

World view in beowulf essay sample



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Epic poem “ Beowulf” is the only survived one of the “ barbarian” peoples of Europe. Its main backbone was formed before the adoption of Christianity. The poem glorifies pagan virtues such as fearlessness in battle, loyalty to the tribe and leader, ruthless revenge on the enemies. The world described in “ Beowulf” is historically reliable, although the hero himself is not mentioned in any other source. Some episodes (the descent of the hero into the sea abyss, the cutting off of the monster’s hand, the battle with the dragon) echo the legends of different Germanic peoples. The main place of the work is occupied by battles, combatants, and soldiers. The description of other aspects of the life of Anglo-Saxon society is absent. Based on the poem, one can also judge the ethical views of people who lived in that era.

In the image of Beowulf, the notion of the heroic is embodied in the most complete, beautiful and majestic version of it. But there are other forms of heroic behavior. This is the wisdom and generosity of Hrodgar – the king of the tribe, his patron and protector; courage, fearlessness and devotion of Viglaf; Beauty and generosity of Wealtheow, the Queen of the Danes. These qualities together constitute a kind of “ catalog of virtues,” mandatory for a positive character of a heroic epic. Beowulf himself was awarded these virtues to the greatest extent. He has courage, wisdom, experience, martial arts, and the art of navigation, beauty, growth, and strength. The remaining characters are endowed with only a part of these stereotyped qualities.

Certain “ sets” of them, a combination of these or other qualities, correspond to different images of the poem, which creates largely generalized, stereotyped images. The number of such images – stereotypes is small, their functions in the plot are strictly delineated, each of them embodies one of

the aspects of heroic behavior, and, together forming a system of images of the poem, they complement each other.

It is not difficult to see that the system of images of the poem (the king, the vigilante, the queen, the hero, his squad) is an ideal society of the epic world. Epic society is limited: there is no place for real social relations. Only one single cell of the social structure, the leader, and his squad, corresponds to the heroic ideal in the greatest degree. This micro society in the poetic consciousness of the narrator and listeners replaces the rest of the world. The military is constantly identified with the whole tribe.

The well-being of society depends entirely on the observance of the standards of behavior, consecrated by centuries of practice that is appropriate to the king, on the one hand, and his soldiers on the other. The king should be powerful, generous and wise (the latter is understood precisely as compliance with traditional norms of conduct). A warrior should be betrayed to the king and be brave in battle.

In “ Beowulf” the ideal ruler of his people is already met at the beginning of the poem. This is the image of Hrodgar, the “ old and gray-haired” King of the Danes, whose main plot function is not the accomplishment of heroic deeds, but the attraction of heroes and giving them the opportunity to perform a feat. The image of the ideal ruler embodies the notion of social order and well-being. One of its main functions is the distribution of treasures. This is why so much attention is paid to the generosity of Hrodgar and other rulers.

The struggle for fame and jewels, loyalty to the leader, bloody revenge as an imperative of behavior, man's dependence on Destiny and courageous meeting with her, the tragic death of the epic hero are the defining themes not only of Beowulf but also of other monuments of the Germanic epic.

Expressed in the confrontation between the two warring forces, the conflict divides the images of the poem into two camps. In one of them there is a hero, the king, and queen of the tribe, their squads, and on the other, there are monsters, opponents of the hero. All the elements of this world gravitate to one of the poles; there are no “neutral” details not connected with this or that camp.

Thus, we can talk about the way of life of that time when military abilities were valued most, and people were perceived only as native or alien.

References

- Beowulf Essay Example – Shmoop. com, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf>