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Beowulf

The story *Beowulf* is an Old English heroic poem. It is considered the highest accomplishment in Old Literature. The setting starts at Mead Hall, Herot, located in Denmark. There is a disturbance of noise that a monster, Grendel, does not like. He has been terrorizing the Danes for the past twelve years. Beowulf, the protagonist from Geatland, comes to fight off Grendel and save the warriors; for the King, Hrothgar, while running into other obstacles along the way. Beowulf is praised for his accomplishments and becomes King of the Geats. Everyone loves his loyalty and him being a bigger than life hero. Beowulf as the epic hero of *Beowulf* saves the Danes from monsters, has ultimate powers, and lives out through the virtues of Wyrd, Lof, and Comitatus.

There are multiple interactions with monsters in Herot. The first monster Beowulf has to fight is Grendel. Grendel does not fight with weapons, so neither does Beowulf. This makes sure it is a fair battle. Beowulf fighting Grendel is shown with these lines, “And Grendel’s great teeth came together, / Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another / Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws, / Grasped at a strong- hearted wakeful sleeper / - And instantly seized himself, claws / Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.” (185-190). This tells us that Grendel tries to grab Beowulf, but then realizes how strong he is and is defeated. After Beowulf is done with Grendel, his mother comes back for revenge and kills Hrothgar’s closest friend. It states “Seeking vengeance, Grendel’s mother kills Hrothgar’s closest friend and advisor and takes the

severed arm of her son back to the fen. Because Beowulf is not present, she is able to do as she wishes. Hrothgar summons Beowulf for help.” (Canto 19). When Beowulf kills Grendel, he snaps his arm off and hangs it from the rafters, so Grendel’s mom steals the arm back after she kills Hrothgar’s friend. After fifty years of being King of Geatland, a dragon was going to attack his people, so Beowulf is called in once again to defeat the dragon. Before Beowulf fights the dragon, he foreshadows his death by saying, “I’d use no sword, no weapon, if this beast / Could be killed without it, crushed to death / Like Grendel gripped in my hands and torn” (491-499). Beowulf ends up defeating and getting defeated by the dragon. The dragon bites him in the neck, which leads to him dying of poison after the dragon dies.

Beowulf has supernatural powers. Beowulf kills Grendel by ripping his arm off with his bare hands and he has the ability to hold his breath underwater to fight and he does not burn when he dives into the fiery lake. Beowulf ripping Grendel’s arm off is stated with these lines, “And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder / Snapped, muscle and bone split / And broke. The battle was over,” (257-259). Grendel’s mom’s fiery lake is a symbol of hell and Beowulf survives it. This is known when it is said, “The water is filled with sea serpents and boils with blood.” (Canto 20-21) and, “He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone’s / Answer; the heaving water covered him / Over. For hours he sank through the waves;” (365-367). These are not human-like qualities. Weapons fail Beowulf in every battle. First, Grendel bewitches all the warriors' weapons, so they could not use them against him. When Beowulf fights Grendel’s mom his sword breaks. He has to take a giant’s sword he found on the wall to finish her. During the battle it seems that Beowulf is in trouble, “Discovered that no sword could slice her evil / Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless / Now when he needed it.” (395-397) and, “Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy / Sword, hammered by giants, strong / He drew it / From its

scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,” (429-430, 433-434). To defeat all the monsters, Beowulf has a strategy. Beowulf sacrifices a soldier to see how Grendel fights. The unknown author describes how Grendel kills a soldier while Beowulf sits there and watches. This shows he is willing to do anything to not lose and protect the soldiers. His strategy is an example of Lof. It takes bravery to do what he does.

The whole story of *Beowulf* is based on the Anglo-Saxon virtues of Wyrd, Lof, and comitatus. Beowulf lives through the concept of Wyrd which is fate and Lof which is fame. Wyrd is the reason Beowulf survives his first two battles. It is also the force that attracts him to kill monsters. Lof plays a big role because Beowulf has a large representation of being an epic hero. Hrothgar gives him attention by praising him after his kills and he speaks of his supernatural powers, which also gives him fame. Beowulf being cremated to ashes and buried in a tower with the dragon's treasure could be a different type of example of Lof. Comitatus is all about loyalty, bravery, and kinsmen ship. Beowulf is brave for wanting to take on monsters and the dragon that he knows will be his last through his final boast. Comitatus is demonstrated when Beowulf travels to a different country and slaughters the monsters for Hrothgar. This shows Beowulf's true friendship and loyalty to Hrothgar.

Overall, Beowulf is an epic hero by staying loyal and honest to Hrothgar. He is bigger than life because of his supernatural abilities. Without the help of Beowulf, the Danes would have not survived. Although weapons fail Beowulf, he still ends up winning. At the end Beowulf dies to the dragon, but it was for good cause and for the people he was loyal to. The Anglo-Saxon virtues reflect how the Danes and Geats live. Their virtues of Wyrd, Lof and Comitatus is the reason they think how they do.

Works Cited

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