

Introduction beowulf  
is a popular title that



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Introduction**

Beowulf is a popular title that refers to an old epic poem that is very informative.

Its setting is in Scandinavia and a lot of importance is attached to the field of literature. The poem revolves around a hero of the Geats by the name Beowulf who encounters three rivals; Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon. Grendel is particularly involved in attacking the warriors of the mead hall.

The hero is engaged in different battles but it is after winning two of them that he retires to his homeland in Sweden where he gets the title of being the king of the Geats and later he engages in his final battle where he survives fatal injuries that lead to his death. Women is a tool that play a very critical role in Beowulf as they help in the understanding of the entire poem and also the culture of the people in the ancient time (Orchard 8). This paper discusses the general aspects of women in Beowulf with much emphasis being given to the specific characters, their roles and how they are viewed.

## **The Female Characters**

According to Porter (3), there are six major women characters in Beowulf. They are Thryth, Hygd, Wealthew, Freawaru, Hildeburh and Grendel's mother. These women characters can be grouped into pairs according to their ranks and the roles they play in the society for instance Wealthew and Hygd are queen and hostess respectively. Hildeburh and Freawaru act as peace keepers and peace weavers and participate in controversial situations in the society while Thryth and Grendel's mother are depicted as monsters

although in different aspects. They in most instances counter the hostesses and peace weavers by acting in a more masculine way than them and also utilizing their physical strength and weapons as a means of impacting their influence on the society as opposed to the use of words or even social aspects like marriages as it is the case with the majority of women. The different characters portrayed by the different women in the poem act as a way through which we can get a general overview of the women in Beowulf and the society at that time in general (Nilson 1).

## **Roles of women in Beowulf**

The women play a variety of roles at different times and occasions. They are for instance supposed to recognize the bravery of their men at all times and also to perform the ritualistic practices that entail the passing of the mead cup.

This is a way of taking care of the men's welfare in terms of satisfying their bodies and souls which are a role that is purely a woman's. Women also serve the role of being peace keepers and weavers through their presence in all the post-battle sections of Beowulf. Peace keeping is a role that gives the women some form of identity. This, for example, can be seen in their effort in arranging marriages between clans that are surrounded by conflicts as they clearly understand the importance of peace and that its absence leads to failure in almost every aspect of life. The women also play the role of being transition figures for instance Grendel's mother who goes ahead and avenges her son's death and in return she gets killed.

Prophecy is the other role that is assigned to women in Beowulf. This is closely related to the ritualistic practices carried out by the women and their power over the men's wits and sobriety. The women give signs and warn the people of anything that ought to happen especially the unpleasant happenings so that they can take the necessary precautions to avoid suffering. For instance, a woman appears after the demise of Beowulf to specifically warn the people that they have to be prepared as much awaits them from their former enemies following the slaying of their lord Beowulf (Edgington and Edgington 2). Women are also entitled with the role of playing power politics in different occasions. For example, we see queen Wealtheow taking the opportunity of rewarding Beowulf substantially following his return from the act of slaying Grendel.

This is a sign of caring for the society a role that is well played by women as opposed to the men. The women also serve a very significant role in the society which entails acting as role models by serving as mirrors to the young people through which they can gauge their failures and achievements. Women are very significant in Beowulf although they are also viewed to be undermined by being given roles that are substandard. However, they are also valued as the roles they play could otherwise be unattended or done ineffectively. They are for example assigned some essential roles like the clarification of the Germanic code that is utilized in the ruling during this time of the Beowulf.

Grendel's mother serves as a good example here where she is depicted as an evil beast and a savage woman and associated with the bad dealings of her son Grendel. The good part of this comes in her act of avenging for her

son's death where she expresses the code of honor in a far much better manner than any man would do. Her honor is especially seen where she only kills one man as opposed to where her son, a man, killed a many of them.

The Germanic code demands that women are supposed to show some specific elements for instance humanity, warlike and sympathetic in all their dealings irrespective of the circumstances that faced them (Edgington and Edgington 4). From the roles given to the women in Beowulf, it is true to conclude that although the roles are not too much inflexible that they can limit the women actions, they are to a great extent responsible for restricting their powers. The women roles also bring out the aspect of male dominance when compared to the men roles in the society. Suppression for women is an aspect that is acceptable and the few who are viewed to express some possession of power are expected to do so at a very minimal rate. A good example being that of queen Wealtheow whom despite having the title, she is charged with petty responsibilities like those of serving drinks to men.

### **How women in Beowulf are viewed**

Women in Beowulf are viewed as homemakers are not accorded the respect and honor they deserve. They are expected to be unassertive and are not given a chance to ask questions but rather to act unquestionably and serve the guests and the warriors and make the men happy under all circumstances. For instance, we see queen Wealtheow being viewed simply as just as typical Danish woman while Grendel's mother is seen as a strong woman who is assertive and worse still a murderer.

This shows that some women are accorded the praise they require while others are despised too much. It is evident from the author's view point there is an element of suppressing the feminine forces in Beowulf despite the fact that there are chances of trying to counter this through praises to some women. Women are also depicted as members of the weaker sex throughout the poem. For instance, when queen Wealtheow is directed to her position beside the king and she is expected to be involved in serving drinks and greeting the guest or else following the king obediently for any occurring chance where her help is needed. The strong attributes of the women for instance their intelligence and their ability to undertake certain duties perfectly than men like peacemaking are not emphasized in the poem although they are evident.

This helps in the understanding of where the women are placed in society especially in relation to the men (MartinX 2).

## **Conclusion**

It is evident from the epic poem that women in Beowulf play a very essential role despite the fact that there are instances of them being undermined. The words and practices carried out by the women in Beowulf seem to play the overall rationale of the poem, which entails the demonstration of concentration on variation and opposition. This is seen in their participation in various activities in the society specifically in their presence after battles and their intervention in celebrations through use of sobering wordings. They also try their best in upholding the warrior code that has been there since the ancient times in a better manner than the men hence fulfilling their duty in an appropriate manner as stipulated by the code.

## **Works Cited**

Edgington Byron and Edgington Mariah.

" The Role of Women in Beowulf - An Overview". Ezine articles, 2011. Mar. 18, 2011.