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11th Grade

27 September 2024

## Beowulf

The story *Beowulf* is an epic poem about a courageous, strong, warrior named Beowulf. An epic poem is a story that tells of a grand quest in which the epic hero, in this case Beowulf, uses extraordinary abilities to achieve great things. Beowulf is a part of the Gaets which is a northern-Germanic tribe now called Sweden. He then travels to help the Danes, a North Germanic tribe inhabiting southern Scandinavia. The Danes had been suffering through years of fear, danger, and death caused by a giant named Grendel. Beowulf takes on this challenge; he decides he will eliminate Grendel and save the people. Though, defeating one enemy might lead others to attack. Beowulf is a strong, courageous, loyal warrior who defeats many enemies and in return receives glory, treasures, and an honorable death.

Beowulf's strength has a main role in why he prevails against his enemies. The measure of his strength would be described as being larger-than-life. No one in the story matches his strength or ability. This is first shown during his battle with Grendel:

The monsters hatred rose higher,  
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,  
And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder  
Snapped, muscle and bone split  
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf

Had been granted new glory, (255-260).

This demonstrates Beowulf's strength by showing how he defeats this giant with his bare hands. Beowulf did not only have physical strength, but also mental strength. He had intelligence and an understanding of battle strategy. Before his battle with Grendel he determines his battle strategy,

Eyes were watching his evil steps,

Waiting to see his swift hard claws.

Grendel snatched at the first Gaet

He came to, ripped him apart, cut

His body to bits with powerful jaws, (177-182).

Beowulf watches as one of his own men gets eaten by Grendel. He does this to see the strategy Grendel will use during the battle. In watching Grendel, Beowulf carefully constructs a plan to where he will have the advantage. This shows that Beowulf will do anything to defeat Grendel; even sacrifice his own man. Though, while facing these monsters Beowulf does not only exemplify strength, but also courage.

Beowulf displays the Anglo-Saxon value of courage, and bravery on many different occasions. This is first shown when Beowulf and his men are preparing for battle against Grendel, "Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life / Against the monster. God must decide / Who will be given to death's cold grip," (144-150). Beowulf decides that he will not use weapons in his battle against Grendel, because Grendel himself does not use weapons, which would make the fight unfair. This shows his courage, because he is willing to fight a giant monster. The monster is suspected to be very strong; with no weapons. This piece of text also presents a pagan value called wyrd. Wyrd is the Anglo-Saxons concept of fate, destiny, or doom.

It is presented when Beowulf is talking about how God will decide who will die and who will live. This shows Beowulf is not afraid of death and is putting his life in God's hands. Beowulf then proceeds to fight Grendel's mother after Grendel has died. Though this battle Beowulf ventures in alone:

Our only help,  
 Again, lies with you...  
 As his words ended  
 He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's  
 Answer, (357-366).

This describes how Beowulf jumps into this hell like lake, alone, with no one to help. He does this to demonstrate his strength, courage, and to receive fame. Going in alone also exemplifies courage, because the environment of the lake is dark and the territory is unknown to Beowulf. Through Beowulf's courage he shows his loyalty to the people who soon become his people.

In Anglo-Saxon culture warriors were expected to show their bravery and prove their loyalty to the king. Beowulf demonstrates both these qualities and is honored greatly by the king. Loyalty is shown when Beowulf agrees to fight Grendel's mother:

“Grendel’s mother  
 Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place  
 You’ve not seen. Seek it if you dare! Save us,  
 Once more,” (358-361).

This is a demonstration of loyalty because Beowulf does not have to agree to fight Grendel's mother since he has already killed Grendel. He agrees because he wants to aid the Danes, help in

any way possible, and stay loyal to the cause. Soon after Beowulf takes the throne and defends his people from a venomous dragon:

“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.”

Then he said farewell to his followers,  
Each in his turn, for the last time, (484-490).

Beowulf is on his way to sacrifice his life for his people, the people that he loves. In doing so he shows the bravest act of loyalty which is giving ones life for another.

In conclusion, Beowulf demonstrates three important values of the Anglo-Saxons: strength, courage, and loyalty. He shows his strength by defeating many monsters, his courage by offering to fight the monsters, and loyalty by standing by his people. Beowulf has many qualities of the perfect hero with larger-than-life abilities. He is brave, abnormally strong, loyal, overcomes obstacles, and never gives up. His example shows us that if you do not cower in the face of your fears you can accomplish anything.

Works Cited

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