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Beowulf Essay

   Beowulf, an epic of Western literature, was a story about the hero Beowulf during

Anglo-Saxons. Beowulf was a story which mostly followed the hero journey that contained a

lot of battles which related to violence. In the first part of story, the main character

Throwing back to that time period, there were no words which people usually used the oral

way to spread the story and to spread the ideas. However, the Beowulf that we read today

was transcribed by the church and translated by historian which might add different meanings

to the text and lead people to interpret the text in different ways. During that time period, it

was lack of education and the concept of science. The church in order to control more power

and persuade people to believe God, they often add the concept of God into literature and

connected it to hero. In the other hand, they often add the concept of devil and hell to the

ideas in literature which was opposed to the church's idea. In my interpretation of Beowulf, I

think that glorify in Beowulf most fit the definition of "to place the glory of God" which

means that to glorify god by working for god and get rid of the devil. Beowulf glorified

violence by being God's instrument and to protect civilians by violence actions.

   The main key of Beowulf glorified violence was because Beowulf worked for God

and trying to fulfill God's demand. Beowulf was the instrument of God in several ways. At

first, he was fighting for Hrothgar who was protected by God. Hrothgar, the man who was

protected by God, gave support even after Unfred criticized Beowulf. Hrothgar said to

Beowulf that "he believed in Beowulf's bold strength and the firmness of his spirit" (342 ~

343). Since there were a lot of crucial challenges for Beowulf, God helped Beowulf in his

own way. For instance, when Beowulf was fighting a swimming match with Brecca, "God's bright beacon appeared in the east" that helped the missing Beowulf found the right direction and safely landed on the coast (302 ~ 303). Another piece of evidence that Beowulf worked for God was when the queen serving the wine to Beowulf, she acted as respect as she could, "she [the queen] saluted the Geats Great prince, thanked God for answering her prayers, for allowing her [the queen's] hands the happy duty of offering mead to a hero who would help her affixed people" (357 ~ 361).

Throughout the story, we could see that a huge part of *Beowulf* was related to violence. Although Beowulf and Grendel both performed violence through the story, we considered their behaviors as different situations. Beowulf's motivation for violence was to protect civilians in the town and the king, Hrothgar, who was protected by the God. During the time period, God had the highest reputation that even Grendel, the monster, "never dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious throne, protected by God" (82 ~ 84). In contrast, Grendel's motivation for violence was the jealousy towards the kingdom. Since Grendel lived "down in the darkness, growled in pain, impatient", and the kingdom of Hrothgar was filled with joy, "the harp's rejoicing call and the poet's clear songs", it bothered Grendel and aroused him to destroy the happy kingdom (2, 4 ~ 5). Additionally, in the beginning of the story, Grendel was punished by being an evil, which contributed to the original setting of his motivation and his evil characteristics, "He[Grendel] was spawned in that slime, conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain, murderous creatures banished by God, punished forever for the crime of Abel's death" (29 ~ 23). Although the dragon had a reasonable motivation, which was that his gold stolen by a thief, however, the dragon still killed a lot of innocent civilians in Beowulf's kingdom which God had an eye on. God put more attention on Beowulf's kingdom because Beowulf worked for God and was his instrument in the human world. Beowulf was glorifying violence since his behaviors were meant to cheer the God, while

Grendel and the dragon were trying to do some actions that destroyed peace and angered God.

Besides the different motivations among Beowulf, Grendel and the dragon, the text also described the three characters differently by using different word choice and poetic devices. The text described Beowulf in a more positive way and sometimes connected his action to God. For example, the text introduced Beowulf as a man who had strong power and were able to use his strength to protect the kingdom, "the strongest of the Geats – greater and stronger than anyone anywhere in this world" (110 ~ 111). Also, the name Beowulf was a kenning which was composed by "Beo" and "Wulf" (the wolf of bees) which meat a bear (Harper). Bear usually gave people of the characteristics of brave and strong which added the positive attitude towards Beowulf. Conversely, Grendel was described in a more negative way and the time that Grendel usually appeared was night which symbolized dark, black, and hell. Compare to Beowulf's kenning, the epic used "shepherd of evil" to indicate Grendel, which was more negative and horrible (432). In the beginning of the story, the text described Grendel as "that, demon, that fiend" by using repetition to emphasize how brutal he was (16). Whenever Grendel entered the story, the setting turned dark. For instance, the first time that Grendel enter Herot, the paragraph started with "when darkness had dropped" and when he battled with Beowulf, the text still started with "the cloudy night" (30, 396). As Grendel started his action of killing people, the text described him of "his eyes gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome Light" Additionally, there was some indirect evidence showing how evil Grendel was that was explained by the other characters. When Unferth was speaking to Beowulf, he guessed that "your[Beowulf's] luck may change if you[Beowulf] challenge Grendel" (258 ~ 259). Unferth believed that Grendel had too much negative energy which might destroy Beowulf and changed Beowulf's life. Grendel's strength was to destroy the world and to change the happy and positive atmosphere to the negative atmosphere which

was similar to hell. In contrast, Beowulf's strength was use protect the civilians and promote positive and joyful atmosphere.

The text not only set the difference between the characteristics of each character but also glorified violence by using vivid and bloody description words during each battle. In the beginning of the battle when Grendel killed the man, Grendel "gnaw[ed] the broken bones of his last human supper" and "snatched at the first Geat he came to, ripped him apart, cut his body to bits with powerful jaws, drank the blood from his veins, and bolted him down" (421 ~ 425). When the battle was finally finished, Grendel's "Arm. Claw and shoulder and all" were hung high on the wall by Beowulf (517). Although the bloody text described the battles between Beowulf and Grendel, due to the different setting and motivation of Beowulf and Grendel that mentioned above, the gross description of Beowulf turned out to glorify violence by doing actions that satisfied God. If the text wasn't glorying violence, it would skip these vivid descriptions and the details to make the story less bloody. However, the bloody and violent text emphasized the importance of the battles and raised the awareness of how hard-working Beowulf was in order to gratify God.

Both Beowulf himself and *Beowulf*, the epic, as a whole glorifies violence by different ways. Beowulf himself was selected by God to be his instrument on earth in order to protect the world and the people who was beloved by God. Not only Beowulf, the character, glorifies violence by his characteristics and actions, but *Beowulf*, the epic, also glorified violence by using vivid descriptions, poetic devices and the comparison with the other characters. However, from the Beowulf which was transcribed by the church we could also realize how the church wanted to promote God's reputation and encourage people to persuade the same spirit of "glorifying violence" to place the glory of god and the attitude of being a hero.

Work Cited

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