

Beowulf essay

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



Nolan Kmiec The similarities and differences within Beowulf and The Canterbury Tales are quite evident after reading both texts. Both authors, Beowulf, by Anonymous and The Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer use literary devices to convey their message in each poem. There are similarities and differences within characters, tone, images and symbols. Beowulf and The Canterbury Tales are two similar poems but are written with different styles and literary devices. Beowulf and The Miller's Tale are great examples of two poems that share similarities, yet provide a contrast between the mores of the 14th century and our current society. In both poems, for instance, the traits of the characters portray social values which are different from society today. In Beowulf, the characters are depicted as brave, strong, kind and devoted to their leaders. The characters suggest that society during this time valued loyalty, obedience and glory. Characters were recognized for their strength and success in battle. Beowulf is first mentioned and described as the greatest warrior alive. Beowulf states, " So every elder and experienced councilman among my people supported my resolve to come here to you, King Hrothgar, because all knew of my awesome strength" (Beowulf, 36). In modern society, men are valued for their good looks or wealth and not their success as a warrior. In The Miller's Tale, the characters are also portrayed in a way that is different than society today. The miller emphasizes that intelligence is the most important characteristic in a person and not wealth. He talks about Nicholas and how his intelligence helped him trick the carpenter. Although the carpenter was wealthy, this did not give him an advantage when it came to Nicholas's plan. Society today is focused more on wealth and status instead of education. People believe that

education is not needed as long as you are wealthy, and that you will have an advantage in life as long as you have money. This clearly goes against the miller's belief that education is more important than wealth. Beowulf and The Miller's Tale are different in the way that they portray women. In Beowulf, women were loyal to their husbands and respected their family and themselves. They had certain duties as a wife or mother and they made sure their job was done well. In The Miller's Tale, Allison is portrayed in a different way. She is a typical woman with beautiful features that all men are thirsty for. She is not loyal to her husband and uses her beauty as a way to get attention from other men. In the poem, Allison uses sympathy to trick her husband into leaving so she can be alone with Nicholas. The poem states, " Help us to scape, or we been dede eechoon. I am thy trwew verray wedded wif: Go, dere spouse, and help to save or lif" (Chaucer, 209). This showed the lack of loyalty Allison had for her husband John, and how she was able to trick him into leaving her and Nicholas alone. Allison is unaware of her behavior and acts like cheating on her husband is okay. The lack of respect she has for her husband and for herself is different than the women in Beowulf. The Miller's Tale and Beowulf also have different tones and imagery. The tone of Beowulf is more serious and gruesome and the imagery is more vibrant. The narrator talks about the battles and characters with much detail so the reader can pinpoint the importance of what the narrator is saying. When talking about Grendel, the narrator makes sure the reader can tell that he is not just a demon, but a " captain of evil". The poem states, " He grabbed and mauled a man on his bench, bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood and gorged on him in lumps" (Beowulf, 42). Grendel is

described in a more detailed and gruesome way and this shows the reader the seriousness of Grendel's character. The detailed description also puts a clear image into the readers head. The Miller's Tale has a more straightforward and comedic tone. Events are described without personal insight from the narrator. The tone becomes comedic as the narrator describes the events in a way that seems like he is unaware of what he is saying. For example, when Absolon kisses Allison's butt, the narrator describes it like it is no big deal. The poem states, " But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers, ful savourly, er he were war of this" (Chaucer, 212). The reader could imagine what is going on, but the lack of detail does not make the image as clear or vibrant. The narrator's sense of humor and lack of attention to what he or she is saying also brings humor to the poem. The Wife of Bath, also by Geoffrey Chaucer, has a similarity to Beowulf. Both poems contain symbolism. In the prologue of The Wife of Bath, the wife compares herself and other women to loaves of bread. The wheat bread symbolizes virgins while the less-expensive barley bread symbolizes wives. She makes the point that virgins or white bread may be preferred, but barley bread is just as nice. The poem states, " I won't envy them virginity: let them be white bread of finest wheat, and let us wives be called barley bread... " (Chaucer, 189). The wife continues to compare the bread to the sexuality of her youth. In Beowulf, there is also symbolism. The great banquet that is held at Herorot after the defeat of Grendel symbolizes the restoration of order and peace to the Danish people. There is rebuilding of the damaged mead-hall and this also symbolizes the rebirth of the community. Although the author of Beowulf and The Canterbury Tales are different, both poems

have there similarities. The way that the characters are portrayed and how their descriptions conflict with society today is similar and both poems use symbolism. The differences of Beowulf and The Canterbury Tales are seen within the tone, images and the portrayal of women. The similarities and differences are emphasized in each poem as the authors' writing style is examined, along with the use of literary devices.