10th centuries. This poem tells the story of a young man, Beowulf, who is strong, courageous, and gracious. Hrothgar, the king of the Danes has called him from his homeland Geatland to Denmark to fight Grendel. Grendel is the monster that lives near the mead hall, Heorot. He lives in the swamp and has been terrorizing Hrothgar's warriors for twelve winters. Grendel comes into the rooms of the sleeping soldiers and smashes thirty men and takes their bodies. Beowulf is a strong, courageous, and gracious warrior who overcomes many challenges, and obstacles, and in return proves he is loyal to the society without failing his culture.

Beowulf uses his strength in many ways to overcome challenges while still staying true to his values. The story tells of his strength in three main ways. Hrothgar calls on Beowulf to defeat Grendel because the monster kept going into Heorot and attacking and eating his soldiers in their sleep. Beowulf's strength is shown in an extraordinary and unnatural way when he is fighting Grendel. Beowulf is able to hold Grendel's claws back and use his bare hands to rip off Grendel's arm. The author proves this when he writes, "And was instantly seized himself, claws/ Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm." (189-190). The second way Beowulf proves his strength is when he kills Grendel's mother. His strength and extraordinary abilities are proven when

Beowulf dives down into the bottomless, fiery lake and is not burned alive. Any other human being would be killed instantly, so this helps prove his unnatural abilities. Beowulf is able to defeat her with the Runting sword and armor that protects him, which was made by giants. He then cuts off Grendel's head, takes it with him, and gives it to the king. The third and final way Beowulf proves his strength is when he kills the Dragon. Beowulf fights the Dragon with the Nageling sword. However, the sword breaks. He was able to kill the Dragon, but he was bitten on the neck with the dragon's poisonous fangs. Even though he was wounded, he still had the physical strength to slay the dragon. The author proves this when they state "The wound/ In his neck began to swell and grow;/ He could feel something stirring, burning/ in his veins, a stinging venom" (634-637).

Beowulf is presented courageously in various ways in this poem, especially through his actions. One of the first ways Beowulf shows that he is a courageous hero is in his approach to fighting Grendel. Almost every warrior tried to escape Grendel by going far from Herot because Grendel would hunt them in their sleep. The ones that would not flee would be slaughtered. This is demonstrated in the text when the author states, "Then each warrior tried/ to escape him, searched for rest in different/ Beds, as far from Herot as they could find/ Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept" (86-890). Most people would run away from such terrible danger. When Beowulf was called to defeat Grendel, he confronted the monster and completed the job. Another way Beowulf shows his courage is when he fights Grendel and does not use any type of armory or weapon. "But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,/ Let them lie waiting for the promises your words/ May make" (105-106).

There are many acts of gratitude shown throughout the story and Beowulf solves many problems through his actions and kind gestures. Beowulf shows his graciousness by respecting

and honoring people. He respects Hrothgar, the Danish King who gave him the opportunity to fight Grendel. Beowulf also gives gifts and receives gifts. He is given a tower in his honor that has treasures and his ashes are buried in the walls. This is provided in the text when it states “The treasures they’d taken were left there, too,/ Silver and jewels buried in the sandy/ ground, back in the earth, again/ And forever hidden and useless to men”. (741-743). One of his kind gestures is when he returned the sword he attempted to use when fighting Grendel’s mother, but it was no use to him. Beowulf actions display his graciousness and even more specifically his loyalty.

Loyalty is important to Anglo Saxon Literature and Beowulf specifically because it is spread throughout the whole story line. Beowulf is seen as a loyal character because Hrothgar called him specifically to come defeat the monster. Beowulf persuades his soldiers to stay and help save the castle from Grendel. In the text, this is talking about when it states “Beowulf arose, with his men/ Around him, ordering a few to remain/ With their weapons, leading the others quickly/ Along under Herot’s steep roof into Hrothgar’s/ presence” (108-112).

Beowulf uses his loyalty to prove to society that he will not fail his culture and he does this by using his characteristics of being strong, courageous, and gracious. Beowulf proves his strength because he has an unnatural ability to fight and kill these monsters that no one else can defeat. He is very courageous and brave to face these horrendous monsters that are terrorizing people and are out for blood. He has a soft, kind side to him deep down that shows his gratitude and loyalty. He is gracious enough to return a sword that is useless to him instead of discarding it. He is loyal to his kingdom and is rewarded for his good deeds by receiving a tower in his honor that is celebrated. Beowulf’s character perfectly sums the Anglo-Saxon values of a loyal warrior and king who is willing to fight to the death to prove his loyalty, strength, and honor.

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