

Truth and justice in beowulf



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Beowulf, the main character of the heroic epic poem Beowulf, conveys fundamental examples for leaders in many aspects of life. Many of the stated ideals are pertinent to a leader's time as a warrior and as a king. In the beginning of the story, Beowulf, the hero of the Geats, aids the Danes and King Hrothgar whose people are harassed by a demon, Grendel. After Beowulf destroys Grendel and his mother, he returns to Heorot, the court of Hrothgar, for a feast of happiness. Here, King Hrothgar gives a speech that advises Beowulf how he should lead his people in the future.

Hrothgar's advice to Beowulf details how he should be the protector of his people and lead them with truth, justice, and tradition as the mainstay of his power. Hrothgar emphasizes that selfishness and resentment lead to misfortune as a high official. Beowulf takes King Hrothgar's advice and as a warrior and King of Geatland, successfully symbolizes a just leader that will do anything for the goodness of mankind. In the first lines of Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf, he introduces Beowulf as "a protector of his people, pledged to uphold truth and justice and to respect tradition" (117).

To be introduced as so lofty a leader is an honor, and Beowulf strives to fulfill these ideals throughout his life. Beowulf protects not only his own people, by wiping out the dragon, but also the Danes, as he defeats Grendel the monster and Grendel's mother. Although he obtains glory and fame from these courageous acts, Beowulf performs these actions for the good of his people, not for his own personal gain. He explains his encounter with Grendel's mother when he returns to Geatland and King Hygelac, "it was hand-to-hand between us, then the blood went curling along the currents and I beheaded Grendel's mother... with a mighty sword" (145). Beowulf's

description is not embellished in any way; his portrayal of events is plainly spoken. The unembellished telling further illustrates how he is an extraordinary individual as this story could easily be exaggerated. Beowulf does not need to glorify his own actions in the tale, for it is the outcome of the battle, not the battle itself that has merit for Beowulf. The honesty and humility shown by Beowulf make his victories all more genuine. Beowulf takes Hrothgar's advice to heart and portrays honesty and selflessness as a vital leadership quality.

In his monologue, Hrothgar uses past kingly figures to illustrate the wrong way to guide a nation. His first example was King Heremod, a very powerful sovereign, but he "grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings to [honor] the Danes. He suffered in the end" (119). This king was selfish, and in turn, this attribute led to his downfall. Hrothgar also recalls another man who was gifted with his kingdom by the "Almighty G-d," but "he covet[ed] and resent[ed]; [dishonored] custom and bestow[ed] no gold (upon his people)... when finally the end arrives when the body he was lent collapse[d] and [fell] prey to its death" (121). King Hrothgar advises Beowulf to avoid all of the qualities embodied by these unsuccessful leaders. When Beowulf becomes leader of the Geats, he works solely to assure his legacy as a fair and worthy king. As the poem closes, the narrator describes Beowulf: "They said that of all kings upon the earth he was the man most gracious and fair-minded" (213). "Gracious" and "fair," each have very positive connotations, and align with the values Beowulf was advised to admire.

Beowulf's description illuminates how he should be respected as a leader. The way Beowulf carries himself show evidence of the rules that Hrothgar

created for Beowulf and other leaders to flourish. Hrothgar's final piece of advice for Beowulf brings all of his previous suggestions together to culminate in a useful code that Beowulf can utilize to rule. Hrothgar said, " O flower of warriors, beware of that trap (greed). Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part, eternal rewards. Do not give way to pride" (121).

Throughout Beowulf's tenure as leader of the Geats, his rule was successful and created a time of peace for the Geat people. No opposition dared to fight the powerful army of the Geats led by Beowulf. All that he accomplished was valuable to his colony, and above all, he provided them with security.

Beowulf never put himself first and he used all of his resources to better the city-state. When Beowulf's death was announced to his court, the messenger explains how the future might change drastically for the Geat people without Beowulf's leadership.

After the past wars with the Swedes, " they will cross our borders and attack in force when they find out Beowulf is dead... when our warriors fell and we were undefended he kept our coffers and our kingdom safe. He worked for the people, but as well as that he behaved like a hero" (203). Beowulf was so remarkable a leader when it came to the security of the Geat people that without him they feel that their chances of continuing to grow and prosper their society are slim to none.

Hrothgar's advice helped Beowulf manage his power by means of peace, truth, and justice. Beowulf's leadership qualities were only strengthened by Hrothgar's advocacy and his days of ruling proved to be filled with fairness and righteousness. Even in his death, the legacy he left for his people was

upright and moral. The three main aspects that Hrothgar covers in his speech pertain to how a man should act, what he should say, and the way he should think.

The narrator persuades readers that Beowulf is honorable and does the best he can for his people. Beowulf makes the decision to sacrifice his own life to save the Geats by slaying the dragon that has been haunting them. As a leader, Beowulf's actions, thoughts, and speech, all better the defense of his people. Hrothgar's advice should be considered a dictate for leadership for his advice clearly states the principles that govern how rulers should behave. Beowulf takes this code to heart and becomes the epitome of a great ruler.