

Beowulfs story: pride before the downfall

Literature



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Ashley K Campbell Dr. Balla British Literature II EH 205-04 Beowulf's Story: Pride before the downfall Beowulf, an Anglo-Saxon epic poem, is believed to date from the late 10th century. Beowulf is generally considered to be the work of an anonymous 8th-century poet who fused Scandinavian history and pagan mythology with Christian elements. The fusion between paganism and Christianity has long been a subject of debate since this literary masterpiece was written. During the early part of the nineteenth century, most critics viewed Beowulf as anti-Christian since it Christianized Germanic Folklore (Cain, 2). The hero himself, Beowulf is called into question due to the Germanic values he carries along with him like pride and boastfulness. Indeed, pride is one of the themes found in this epic as the hero's bravery becomes the source of his downfall because he was not able to control his pride. One of the main conquests of Beowulf was ripping the arm of Grendel that eventually led to the monster's painful death. Beowulf became very proud. He was described in the text by the narrator as: " His vanity swelled him so vile and rank/ That he could hear no voices but his own. He deserved/ to suffer and die. But Beowulf was a prince/ Well-loved, followed in friendship, not fear ;"(lines 911-914) The arm and hand of Grendel was a trophy, a symbol of Beowulf's might because even swords cannot cut through the thick skin of the monster. A bard retold the story of Beowulf's fight with Grendel while Hrothgar praised him and accepted him as a son. This further incensed Beowulf's pride to pursue not only the Grendel but the mother herself. Indeed, Beowulf succeeded in defeating Grendel's mother as well as the dragon; however, not without repercussions. A warning has been given to Beowulf about his boldness: O flower of warriors, beware of that trap. Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part, eternal rewards. Do not give way

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to pride. For a brief while your strength is in bloom but it fades quickly; and soon there will follow illness or the sword to lay you low, or a sudden fire or surge of water or jabbing blade or javelin from the air or repellent age. Your piercing eye will dim and darken; and death will arrive, dear warrior, to sweep you away. (1758-1768) Although Beowulf transformed from a might warrior to a benevolent king, still, it was in his blood to fight with enemies. His last fight was with the dragon that cost him his dear life and left his kingdom without a leader. It was not a wise decision because Beowulf should have admitted to himself that his strength is at much lesser level when he became old. Wiglaf cannot help conclude that " Often when one man follows his own will / many are hurt. This happened to us" (3077-3078). Beowulf's death may seem heroic to most people for he defeated a formidable enemy. Unfortunately, his untimely death also leaves his kingdom vulnerable to attacks thus his own people that he intended to protect would also be harmed or killed. More humiliating is the fact that the people would be enslaved and the only thing that they have is a memory of a brave king. Beowulf's pride led him to death and the destruction of his own people. He could make a good strategy to outwit the dragon and organized an army. Instead, he relied on his own strength even if he knew that it would cost him his life. Mighty and brave he was but not a wise king for he let pride overrule him. Works Cited Cain, Christopher M. " Beowulf, ' the Old Testament and the 'Regula Fidei.'. Volume 49: Issue: 4. 1997. Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature. Publication Year: Page Number: 227.