

How does the dragon
provide the most
dramatic
development in
beowulf?

[Business](#)



Beowulf is a poem that comes from the ancient Anglo-Saxons, a culture that was connected through their traditions of oral storytelling. Historians believe that the actual written poem, in Old English, was composed two or three hundred years after the story originated in 500 A. D. Prior to that time, the poem was memorized and retold by storytellers, who travelled across the land, making a living by entertaining the masses.

The evidence shows in the way that Beowulf is structured, where the poem will have sudden jumps in plot and long meanderings into related stories. The roots in oral storytelling lead to the emphasis on the use of dramatic development, which help expand on the scenes where Beowulf encounters the three " agons." The various settings where the battles take place include the grand mead-hall Heorot, an underwater grotto, and the cave of a dragon. The poet, or scop, achieves the greatest dramatic development in the setting of the dragon ruled wilderness by using devices such as epithets, foreshadowing, and hyperboles. The use of epithets aid in characterizing the grandeur of both the dragon and its surroundings. The poem, on Line 2208, suddenly transitions into a time period fifty years after Beowulf assumes the title of King of the Geats.

During his rule, a dragon slept as it guarded a vast hoard of treasure, until it was disturbed by the accidental theft of a goblet from the treasure trove. As the dragon awakened, it became infuriated, and went on to ravage the Geatland country. " So the guardian of the mound, the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming with fierce impatience; his pent-up fury at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back and lash out in flames," (Page 157).

The use of an epithet can not only give us background description of a
<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-the-dragon-provide-the-most-dramatic-development-in-beowulf/>

character, but can also act as an allegory. The quote uses two epithets together, “ the guardian of the mound, the hoard watcher,” to represent two different allegories: greed and isolation. The dragon’s main driving force is to hunt out hoards underground, only to guard them against outside forces for long period of time.

These two epithets give the audience contrasting feelings of hostility and pity towards the dragon, where the guardian’s materialistic needs cause violence, but all without a purpose. The driving forces behind the human characters in the poem are more complex. The poet uses foreshadowing throughout the poem in order to lead up to Beowulf’s final battle against the dragon. At the grand mead-hall of Heorot, the Geats and the Danes celebrated Beowulf’s victory against Grendel. A minstrel in King Hrothgar’s court decided to recite the ancient tale of Sigemund the dragon-slayer, as it connected to the feats of Beowulf.

“ Under grey stone he had dared to enter all by himself, to face the worst without Fitela,” (Page 59). The poet chooses to reference a similar dragon battle to show how history repeats itself, and that the heroic actions of both Sigemund and Beowulf still lead to unpredictable futures. Sigemund, like Beowulf, recklessly decides to fight the dragon on his own, risking his own life and the safety of others. Although both warriors manage to defeat their dragon and preserve the legacies of their names, their kingdoms still experience instability and threats of war, just as the ancient society who originally collected the hoards of treasure did. The use of foreshadowing

shows dramatic development by revealing to the audience of the future moral choices to be made in the presence of evil.

The poet uses hyperboles for characters to declare their convictions of their beliefs during the battle against the dragon. As the dragon ravaged the Geatland country, the warriors that Beowulf brought alongside him to defeat the dragon fell prey to fear. All except one retreated back into the woods, with the lone soldier called Wiglaf. A descendant of a great line of warriors, Wiglaf was determined to enter his first battle with loyalty. "As God is my witness, I would rather my body were robed in the same burning blaze as my gold-giver's body than go back bearing arms," (Page 179). This quote marks why the boasts given by characters during the battle of the dragon are significantly different than the encounters with the other monsters.

Speeches with these exaggerations are given by Beowulf and Wiglaf to emphasize the strength of loyalty instead of the importance of personal strength. We see through the fight against the dragon the beginning of the disintegration of a "heroic society," where soldiers such as Beowulf's are supposed to uphold the strict, loyal values of Norse society. Beowulf and Wiglaf both continue to fight the dragon to uphold their values, despite the inevitable changes that time will bring to their society. The dragon differs in importance from previous foes encountered in Beowulf. Grendel and his mother were members of the Clan of Cain, put upon the Earth and pitted against humans against their will.

The dragon, on the other hand, does not descend from the Clan of Cain. In many ways, it symbolizes the existence of ancient Scandinavian culture. It

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-the-dragon-provide-the-most-dramatic-development-in-beowulf/>

connects ancient kingdoms to the current, yet also instigates social change in the wake of its destructive nature. The poet emphasizes that the battle with the dragon is based solely on wyrd, or fate, instead of the personal strength presented in the beginning of the poem. We see that the Danes' meetings with Grendel and Grendel's mother bring out their negative aspects, despite their self-praise for their "heroic" deeds. Whereas with the dragon, we see characters such as Wiglaf stand up for the true morals of the Geats, and assist Beowulf in his struggle.

The dramatic devices that the poet uses help express these ideas and keep the audience aware of the symbolism behind the prose.