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Period 2 British Literature

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Good vs Evil in Beowulf

There are many good and evil characters in the poem Beowulf. Although many characters in the poem may seem good or bad, it is really more of a gray area in terms of good or bad. Characters like Beowulf may seem good while characters like Grendel, and his mother and the dragon may look more evil.

For Beowulf, the story portrays him as the hero defeating evil. For example he defeats Grendel, Eve and the dragon. All of them were killing innocent civilians because they were angry and wanted to satisfy their own bloodlust, “day of mourning of fear and sorrow to come slaughter and terror and captivity” (Line 729-730). By killing all of the monsters he saved many of his people’s lives. He was also a good king, he was kind to his people and he protected the land from invaders, “Crying that no other king had ever lived” (Line 756-757). In fact he was such a good king that he protected his kingdom from invaders for more than fifty years. Although he was a great warrior and king, he had a greedy side. One for wealth and one for his pride, “and high as wise and willing hands could raise them and the riches he and Wiglaf had won” (Line 737-739). In the end Beowulf mainly cares about his pride and wealth, even when he was dying he was still thinking about wealth. Beowulf is a great leader and fights for justice but he is caught up in his greed.

Grendel is no doubt the most evil character of the story. He has no good side to him, and he is just pure evil. In the story, Grendel came from monsters and he killed thirty people without

a second thought, “snatched up thirty men, smashed them”(Line 70). Grendel killed thousands of people in the span of twelve years. Grendel’s mother, however, is less evil. Even though she kills she does it through rage instead of just evil, “drove her from her den on the dangerous pathway of revenge”(Line 324-325). She is angry for a good reason, her son died by Grendel and kept it as a trophy. Since Grendel and her mom lived far away, she did not know that Grendel was the attacker and deserved this. In her eyes the people are the attackers.

The last character, the Dragon, is half good and half evil. He only attacked the villages because the dragon wanted it’s Gold back . The dragon’s attacks were less evil than the other characters because he fought for his wealth instead of revenge, “furious at the theft of the cup the dragon attacks the countryside”(Cantos 32-34). Since the dragon is an animal, it doesn’t know that killing is wrong. In the dragon’s eyes, burning the community is a way of getting it’s territory back just like a lion would protect it’s own children, “the dragon has been guarding and dazzling and greedy”(Line 478). The dragon has been amused by the shine of the gold and decided to guard the treasure just as raccoons do. Just like raccoons they have no sense of good or evil.

Many characters in Beowulf are not extreme in terms of good or bad. Many of the characters like Grendel’s mother, the dragon and Beowulf are more in the grey. Beowulf is a generous leader but he is greedy. Grendel’s mother is getting revenge against the people because she thought the people hunted Grendel. Lastly The dragon has no concept of good or evil and wants to protect it’s gold.