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### Values Never Die

An epic tale of a hero traveling afar to single-handedly defeat multiple evil monsters grabs the attention of most males age twelve to thirty-five; it also grabs the attention of the entire literature world, considering it is the longest surviving Old English poem. *Beowulf* was written around 700-1000 AD but was passed down orally long before that. *Beowulf* captures the culture and ideals of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian people and gives us a glimpse into history that would otherwise be unknown. In order to provide an example of a life worthy of Valhalla, a place like heaven only accessible by leaving behind a great legacy, Beowulf is filled with the Anglo-Saxon values of bravery, loyalty, friendship, and generosity shown through the actions and words of the characters.

A prominent Anglo-Saxon virtue illustrated in *Beowulf* is bravery. Throughout the tale, bravery is exuded through the hero himself, Beowulf. The bravery in *Beowulf* is not very accessible to readers in the twenty-first century because it is truly extraordinary. As stated in lines 311-12, Beowulf survived the sea, smashed monsters' jaws, and was still able to swim home from the journey (*Beowulf* 31). Furthermore, Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he "drove five great giants into chains, chased/ All of that race from the earth" (*Beowulf* 25). Because Anglo-Saxon heroes are inherently superhuman, they show no fear. An example of Beowulf's fearlessness and courage is shown in lines 675-7 when Beowulf is preparing to fight the dragon-

like creature. He tells his army: “When he comes to me/ I mean to stand, not run from his shooting/ Flames, stand till fate decides/ Which of us wins” (*Beowulf* 42).

One must possess bravery in order to remain loyal during trying times; both bravery and loyalty are big factors in achieving Valhalla. Beowulf was loyal to his people and was aware of his duty to protect them no matter what. Beowulf’s chosen army demonstrated their loyalty in lines 475-8 by jumping from their beds and being determined to keep their prince safe at all costs (*Beowulf* 34). The most loyal of all was Wiglaf. During the dangerous battle between Beowulf and the dragon, Wiglaf says to his comrades, “And we must go to him, while angry/ Flames burn at his flesh, help/ Our glorious king! By almighty God, / I’d rather burn myself than see/ Flames swirling around my lord” (*Beowulf* 44). To say you would rather burn yourself than have your leader suffer is the ultimate sacrifice; this quote from Wiglaf showcases that he is genuinely loyal in any circumstance, especially because the rest of the army fled when Beowulf was fighting the dragon. After the battle was over, “Wiglaf went back anxious/ To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him/ Treasure they’d won together” (*Beowulf* 45). Most people would have been tempted to leave Beowulf for dead and have the treasure for themselves, but the Anglo-Saxons are promoting good character along with loyalty. Wiglaf is a prime example of how the Anglo-Saxons wanted to portray loyalty and show that one can achieve greatness just from exhibiting loyalty.

In Anglo-Saxon literature, friendship and loyalty essentially go hand in hand. Many of the lines in *Beowulf* could be viewed as representing both friendship and loyalty simultaneously. When Beowulf arrives at Hrothgar’s palace, Hrothgar mentions that Beowulf has come in friendship and that there has been a continuous bond between their families and people (*Beowulf* 26). There is comradeship and friendship present between Beowulf and his army. Beowulf refers to

them as his friends and requests that they wait for him after his final battle (*Beowulf* 42).

Beowulf values the connection he has with his army; friendship in general is valued by all characters in *Beowulf*. The Anglo-Saxons are emphasizing that everyone should be friendly and talk highly of one other. This is made clear in lines 834-8: “So should all men/ Raise up words for their lords, warm/ With love, when their shield and protector leaves/ His body behind, sends his soul on high” (*Beowulf* 46).

With friendships come generosity. It would be difficult to foster a genuine friendship without being generous with your time and even with material things. If you love someone, you want to share what you have with them to make them happy. When Beowulf and his clan arrive at Hrothgar’s palace, Hrothgar’s men greeted them warmly by giving places to the Geats, providing benches, and hosting a feast for them (*Beowulf* 27). As the feast progresses, Hrothgar speaks to Beowulf, realizes he will be the savior of his people, and offers Beowulf full reign of his entire palace (*Beowulf* 32). The Anglo-Saxons are teaching that being selfless and generous is greatly appreciated and doesn’t go unnoticed. Sometimes, showing generosity towards someone can help gain their respect and loyalty. In Beowulf’s case, his generosity paid off just when he needed it the most. When Beowulf was dueling the dragon and hope seemed to be lost, lines 755-60 reveal Wiglaf’s thoughts: “Remembering/ Everything his lord and cousin had given him,/ Armor and gold and the great estates/ Wexstan's family enjoyed, Wiglaf's/ Mind was made up; he raised his yellow/ Shield and drew his sword. . .” (*Beowulf* 44). Wiglaf realized that Beowulf had been generous to him and his family, so he wanted to be generous in return to Beowulf, except with his life instead of material things. Generosity is woven throughout the story in small ways, but looking at the big picture, generosity had a substantial impact on the main events.

*Beowulf* is an epic tale that is still relevant to readers today. Now more than ever our culture needs to be exposed to honorable, upstanding people. Beowulf is a great example of how to live out a courageous and generous lifestyle. The skeleton of this story is still used by writers today. *Lord of the Rings* and *Iron Man* follow similar storylines and share characteristics of heroic literature. While *Beowulf* is over one thousand years old, the plot and values are timeless.