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## Beowulf

In the Old English epic, Beowulf is the epitome of an epic hero with all those virtues and ideals of the Anglo-Saxon cultural background. His larger-than-life personality is personified in super-human feats, unyielding bravery, and adhering to values of lof-glory, comitatus-kinship, and loyalty. This essay depicts how Beowulf shows the archetype of an epic hero through his superhuman quality, ethical code, and the ideals of the civilization he represents.

The Greater-than-Life Hero Immediately obvious in Beowulf is his heroism through physical prowess and strength in combat. It has been set from the beginning of the poem that his strength was much above the average of those around him. This is evidenced in his fight with Grendel where he does not use any weapons- a choice that exhibits not only his bravery but his big pride in his abilities.

A perpetual theme throughout literature has been that of the epic hero's strength, and Beowulf's feats of superhumanity extend him simply beyond the commonplace human experience. More importantly, the change that Beowulf undergoes from a young warrior into a king contributes to the more-than-human legend of Beowulf. This is through great enemies that he has

fought-Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon-which are not mere physical combats but metaphors for a universal struggle between good and evil. This connotation of battles does not stop at the mere outcome of the fights themselves but expresses the ideals in the Anglo-Saxon culture.

An embodiment of Anglo-Saxon Virtues Central to Beowulf's character is the Anglo-Saxon values of *lof* and *comitatus*. *Lof*-or glory proves to be one of the major motivations in most of Beowulf's actions. He wants to achieve a lasting reputation through his heroic feats, which shows well the pursuit of honor being enwrapped in the culture. Beowulf is ready to fight Grendel and afterward, his mother because he wants to be remembered as a great warrior.

And this was not a simply egotistical pursuit of fame for it was understood in that culture that a hero's accomplishment honored his entire clan through him.

Another highly important element in the character of Beowulf is the *Comitatus* or the bond of loyalty of a lord for his warriors. This was depicted throughout the poem by Beowulf with his loyalty to King Hygelac, and later his warriors after he became their king.

His commitment during battles to his men shows the relationship of reciprocity where loyalty is owed, and the success of the head equates to the success of his people. Beowulf's actions emphasize that a good hero takes care of his people and gains loyalty by being strong yet wise.

Beowulf as an Icon of Culture

Not only does Beowulf symbolize the heroic character in a physical sense, but he is also a sort of cultural icon in his own right to the Anglo-Saxon people. These battles with his monstrous opponents symbolize the greater ills that society suffers from, both internally and externally. Thus, the existence of Grendel and his mother can be viewed as representations of chaos and evil, which the hero has to vanquish to reinstate order. That is a thematic conflict, playing right into the cultural desire for stability and security in a dangerous world. Furthermore, Beowulf's final defeat by the dragon brings one to the realization of the fickle nature of life and, for that matter, glory. Even the most magnificent of heroes are prone to mortality, and that is the shocking feeling of humans' helplessness. Yet, his legacy lives on as the poem reaches its climax in mourning and celebration of his services to his people. Therefore, the Anglo-Saxon code is all about legacy and remembrance, thereby making him an even more powerful heroic figure.

Conclusion In essence, Beowulf represents the ultimate ideal of an epic hero through his superhuman strength, concerning the Anglo-Saxon code of virtues, and dramatizing the ideals of the culture. His larger-than-life personality is set in his ceaseless pursuit of glory along with his pledged duties towards those ties of allegiance that link him with his kinsfolk. All these battles he went through and the final sacrifice epitomize the heroic ideals of his culture, which he will always be remembered for through the ages. The poem is a paean to his glory but also, simultaneously, a mirror of those virtues that chiseled the character of the Anglo-Saxon people and made Beowulf the undying symbol of heroism in literature.