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## Beowulf

The epic poem *Beowulf*, written in Old English, stands as one of the most significant works of medieval literature. Set in Scandinavia, the narrative follows the legendary hero Beowulf as he confronts formidable enemies, such as the fearsome Grendel, Grendel's vengeful mother, and a dragon in his later years. These defeats of Grendel, his vengeful mother, and the dragon all reflect his skillfulness and bravery as a heroic warrior. Beowulf's actions reflect the values upheld by his society. Through his battles and leadership, Beowulf portrays the archetype of the epic hero, by showing the virtues of his bravery and honor, while also going into themes of mortality and the moral complexities of leadership, ultimately highlighting the duality of human strength and vulnerability.

Beowulf is a strong warrior by showing his values of courage, strength, honor serving as a symbol he learned from his society. The first event in which Beowulf symbolizes his heroic nature is through his fight with Grendel was a monstrous creature that terrorized the mead hall of Heorot, and he also attacked the warriors at night. Immediately upon hearing about Grendel's attacks on King Hrothgar's hall, Beowulf sailed to help King Hrothgar. His decision to fight Grendel without weapons symbolizes his confidence in himself and superhuman strength. Beowulf says, "I have heard that the monster's scorn of men / is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none. / Nor will I" (Lines 433–435). By the use of his bare hands, Beowulf chose to fight Grendel to show his belief in himself based on physical abilities. Beowulf

overcame Grendel in battle due to his strength. The poet describes just how Beowulf tore off Grendel's arm "The bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder / snapped, muscle and bone split / and broke" (Lines 814–816). The victory that Beowulf has gained over Grendel means that he is a hero who has fantastic strength—one capable of overpowering supernatural beings by pure, brute physical force. With the defeat of Grendel, an even bigger test awaits Beowulf in the form of Grendel's mother, who desired to avenge her son's death. This second battle shows Beowulf matching his strength with bravery and the readiness to incur deadly risks. Grendel's mother dwells in a dark, underwater lair; Beowulf does not show any reluctance in plunging into the dark unknown to engage his enemy. The poet says, "It was the best part of a day before he could see the solid bottom. / Quickly the one who haunted those waters / sensed a human / observing her outlandish lair from above" (Lines 1495–1500). This perilous journey serves to exemplify Beowulf's heroism. When his sword, Hrunting, serves him no good during the battle, Beowulf does not give up. A magic giant's sword is hanging on the wall, and with it, he manages to kill Grendel's mother by cutting off her head. "He saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy / sword, hammered by giants, strong / and blessed with their magic" (Lines 1557–1559). Beowulf uses his wit and bravery to be able to turn the battle to his advantage. Thus, he proves that he indeed is not only strong but resourceful and determined too.

Beowulf's final act of heroism comes in his later years when, as king of the Geats, he faces a deadly dragon which threatens his kingdom. Though Beowulf is now appreciably older, his sense of duty and loyalty to his people has not wavered. Knowing this battle could be his last, Beowulf accepts his fate: "I risked my life / often when I was young.". Now I am old, / but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight" (Lines 2510–2512). This line portrays Beowulf's sense of responsibility as a ruler and also his determination for the defense of his kingdom, even at the

cost of his life. In the course of the battle with the dragon, Beowulf acquires a lethal wound; nonetheless, with the assistance of his loyal companion Wiglaf, he finally slays the dragon. Dying, Beowulf looks on his life and is satisfied with what he has left behind him: "My days / have gone by as fate willed, / waiting for its word to be spoken, / ruling as well as I knew how" (Lines 2735–2738). This reveals how Beowulf managed to reach the heroic dream of the enduring renown of feats.

Beowulf's quest for glory is the binding thread in his character and motivation throughout the poem. As in many epic heroes, Beowulf desires to have his name remembered for a long time after his death. Immediately following his victories over Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf is hailed as a hero because of his bravery, and King Hrothgar commends him, saying, "You are strong in body and mature in mind, / impressive in speech.". If it should come to pass / that Hrethel's heir is killed by a spear, / I say that the Geats could do no better, / find no man better suited to be king" (Lines 1844–1850). Such recognition of Beowulf's greatness as both a warrior and future king underlines his growing reputation and foreshadows the legacy he will leave behind. Beowulf's concern, even in the last moments of his life, is the perpetuation of his name and heroic feats. Requesting Wiglaf to raise a barrow over him in memory, Beowulf states, "Command the battle-shields be raised, / and hang the helmet on the high barrow / for a memory to be seen by men" (Lines 2804–2806). Beowulf's desire to have his actions remembered for ever and ever reveals the deep commitment he had with the heroic ideal of eternal fame.

In conclusion, Beowulf manifests the characteristics of an epic hero through strength, courage, loyalty, and a quest for glory. His struggles against Grendel, his mother, and the dragon reveal incomparable physical strength and shaken bravery. Moreover, through these battles Beowulf expresses his virtues of bravery and honor, while also going into themes of humanity

and the moral complexities and his leadership, by showing his duality of human strength and vulnerability.

Works Cited

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