

Beowulf is an anglo-saxon poem

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Throughout time man has been considered the stronger sex; the hunter, the provider, the protector. But, history shows evidence of the fragility of the male ego, and its weaker foundations when in comparison to the feminine. Gender roles have been established on the underpinnings of natural law, decreed by God or nature, and are believed to be beyond the reach of change. Though we see the social roles and status of the sexes changing in recent times, the gender system remains almost impervious to change.

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon poem about a warrior-hero, kings, and beasts. It is essentially about men within a masculine world indicated by the obscure roles given to women within the poem; from Hrothgars unnamed sister to Grendels mother, identified only through her son. Beowulf performs great feats using his incredible strength. He puts himself at risk for others to prove his worth among men.

To understand its construction, masculinity must first be broken down to its foundation. So, what is masculinity? The closest answer would be the set of behaviors, language, and practices that are typically associated with males. Male behaviors have been proven not to be genetically inherited, that is, there is no biological predisposition. Behavioral studies have proven that masculinity is a learned social construct. The concept is also inherently relational. ' Masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with ' femininity'. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture (Connell, 2001).

Gender norms are dictated by the culture in which they exist, so different cultures have different expectations regarding gender and the different ways in which gender has coercive force. In our modern culture, it is a recognized and sanctioned position, a dominant ideological position, for the masculine to be associated with the terse. Hyper masculine heroes tend to be very quiet in our dominant culture. Think of the heroes like Clint Eastwood, Robocop, or Rambo.

For Anglo-Saxon culture, on the other hand, the ability to wield words was a measure of masculine virtue. So, think about for instance when Hrothgar is an early leader of the Danes and he builds that great Hall of Herot. The poet says of Hrothgar: Who wide-reaching word-sway wielded mong earlmen. (Beowulf, 26). Hrothgar's words have power in three ways. They for 1. Give commands, for example to build Herot. 2. They vow to give treasure to those underneath him, a torque and ring-giver. And 3. They name, as they named Herot itself.

Masculinity, in this text, is about power over others. It's about power over self. It's about power over the world, as dictated through language. That means that linguistic capacity, which modern dominant cultures suggests is gendered feminine today, was gendered masculine for the Anglo Saxons. For example, when Beowulf is being interrogated at Herot to see if hes good enough he must tell stories to prove his prowess with his words. The man started to recite with skill, rehearsing Beowulfs Triumphs and feats in well-fashioned lines, Entwining his words (Beowulf, 870).

Culture is based upon this idea of men being terse in fact there are some aspects of our present culture where linguistic capacity and masculinity are alive I'm thinking in particular of for instance rap and hip hop performance poetry there you have the alignment of the wisdom capacity with masculinity.