

# Beowulfquestions persuasive essay



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Gold and treasure has a far more meaningful presence in the poem than what meets the eye. Even though there are plenty of references to gold and other worldly treasures in the poem, and they seem to juxtapose with greatness, bravery or heroics, these worldly pleasures stand testimony of heroism and sacrifice.

## Introduction

Among the early surviving Germanic epics is the famous ‘ Beowulf,’ which was presumably composed by a Christian poet in the early 8th Century.

The epic ‘ Beowulf,’ illustrates the remarkable deeds of the great warrior, Beowulf during his youth and maturity. During this period, Beowulf kills Grendel, a menacing man-eating monster, his mother, and a fire-breathing dragon, when Beowulf is mortally wounded. The poem ends with Beowulf’s funeral pyre.

Beowulf, written in the 8th Century A. D, revolves around the heroics of Beowulf, who battles man-eating monsters, of whom Grendel stood out for his fierceness.

The epic poem, which occurs in Scandinavia, shows the hero/warrior Beowulf setting sail for the land of the Danes, at the behest of Hrothgar.

Right at the beginning of the poem, there is a reference of ‘ far-fetched treasures,’ but this again is juxtaposed to greatness and love:

They stretched their beloved lord in his boat ..... Far-fetched treasures were piled upon him, and precious gear. I never heard before ...The massed

treasure was loaded on top of him: it would travel far on out into the ocean's sway. (34-42)

This infers to the importance the Danes gave their heroes on their victory or death. This particular reference is to the funeral of the Danish king Shield Sheafson; a great king who commanded respect from his people. Because of his popularity, the dead king's body was set sail into the sea with ' a literal boatload of treasures.'

Beowulf was undoubtedly showered with wealth whenever he went out to fight for King Hrothgar. Every time Beowulf helped the king in battle, he was showered with worldly treasures. Therefore, it can be said that though wealth played an important role in the epic, it was only because of Beowulf's courage and success that so much wealth was being showered on him

" Finally I healed the feud by paying: I shipped a treasure ... to the Wulfings and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance." (470-472)

Treasure wasn't just a mark of status to Danes and the Geats; it signified its power to buy them out of blood-feuds and wars. Every time Beowulf left to fight the enemy, the Danes knew that it was a price they had to pay for their safety. By killing an enemy, the victor was bringing about a truce, and this could be won only through treasure. While the significance of wealth is denoted here, one shouldn't forget that it took the bravery and courage of one man to bring about this situation, and that was none other than Beowulf.

Beowulf, amid political and personal inconstancies and growth, goes on to slay a dragon. This made him a very popular man. Therefore, it was only appropriate for them to shower Beowulf with lots of gold and other treasures:

So, borne aloft, thy fame must fly, O friend my Beowulf, far and wide o'er folksteads many. Firmly thou shalt all maintain, mighty strength with mood of wisdom. Love of mine will I assure thee, as, awhile ago, I promised; thou shalt prove a stay in future, in far-off years, to folk of thine, to the heroes a help [Chapter 24, Beowulf in Hypertext]

Seamus Heaney Translation:

' You have won renown: you are known to all men/ far and near, now and forever. Your sway is wide as the wind's home, as the sea around cliffs.'

Beowulf was popular with the masses because of his heroism:

' Beow's name was known through the north. And a young prince must be prudent like that, giving freely while his father lives/ so that afterwards in age when fighting starts steadfast companions will stand by him/ and hold the line.

Behaviour that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere.'

In another reference to gold and other treasures, in the final battle against the dragon, even though Beowulf is content to having killed the mighty dragon, he is mortally wounded. He questions his action to fight with his life for money. Even though all the treasures showered on him was pleasing, he was not destined to enjoy any of it. On killing the dragon, Beowulf had won

back a lot of wealth from it. However, what use was it to him now, as he lay, waiting for death to catch up with him? While he is happy that he is able to leave the wealth in the hands of the people he so dearly loves, he questions his ethics on whether it was worth sacrificing his life. In the end, for all his efforts, Beowulf would never be able to enjoy the fruit of his labor:

The old lord gazed sadly at the gold..... King of Glory, I give thanks...that I behold this treasure here in front of me that I have been allowed to leave my people, so well endowed on the day I die.” (2793-2798)

And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels..... trove of such things as trespassing men...dared to drag from the hoard. They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure...as useless to men now as it ever was. (3163-3168)

In the end, all the wealth and gold which Beowulf won for him for his heroics, was buried along with him. Though Beowulf would have loved to enjoy his gifts in life, he was not destined to do so. However, he found comfort that his sacrifice would help the Geats live a better life, but that was not to be. The narrator says that all the gold and treasures in the world are useless to men in comparison to life. However, when the reassurance was buried along with his mortal body, the ‘ancestral treasure,’ was now “as useless to men now as it ever was.”

Beowulf knew that he was destined to die in fighting the mighty dragon and that for his deeds; his soul would find the ultimate home among the steadfast ones:

‘Twas no easy path that Ecgtheow’s honored heir must tread over the plain to the place of the foe; for against his will he must win a home elsewhere far, as must all men, leaving this lapsing life! [Chapter 35, Beowulf in Hypertext]

Seamus Heaney Translation:

‘It is always better/ To avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning. For every one of us, living in this world/ Means waiting for our end. Let whoever can/ Win glory before death. When a warrior is gone, That will be his best and only bulwark [1384–9]

This clearly shows that despite the fortunes which were showered on him for his heroic deeds, it was ultimately his bravery and courage which stood the test of time. In a lasting message to the people, Beowulf says that, though he had made enough and more money through his battles, it would serve him no purpose, as he was about to leave the money and his body to be with the Lord. He wishes to part the money to the very people for whom he fought the monsters. Gold and other wealth were now useless for men as it ever was:

“For the gold and treasure, to God my thanks, to the Wielder-of-Wonders, with words I say, for what I behold, to Heaven’s Lord, for the grace that I give such gifts to my folk or ever the day of my death be run! Now I’ve bartered here for booty of treasure the last of my life, so look ye well to the needs of my land! No longer I tarry. [Chapter 38, Beowulf in Hypertext]

The elevation of Beowulf has always been paradoxically, down-to-earth. And nowhere is this more obvious than in the account of the hero’s funeral. The

narration of the hero's funeral pyre being readied and the body being burnt and barrow being constructed is contemporary, and not archaic.

While gold and other treasures was a means to achieve something; in this case their freedom from the man-eating monsters, Beowulf, never had any use for the money showered on him because his life was always in danger, and he hardly had the time to spend it on luxury. In those days, it was the custom of kings and powerful men to shower their subordinates with precious gifts to show their gratitude and though the poem has plenty of references to wealth and other treasures, it does not in any way take away the heroism of Beowulf. Even in death, Beowulf only sought to be a hero. It was his heroics which distinguished him from the rest and not his wealth.