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English 11

24 September 2024

Beowulf

Beowulf is an epic tale of the great Anglo-Saxon king, Beowulf, accompanied by his numerous soldiers heroically fighting for what they believe in. They engage in several battles throughout this story, including battles against dragons, and monsters. This tale includes many victories and triumphs, as well as heartbreaking loss and defeat. There are many human, as well as non-human characters that the book introduces to us. The setting of the narrative takes place in the Kingdom of Geatland in the early sixth century. There are many lessons of importance introduced and taught throughout this story. Beowulf is the prototype of an epic hero, prevailed with his larger than life victories, and embodied Anglo-Saxon virtues with characteristics of loyalty and pride.

There are numerous ways that Beowulf can be seen as the prototype of an epic hero. An epic hero is defined as the main character in an epic poem that tells the story of their grand quest. Another factor is how they use their extraordinary or superhuman abilities to achieve great things. Beowulf depicts an epic hero because of his great feats and battles told throughout the story. The first battle was against the horrific monster Grendel, who lived in a murky marsh near the mead hall. In the story *Beowulf*, “Out from the marsh, from the foot of mist hills and bogs, bearing God’s hatred, Grendel came” (Canto 11). Grendel was tired of hearing all of the partying

always going on, and decided to do something about it. Grendel came up killing drunk soldiers in their sleep. Beowulf heard of this and had an epic battle against Grendel. Beowulf ended up winning the battle by ripping Grendel's arm off with his bare hands. As referenced in *Beowulf*, “He twisted in pain, and the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder snapped, muscle and bone split and broke” (Canto 12). The arm of Grendel hung as a trophy in the mead hall. The second victory Beowulf achieved was against Grendel's mother, where Beowulf acquired the sword of the giants. Beowulf used the powerful sword to slice clean through Grendel's mother's neck, causing her to bleed out and die.

Larger than life is an excellent example of how to describe Beowulf and his victories. To be larger than life in an epic poem, you must embody the highest ideals of your culture in an exaggerated as well as an important way. Another quality of being larger than life is being heavily looked upon or valued by your community or a certain group of people. Beowulf has many qualities that present him as larger than life, some being his strength, his bravery, and his passion to achieve immortal fame. Beowulf fights monsters with his bare hands, proving his capabilities of strength and braveness. “Beowulf knew at once that nowhere on earth had he met a man whose hands were harder” (Canto 11). He is also very passionate about many things and will do anything to achieve immortal fame as shown by his actions. It takes tremendous efforts of bravery and skill to accomplish all of these larger than life feats that Beowulf is the successor of. Beowulf faces monsters and creatures that are easily physically larger than him and prevails. It is Beowulf's larger than life beliefs, mindset, and capabilities that lead to his victories.

Beowulf embodies many Anglo-Saxon virtues and ideals throughout the entirety of this epic tale. One of the many very important virtues to the Anglo-Saxons that Beowulf heavily embodies is Comitatus. Comitatus is referred to as the Anglo-Saxon belief of loyalty, respect,

and love to others. After Beowulf defeated Grendel and Grendel's mother, he was crowned king of Geatland.

As stated in the epic tale of *Beowulf*,
 “Their king—then, when Higd's one son
 Was gone, Beowulf ruled in Geatland,
 Took the throne he'd refused, once,
 And held it long and well” (Canto 31).

Beowulf then settled down for 50 years before a dragon began terrorizing the city, causing an aged Beowulf to stand from his throne for one last battle. Although Beowulf was killed by the dragon in the end, this is a huge sign of his belief in loyalty and love, known as Comitatus. Beowulf is not the only character we see who shows signs of these virtues. Wiglaf, Beowulf's soldier and friend, refused to abandon his king and killed the dragon even after the dragon killed Beowulf. After killing the dragon, Wiglaf collects the treasure that Beowulf wanted so badly to acquire. This is an excellent sign of Wiglaf's loyalty, respect, and perseverance for everything that he believes in. Another Anglo-Saxon virtue, Lof, being the Anglo-Saxon belief of immortal fame, could arguably be considered Beowulf's most chased after virtue. It is clear throughout the story that Beowulf does not want to be forgotten in the afterlife. He wants to be remembered forever and this is one of the main reasons for his grand battles and quests. One way that the people of Geatland show their belief in Lof, is by their honoring of their King, Beowulf, after his passing. After Beowulf falls to the dragon, the people of Geatland honor him by burning his body in the river. The people then build a lighthouse for Beowulf, as he requested, so people will always remember him. In the walls of this tower, they placed the ashes of Beowulf. In the story *Beowulf*, “For ten long days they made his monument” (Canto 43). To finish the tower off, they

buried Beowulf's treasure so it could be with him forever. Twelve soldiers then rode horses around the newly constructed tower to mourn the death of their king Beowulf.

As referenced in *Beowulf*,

“And then the twelve of the bravest Geats

Rode their horses around the tower,

Telling their sorrow, telling stories

Of their dead king and his greatness” (Canto 43).

All of these were great ways the soldiers showed their loyalty and love, (Lof), to Beowulf, as well as making him achieve immortal fame (Comatitus).

Overall, this story sets a very good example of an epic hero that exemplified courage, living out Anglo-Saxon beliefs and teachings and prevailing in victories on the battlefield. All of the examples shown throughout the narrative portray the values in this story that Beowulf holds highly, making him a respectable hero and king marked in history. Beowulf is a very well deserving king after the many victories he had taken, but achieved his most important victory, immortal fame, making him a perfect prototype for an epic hero.

Works Cited

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