

Tripp Wimberly

Mrs. Graning

English 11

Beowulf

Beowulf is the first written literature that came about in the Anglo-Saxon era. This poem takes place in the land of the Danes and Geats. Beowulf is the epic hero of the poem, and he is tasked with taking down the monsters to save the Danes and Geats. Beowulf becomes the king of the Geats for fifty years before his final battle, which leads him to his death. Beowulf is a prototype of an epic hero because of his larger than life achievements, his heroic status, and his embodiment of Anglo-Saxon virtues.

Beowulf has a record of defeating the greatest giants and monsters of the land, and the people go to him whenever trouble comes about. When Beowulf came to the Danes' aid, he boasted of the time when he banished all the giants of the world, and killed many other monsters. Beowulf greeted the Danes before his boast,

“ I drove Five great giants into chains, chased
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned,”(128-134).

Beowulf needed to boast his past achievements to show Hrothgar that he is worthy enough to fight this monster. Additionally, Hrothgar agreed to let Beowulf fight Grendel, and Beowulf tore off his arm, killing him in the mead hall. When the battle was over, the author stated,

“ The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
But wounded as he was could flee th his den,
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end
Of all his days,” (259-264).

Beowulf kills Grendel, and he hangs Grendel's arm in the mead hall as a trophy. Consequently, after Grendel's death, Grendel's mother seeked revenge, and she killed Hrothgar's closest friend. Hrothgar tells Beowulf to take care of Grendel's maker. Beowulf kills Grendel's mother with the giant sword. The Author tells of her death,

“ And struck with all the strength he had left,
Caught her in the neck and cut through it,
Broke bones and all. Her body fell
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
With her blood,” (437-441).

Beowulf was the hero once again, and he was praised with riches. Further, Beowulf is crowned King of the Geats, and after fifty years he comes upon a dragon. He makes his final boast before going and battling the dragon. Beowulf's battle was a difficult one, and the dragon's poisonous bite caught Beowulf's neck. His one loyal warrior stayed to help defeat the dragon. Before Beowulf's death, he takes his sword and splits the dragon's breast, “Quickly, he cut / The beast in half, slit it apart / It fell, their courage had killed it,” (627-629). Beowulf's final battle ended his life, but raised his loyal warrior's status to king. Although Beowulf's journey ended in death, His great achievements made him a hero to the Danes and Geats.

Beowulf was a well known person even before he came to help the Danes and Geats, and people looked at Beowulf as a hero. Before Beowulf became known to the Danes, he defeated giants and other monsters. This makes Beowulf a hero to his people. When he first appears to Hrothgar, he says, “ The days / Of my youth have been filled with glory,” (127-128). This helps Hrothgar believe that Beowulf is worthy enough to fight Grendel. Additionally, after Beowulf took down Grendel and his mother; the people of Herot cheered when he returned. The summarized conclusion of Canto 23 states, “ He is greeted with much rejoicing,”. Beowulf saves the day for the Danes, and he is seen as a great hero. Further, when returning to Geatland, Beowulf took the throne as king, and he ruled the throne fifty years before the awakening of the dragon. He was killed in the battle, but Beowulf’s heroic legacy never died. The Geats built a tower for his final resting place,

“ For ten long days they made his monument,
 Sealed his ashes in walls as straight
 And high as wise and willing hands
 Could raise them,” (735-738).

The Geats honor him as their saving hero, and his twelve bravest warriors rode telling stories of their great hero. Beowulf was a great hero who embodied the Anglo-Saxon virtues.

Beowulf embodied the Anglo-Saxon virtues of lof, comitatus, and wyrd. Beowulf chases after lof by defeating the monsters, and by bragging about killing them. According to Clark Beowulf offers to kill the monsters for honor, nobility, and a reward. Lof is an important virtue in Anglo-Saxon culture because it is their way of becoming immortal, since they don’t have an afterlife. Additionally, Beowulf uses the virtue of comitatus when he tells stories of past battles. Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he is dripping with his enemies’ blood. Furthermore, The author

uses *wyrd* when he is describing Beowulf's boast for his battle against the dragon. The author says "...And Beowulf uttered his final boast:" (483). The author uses the word final to indicate that this battle with the dragon would be the end of Beowulf's life.

Beowulf's great achievements, heroic status, and his embodiment of Anglo-Saxon virtues make him a prototype of an epic hero. Beowulf was seen as a noble hero to not only his people, but to the Danes as well. Beowulf gives people a good idea of what the Anglo-Saxons believed and practiced.