

# Pagan and christian symbols in beowulf

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



At the time that Beowulf was written, the culture that produced the poem, the Anglo-Saxons, were a pagan culture. The Catholic Church was trying to spread its beliefs to other parts of the world. The Anglo-Saxons were a definite target. Many of the texts that we have out of that time period were written by Catholic monks. In Beowulf there are many references to pagan and Christian beliefs. These beliefs neither contradict, nor outshine each other. Rather, the monks writing the work interjected some Christian ideas in order to try and sell Christianity to the people that were familiar with the tale.

The pagan and Christian ideas are perfectly laced together to introduce some of the ideas of Christianity to a pagan people. In this poem there are often references to pagan and Christian beliefs very close in the piece of poetry. This would tie a familiar belief to something exotic to the Anglo-Saxons. In lines 1261-1268, the story of Cain and Abel are briefly explained, but not far from this Christian reference is the idea of revenge, in line 1278, which is frowned upon in Christianity, but it was a popular belief among the Anglo-Saxon culture at that time.

By binding these two elements together, the monk was trying to make Christianity seem less foreign and more like something familiar to the people. At the end of the attack on Grendel's mother, in lines 1553-1556, the outcome of the fight was said to have been decided by God. Beowulf even credits God and thanks him for guiding him through the battle at many different points of the story. Yet, at the very end of the poem the greatest thing for Beowulf is fame. He wants to be remembered forever for his actions.

At this point there is no mention of God or God's help. Beowulf boasts; I risked my life Often when I was young. Now I am old, But as king of this people I shall pursue this fight For the glory of winning, if the evil one will only Abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open. (lines 2511-2515) This gives credit to God for his actions, but it does tie God into fame. Earlier in the poem God had helped Beowulf on his quest, which gained him eternal fame. This, again, ties a popular belief among the Anglo-Saxons to a Christian belief.

Making it easier to understand and, in a way, makes Christianity seem like a desirable belief system if it will gain one fame. The monks who wrote down the oral tradition of Beowulf intertwined Christian and pagan beliefs, hoping it would make Christianity more familiar to the Anglo-Saxons of that time. The monks had also used examples of Christianity that made it seem desirable for the people to convert. The purpose of adding Christian elements to Beowulf was not to outshine the pagan beliefs but to make Christianity something the Anglo-Saxons would understand.