

Religious dissonance within beowulf

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



Throughout the epic "Beowulf" the clash between monotheism and polytheism is evident due to the wide religious belief spectrum it envelops. Allusions to Christianity and Paganism show up constantly throughout its text and create a dissonance in values and symbolism through the duration of the poem. The protagonist of this epic, Beowulf, starts off not as a savior of his people but as a lowly druid seeking to prove himself on the field of battle such as Jesus started as a carpenter from a poor family from Nazareth. At first glance, it is apparent that Beowulf, a pagan warrior is depicting a Christ-like entity. We are told at the beginning of the story that Beowulf is "a Wendel chief renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom". This statement suggests that Beowulf is a pagan character, for he is a warrior; nonetheless, aside from being boastful and egotistic, the poet is depicting Beowulf as a man of wisdom, a man like Christ. Towards the end of the poem, for example, the poet reveals that Wiglaf, "a comrade shoulder to shoulder with his lord," was the only one who did not abandon Beowulf. Here the reader can clearly see a relationship between Beowulf and Christ, for in the Bible, Peter was the only apostle who loyally waited for Christ to return from the Garden of Gethsemane. This is meant to exemplify the importance of comradeship in which the Bible constantly tries to get its readers to embrace. Another example of Christianity being fused into the story occurs when the twelve members of King Beowulf's entourage flee in the face of peril, this gives an allusion to the twelve disciples of Jesus and how they fled after being persecuted for believing in Jesus. Beowulf also mirrors Christ due to the fact that he was the 'savior' of the Danes and the Geats, as Christ was the savior for his people. Moreover, Beowulf had the strength to tear

Grendel's arm, and the capability to fight underwater, just as Jesus was capable of walking on water, and parting the seas. Overall, one can clearly see that the poet incorporated these Christian characteristics to allure the reader into admiring the Pagan characters. Beowulf and other characters in the story constantly make references to God. For example, when facing Grendel, Beowulf relies on God alone to protect him, as he states, "Whichever one death fells must deem it a just judgment by God". Another reference to God is made when Hrothgar states " Now Holy God has, in His goodness, guided him here to the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel". These constant references to God, force the reader into recognizing that even though the characters are Pagan, they are somewhat admirable, due to the Christian characteristics, which the poet has embodied in them. A core concern for any reader of this epic is the authenticity of their translations and the injection of Christian values within the poem. In the case of Beowulf, the actual text was written in England sometime between the middle of the seventh and end of the tenth century which gives an insight on which religion ruled at the time of its paper recording. The setting for Beowulf also gives a clue to its original religious background because it is set in Pagan Scandinavia. But on the other hand the text makes constant references to the existence of one almighty God, superimposing a monotheistic religion upon a people known for worshipping a multitude of gods. It isn't quite clear how this manifested but it is obvious that the author was not interested too much in authenticity of religion and was unable to separate his Christian 'mark' from his works. This allowed him to view Paganistic culture and society through an opaque glass that he used to design the story around a Christian

mindset and point of view. At first glance, one would note that the story "Beowulf" is a Pagan story enveloping only Pagan characters. However, after second and later readings, it becomes apparent that "Beowulf" is really a story depicting the battle between good and evil. Nonetheless, through careful plotting, the poet was able to drive the reader into admiring the Pagan characters in the story by instilling Christian qualities into each character.