

Close reading: the key episode of beowulf

Literature



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Assignment, Literature Topic: Close Reading: " The Key Episode" of Beowulf: Lines 2557-2591.

I take the passage from Beowulf in which an ageing Beowulf fights a dragon beginning with " Pouring forth in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster burst from the rock" and ending at " For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing to have to give ground like that and go unwillingly to inhabit another home in a place beyond; so every man must yield the leasehold of his days". (2557-2591)The passage foreshadows the tragic ending of Beowulf. Notwithstanding the fate suffered by him, he was a perfect king. He had done his best for the people and he would be remembered by them forever. The poet touches the borders of spirituality when he asserts that all secular things are transient. The values and beliefs for which one lives are important. Beowulf's barrow is a monument that proclaims his values and beliefs and will stand as the moral barometer to the Geats for all time to come. Phrases like " a hot battle-fume", " serpent looped", " swaddled in flames", " spouted deadly flames", " battle-fire billowed and spewed", create a mind-boggling imagery that impacts inner world of the reader. Needles to add, that the genre of Beowulf is epic and heroism and commitment to the cause are the important themes of the poem.

Beowulf is a heroic poem and in this important passage evil constantly challenges good, morality is repeatedly tested and violent confrontations happen on a recurring basis. Beowulf, exemplifies those constant engagements, he challenges the evils fronting him and his people and as such death (mortality) in Beowulf turns out to be the inherent part of its structure, both from the religious and secular standpoints. Throughout the poem, and particularly in this passage, death is a perpetual topic and nearly

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everything Beowulf does leads to a death. While many would see this as gloomy and disheartening, it is the quintessence of Beowulf's ability. The poet is in excellent command of the language and the story progresses in a brisk pace. Though a series of deathly events are accounted, the author finds new phrases and expressions throughout the poem and avoids repetition. The events related to death are commonplace and prove to be the hallmark of the poem. The dragon is the poem's most powerful symbol.

Work Cited

Heaney, Seamus (Trans). *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation (Bilingual Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company; New York, 2001; Print.