

Grendel vs. beowulf comparison essay sample

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There are two sides to every story. The events may be the same, but the tone in which the story is told shapes the reader's understanding of the events. This idea is never more evident than through the disparity between Burton Raffel's translation of Beowulf and John Gardner's Grendel. Both novels are based on the idea of Beowulf killing Grendel. However, the two different points of view telling the story create vastly different novels. Beowulf highlights the heroic and positive world in which Beowulf lives. Whereas Grendel elucidates on the miserable life that Grendel is circumscribed to. The consistent variance in tone skews the events in two completely different directions. The tone between Beowulf and Grendel differ in perception, righteousness, and maturity.

First and foremost, perception is the key ingredient in shaping the tone of the novel. Narrators tell a story like they see it, and a difference in perception can create two very dissimilar stories. In Beowulf the events are perceived as a positive. When Beowulf slays two adversaries King Hrothgar notes, "Your fame is everywhere, my friend, reaches to the ends of the earth, and you hold it in your heart wisely" (Raffel 72). Beowulf views the world as positive, and the world reciprocates by lavishing him with praise. Now look at the world from Grendel's perspective. Everyone views him as a hideous monster that is the epitome of evil. After a deep philosophical talk with the Dragon, Grendel is convinced that there is no way in which he can win. With a negative mindset, Grendel takes a look at his environment: "Futility, doom, became a smell in the air, pervasive and acrid as the dead smell after a forest fire" (Gardner 75). It no surprise that he sees the world as a negative place; one in which there is no hope. Both Grendel and Beowulf

live in the same area at the same time. However, the difference in the description of the events comes from the difference in perception.

The perception of equitableness of the world consequently shapes how each character speaks about the events they encounter. Once again, Beowulf encounters great fortune therefore he views the world as a just place.

Attributing the fairness to god he explices, “ The world is God’s, he allows a man to grow famous, and his family rich, gives him land and towns to rule” (Raffel 73). Clearly, Beowulf believes that God rewards the good and punishes the evil. After he is successful in battles, Beowulf’s tone towards God shows that he believes the world is righteous. Grendel has the exact opposite feeling when it comes to the fairness of the world. The outcast clearly points to the world as the source of his misfortune. Grendel explains how he feels: “ defiance, reject of the gods that, for my part, I’d known all along as lifeless sticks” (Gardner 52). Grendel has not had success; therefore he talks of the gods in a derogatory way. He goes onto say how the world is unfair and meaningless. Both Beowulf and Grendel are talking about the same god, but the tone in each of the novels paint divergent pictures of god. Through the narration, the audience can compare how the world can be giving to one while simultaneously being suppressing of another. Equitableness is contrasted through the tone in which each character speaks.

Of all the differences in tone, none is more obvious than the maturity in which Beowulf and Grendel speak. Beowulf appears to be a wise and well-spoken individual. Through the demeanor in which he is described and the

words in which he uses Beowulf comes off as sophisticated. The narrator describes Beowulf in a flattering way: “ He was old with years and wisdom, fifty winters a king” (Raffel 92). Reading that, the audience clearly can tell that Beowulf is no average person, and that he is experienced with wisdom. With Beowulf portrayed as a polished individual the reader comes to respect Beowulf’s actions and words much more. Grendel, however, is portrayed as an immature child. His childishness is noted through his actions, but is even more obvious through his words. When Grendel’s foot gets caught in a trap, his words confirm his pupilage: “ Owp!” I yelled. “ Mama! Waa!” (Gardner 18). It sounds like something a five year old would say. The tone makes it blatantly obvious how immature Grendel really is. Grendel depends on his mother rescue to continue surviving. The tone illustrates the immense difference between the mature Beowulf, leader of the Geats, and the immature Grendel, an aimless creature. As a result of the varying tone sophistication, each novel demands a different level of seriousness from the audience.

Can tone really change our perception of an event? The contrast between Beowulf and Grendel proves that tone dictates the way the audience comprehends the plot. The positive perception of Beowulf and negative perception of Grendel shape their outlook on life as a whole. When Beowulf succeeds he points to god as the source of the righteousness, while Grendel attributes his failure and the world’s unfairness to god. Further more, the mature tone throughout Beowulf confirms the character’s strength, and the immaturity of Grendel belittles the character to an overgrown child. Tone determines how one perceives a character and the events that unfold.

Without tone there would be no story. It would just a statement of unbiased, unentertaining facts.