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Mrs. Graning

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Beowulf

The story of *Beowulf* is an epic poem written in Old English. It starts off by telling about how a mead hall known as Herot is being terrorized by a monster named Grendel. The monster has been terrorizing the people of Herot, Danes, for twelve years. The Danes have not been able to catch him or kill him because he only hunts while they are sleeping. One night, Grendel came to the hall and captured 30 of the King's, Hrothgar, soldiers. This was a breaking point for Hrothgar so he and the rest of his men came up with a plan to stop Grendel, but nothing worked. Upon hearing this, Beowulf, the hero of this epic, travels across the sea with some of his men to help Hrothgar. Throughout the story we hear of all the great battles Beowulf faces to save the people of Herot— all of which inevitably lead to Beowulf's death. Beowulf is an epic hero because of the great lengths he goes to to save his people, the bravery he displays through every battle, and the larger than life qualities he shows through Lof, Wryd, and Comitatus.

This poem shows time and time again how Beowulf was a hero to Herot and how he stood up for those who could not fight for themselves. In the beginning of the story it states Grendel coming into Herot and seeing all of the soldiers lining the hall asleep. He is so happy to claim his first victim of the night, but he did not know it would be his last. Even though Beowulf is in Herot to defeat Grendel, he does not protect this soldier because he wants to see how Grendel fights. "His heart laughed, he relished the sight / Grendel to gnaw the broken bones / Of his last human supper." (171, 176-177). The first line shows how happy Grendel is by using

personification with his heart laughing. The next two use foreshadowing to let the readers know this will be Grendel's final battle. Next, Beowulf defeats Grendel with his bare hands and no help from his soldiers because Grendel bewitches all of their swords to make them dull if his men try to use them.

Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron

Could not scratch his skin, for that sin-stained demon

Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells

That blunted every mortal man's blade.(242-245).

In a way, this proves Grendel knows he can be defeated because he is worrying about the soldier's weapons. This shows that Grendel is not the most powerful creature in this epic poem.

Beowulf is a hero because of his courage to fight every monster he comes across no matter the consequences. Beowulf's first battle with Grendel using only his bare hands shows just how powerful he is. He is able to defeat Grendel by ripping off his arm and displaying it on the rafters of Herot to show his victory. "The victory, for the proof, hanging high / From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's / Arm, claw and shoulder and all." (275-277). Beowulf wants all of Herot to see the arm and know he did what he came for and defeated Grendel. Grendel's mother is not happy about what happened to her son. The day after the battle, the people of Herot are giving Beowulf gifts and treasures for defeating the monster. While this is happening, Grendel's mother comes to Herot and kills Hrothgar's best friend and takes back her son's arm. "His mothers sad heart, / And her greed, drove her from her den on the dangerous / Pathway to revenge..."(323-325). Grendel's mother is extremely upset about his death and is seeking nothing but revenge on Beowulf.

When Beowulf finds what she did he gets a sword named Hrunting from one of Hrothgar's men and goes down to the fiery lake to fight her. Grendel's mother is waiting for Beowulf to arrive and is immediately ready to fight. When Beowulf tries to use the sword but it does not work. "Discovered that no sword could slice her evil / Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless / Now when he needed it," (395-397). Because his sword does not work, Grendel's mother pins him down and is about to kill him when he gets a sword off the wall in their cave, swings around, and cuts off her head. Still seeking revenge, Beowulf goes over to Grendel's dead body and cuts off his head to bring back to Hrothgar.

But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
 Found him lying dead in his corner,
 Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
 Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
 His head with a single swift blow. (457-460).

Beowulf does this as a way of showing who the true brave hero is and to prove that the monsters are now dead. The last battle Beowulf has is with a dragon at his home, the land of the Geats, after someone steals the dragon's jewels and it begins to terrorize the countryside. When Beowulf gets to where the dragon lives he says that this is going to be his last battle, foreshadowing his death. He brought a sword called nagling and a shield to fight against the dragon. Neither weapon could protect him because, when the time came, the shield melted under the fiery breath and the sword broke against the dragon's scaly skin. The dragon is too powerful against Beowulf and he burns him to death (510-555). After his death, the Geats build a tower to remember Beowulf and they bury him inside along with the jewels from the dragon. Even though

Beowulf knew this would be his last battle, he still went to fight the dragon to try and protect his people.

The Anglo-Saxon virtues displayed in Beowulf throughout the story are shown throughout all of his battles and the way he is treated after he dies. Wyrd is really shown in Beowulf's final battle when his sword breaks. In lines 546 and 547 it reads "And for the first time in his life that famous prince / Fought with fate against him." He felt that his weapons failing him was a sign he was meant to die in that battle against the dragon. Lof and Comitatus are both shown at the end of the story. Lof is shown through every battle he was in because it made him more and more famous. Lastly, the people of Geatland showed companionship and loyalty towards him by building him a memorial and burying him in it.

The story of *Beowulf* is an outstanding epic poem showing the bravery of a man using his strength to protect people. The poem highlights his main battles against powerful monsters and how each one changed Beowulf's fate in the end. Through fighting for those who are less powerful, Beowulf's character gives the wonderful message to stand up for those who can not stand up for themselves.

Works Cited

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