

An explication of beowulf's monologue about his past

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Katie Taylor EH 215 Volf 4 February 2013 Beowulf's Past Beowulf is an epic poem that is filled with episodes and digressions that provide a better understanding of the poem as a whole. In one of the episodes, Beowulf speaks of his past, and the reader can learn about his upbringing as a child and how it has affected him as an adult. This monologue also gives some information about King Hrethel and his sons. The main purpose of this anecdote, however, is to describe how and when Beowulf began his career of combat and fame.

Within Beowulf's monologue, the author utilizes alliterations and kenning to help the poem flow and to emphasize the strength and valor of Beowulf as an epic hero. One such example is the kenning used at the beginning of the episode. It reads, " Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke..." (2425). Instead of the phrasing reading " Beowulf spoke," this phrase adds vigor to the beginning. It reinforces the idea that Beowulf is seen as an extremely powerful hero that can take on anything that comes his way as opposed to " just Beowulf. If " son of Ecgtheow" were not used, Beowulf would seem almost boring compared to the magnificent, heroic image that comes to mind when this phrase is employed. Alliteration is also used to allow the poem to flow and also to provide an interesting element to otherwise bland sentences. " While I was in his ward he treated me no worse as a wean..." is referring to King Hrethel's " adoption" of Beowulf after his father died (2432).

The repetition of the W sound allows easy movement through the story that Beowulf tells, and it keeps the reader interested in what is being said. Another example of alliteration is the lines 2479-2480: " My own kith and kin

avenged these evil events, as everybody knows..." Without any sound repetition, the reader would become bored with the story, but the author strategically places these examples of alliteration in the epic to provide more exciting details. Along with these rhetorical devices, this passage gives significant details about Beowulf's upbringing. The reader learns that Beowulf's father Ecgtheow dies when Beowulf is only seven years old. King Hrethel takes him in, though, and treats him like one of his own sons. Later, the king's oldest son Herebeald is accidentally killed by his younger brother Haethcyn. King Hrethel is so depressed that he lay down and dies from grief. Afterward, there is a battle between the Swedes and the Geats, in which Hrethel's son Haethcyn, the new king, is killed in battle.

Hygelac, the last son of Hrethel and now the new king of the Geats, gave Beowulf treasure and land for fighting alongside them. This battle seems to be one of the first that Beowulf participated in. He says, " I marched ahead of him [Hygelac], always there at the front of the line; and I shall fight like that for as long as I live..." (2497-2499). After that first battle, Beowulf launched himself into a life of war and fame, constantly craving the recognition and treasures that came after a successful battle or killing.

Beowulf's monologue about his past allows readers into his mind so that they can understand why he fights the way he does and where he came from in the first place. Without this episode, the poem as a whole would suffer because there would be no back story to explain Beowulf's desire to defeat monsters and achieve the fame that he thinks he deserves. Perhaps he is making up for the fact that his father died when he was so young: he is

trying to live a life that would make his father proud that Beowulf was his son.