

Beowulf

Beowulf, the title character of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, is a classic epic hero, a mythological or legendary figure, a brave, self-sacrificing, illustrious warrior and king endowed with great strength and ability, admired for his achievements and noble qualities, who represents good and battles evil, who embodies the ideals of his society, who fulfills his quest to rescue those who need help and to protect his people. Beowulf is an outstanding fighter. The story gives examples of his fierce strength and great courage, which can grant him glory and future immortality surrounded by his fame.

It is obvious that Beowulf is the quintessential hero. His strength and courage are unparalleled and they are the key traits of Beowulf's heroism. Strength and physical appearance are essential to the Anglo-Saxon warrior. Beowulf is described as the one "with the strength of thirty in the grip of each hand" (1188), and when he first arrives in the land of the Danes, the coastguard sees the mighty hero and says, "Nor have I seen a mightier man- at- arms on this earth than the one standing here" (1185). He is strong enough to kill the monster Grendel, who has been terrorizing the Danes for twelve years, with his bare hands by ripping off his arm. Grendel "was overwhelmed, manacled tight by (Beowulf) who of all men was foremost and strongest in the days of this life" (11960).

Strength is clearly an important characteristic, but strength alone is not enough to define a hero. Beowulf shows that every hero must have courage. In an argument with Unferth, Beowulf says, "Often, for undaunted courage, fate spares the man it has not already market" (1192). This quotation shows the importance of courage and fate, which was thought to be unchangeable, seems to favor a hero who has enough courage. Beowulf tells Hrothgar and the Danes that he will kill Grendel, but he says he will do this without his sword, and this shows his courage and honor. Beowulf then speaks inspiringly to the thanes: "I had a fixed purpose when I put to sea. (...) I meant to perform to the uttermost what your people wanted or perish in attempt, in the fiend's clutches. And I shall fulfill that

purpose, prove myself with a proud deed or meet my death here in the mead- hall” (1193). When Beowulf speaks these words, he shows his great courage, and displays the proper attitude of the warrior. Death for a fighter is honorable, and courage must be shown through deeds, even if it means death. A hero must be willing to die to achieve glory. He must display courage in the face of overwhelming or impossible odds, and he must have the strength to back his courage.

The only way to experience life after death was to live on in the memories of others. Only through fame and honor can a warrior achieve immortality. Even Hrothgar warns Beowulf: “keep in mind your fame, beware of the enemy. There’s nothing you wish for that won’t be yours if you win through alive” (1193). Beowulf had to win because all warriors’ credo is devoted to glory, reputation, honor, wealth, and fame. Also one of the Beowulf’s heroic traits is that he is not afraid to die. He faces a reality by showing no fear and preparing for a positive or a fatal outcome. Because “fate goes ever as fate must”, Beowulf explains his death wishes before going into battle and requests to have any assets delivered to his people. He says: “if the battle takes me, send back this breast- webbing that Weland fashioned and Herthel gave me, to Lord Hygelac” (1189). There was also Beowulf’s surety in himself. Even though Beowulf instructed Hrothgar to deal with his corpse if he were to fail in the battle with Grendel, his character made it clear that the battle would be victorious. However, he understands that “whichever one death fells must deem it a just judgment by God” (1189).

Beowulf is the prime example of an epic hero. His bravery and strength surpass all mortal men. With his skills and talent, he can overcome all. He is fearless and ready to meet with death. Beowulf is the ultimate epic hero who risks his life countless times for immortal glory and for the good of others.