

The germanic heroic code

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



Explain the Germanic (includes Anglo-Saxon and Norse) heroic ideal (heroic code) and define its main elements. Cite specific examples in Beowulf. Choose many elements---from the beginning, middle, and end of the poem. The examples do not have to be told in detail (don't drift into plot summary). The epic poem Beowulf demonstrates how the Germanic heroic code supports the warrior lifestyle. (Greenblatt 5) The heroic code was based on the idea that "the most important of human relationships was that which existed between the warrior-the thane-and his lord". (Greenblatt 27) It was a voluntary partnership, with the thane's role as warrior and the King's role as provider. The King was not selfish with his riches and in return the thane would die for the King or die avenging his death. (Greenblatt 28) After Beowulf kills Grendel a huge celebration takes place at the castle and the partnership between the King and the thane, Beowulf, is so clearly shown when Beowulf is given presents for his courage and victory. Then Halfdane's son presented Beowulf with a gold standard as a victory gift, an embroidered banner; also breast-mail and a helmet; and a sword carried high, that was both precious object and token of honor. (Lines 1019-1023) In this passage Beowulf is given expensive gifts by the King. These gifts are payment for his bravery, courage, and ultimately his victory. The gifts are not only expensive but they represent honor. And Beowulf earned this honor by protecting the King and his land and he did this by defeating Grendel. This Germanic code is also displayed when Beowulf is retelling his fight with Grendel's mother, and he talks about the custom of his payment for another victory. Thus the king acted with due custom. I was paid and recompensed completely, given full measure of freedom to choose Beowulf explains how it is custom for him

to be given gifts by the king because he not only did kill Grendel's mother he showed loyalty and courage. Another element of the Germanic code is avenging the death of your fellow kinsmen. " The relationship between kinsmen was also of deep significance to this society. If one of his kinsmen had been slain, a man had a moral obligation either to kill the slayer or to exact payment of wergild (man-price) in compensation. " (Greenblatt 28) The slain had a predefined price based on their rank in society. (Greenblatt 28) When Grendel's mother attacked the hall and killed Aeschere it was explained to Beowulf as an act of vengeance. because of last night, when you killed Grendel, wrestled and racked him in ruinous combat since for too long he had terrorized us with his depredations. He died in battle, paid with his life; and now this powerful other one arrives, this force for evil driven to avenge her kinsman's death. (Lines 1334-1340) This passage displays how the heroic code is even upheld to the villains in the story. Even though Grendel and his mother are evil they still are expected to avenge their loved ones death. Beowulf's adopted brother, Herebeald, was killed by his brother Haethcyn. And their dad, the king, decided to kill himself instead of avenging his son's death by killing his other son. after Herebeald's death. He was helplessly placed to set to rights the wrong committed, could not punish the killer in accordance with the law of the blood-feud, although he felt no love for him. Heartsore, wearied, he turned away From life's joys chose God's light. (Lines 2464-2769) King Hrethel was so torn between the Germanic ideal of " an eye for an eye" that he chose to take his own life. He did not want to kill his son, but he also did not want to face the shame of not avenging his death would bring him. Beowulf shows how the Germanic

heroic code gives warriors the permission for vengeance and it also gives warriors wealth to fight and do battle.