

Tralyn Cusic

Mrs. Graning

English 11

24 September 2024

### *Beowulf*

In the streets of Geatland is where Beowulf, the protagonist of this epic poem, lived. He was dedicated to protecting his kingdom and possessed many epic hero and Anglo-Saxon virtues. His character and his virtues is what led him to win many battles and protect his kingdom. Throughout this epic poem, Beowulf proves to be a prototypical epic hero because he displays virtues such as courage, loyalty, bravery and perseverance, which are also known as Anglo-Saxon virtues.

Beowulf's personality and character vary throughout this epic poem. Out of all of his many characteristics, his bravery was something that stood out the most throughout this poem. His bravery was mainly displayed when he fought Grendel. When his uncle, Lord Higlac, told him that Grendel was a great fighter and didn't use weapons, he said in response, "Nor will I. My lord Higlac" (144). In this line, Beowulf displays his bravery by deciding to fight the monster Grendel with his bare hands instead of using weapons. Additionally, Beowulf displayed his pride when talking to the king before his battle with Grendel. While talking to King Hrothgar he says

"They have seen my strength for themselves,  
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,  
Dripping with my enemies' blood. 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.”

(126-130). In these lines, Beowulf boasts and tells Hrothgar that everyone knows and has seen what he is capable of. As a result of these two events, Beowulf’s bravery and pride led him to defeat Grendel.

Grendel, one of the antagonists of this epic poem, was the monster who terrorized the Danes for twelve long years. He was an intimidating creature whom all the Danes were scared of. Their fear of Grendel was displayed when Grendel attacked the Herot hall at night while the guards were sleeping and killed thirty men (69-70). The author told the story of these events to show readers why the Danes were so deeply terrified of this Grendel. In addition, the Danes were also scared of Grendel because he was believed to be the descendent of Cain. It was believed among the Danes that Grendel was the child of two monsters that were born of Cain from the bible (52-55). This story also terrified the Danes because Cain is known biblically for displaying violence by killing his own brother. Consequently, just like his ancestor Cain, Grendel showcased violence in his twelve years of terrorizing the Danes and through all of his other evil actions.

Beowulf displayed many Anglo-Saxon virtues. He displayed Lof and also loyalty. Lof is the concept of glory and fame in Old English literature. Considering the fact that this poem is one of the first pieces of Old English literature, it's easy to assume that somewhere in Beowulf’s mind he had a thought of achieving Lof. He proved this assumption when he decided to fight Grendel’s mother (429-440). This showed that even after Beowulf gained glory and honor from

defeating Grendel, he wanted more. In addition to wanting fame and glory, he was also loyal. He showed his loyalty to his mentor Hrothgar when he needed his aid in fighting Grendel (98-115). This was a very selfless and loyal move by Beowulf because, even though the Danes were not his people, he helped them in their time of need. Subsequently, this event led to Beowulf defeating Grendel and earning his respect from many. This also led to Beowulf having to fight more battles, which allowed him to further reach his goal of Lof.

After Beowulf's battle with Grendel and his mother, he fought arguably his hardest battle against the dragon. In this last battle, Beowulf had many reasons to fight the dragon. Even at his old age, he wanted to protect his kingdom. It was a personal challenge, but most importantly, he wanted to maintain his legacy and honor. Beowulf expressed his determination to do this by saying,

“I’ve never known fear; as a youth I fought  
In endless battles. I am old, now,  
But I will fight again seek fame still,  
If the dragon hiding in his tower dares  
To face me.”

(484-488). In these lines, Beowulf displayed the same pride and bravery that he had in his younger years. Although he won this battle against the dragon, he knew his time as a warrior and king had come to an end. When Beowulf was near death at the end of the battle, he spoke to Wiglaf and said,

“Seeking no lying wars, I can leave  
This life happy; I can die, here,  
Knowing the Lord of all life has never

Watched me wash my sword in blood

Born of my own family” (662-666).

In these lines, Beowulf tells Wiglaf that he was satisfied with the life he lived and that no one could ever say he did anything to harm his people. Subsequently, Beowulf died and left behind a legacy that his people honored.

In the end, Beowulf laid a foundation for Wiglaf to build on as king. After all of Beowulf’s years of being king of the Danes and after all of his battles, he finally achieved his goal in the end, which was Lof. After serving the Danes for 50 years, they mourned him, built him a tower that was filled with treasures and artifacts, and made sure that his legacy as a warrior and king would live on.

Owens, Brenda et al. *Beowulf. Mirrors and Windows: Connecting With Literature - British Tradition* pages 25 - 48. EMC Publishing, 2012

Zou, Victor. "Beowulf". *Apollon*, 29 October 2015,

<https://www.apollonejournal.org/apollon-journal/the-lonely-king> 25 September 2024