

The epic of beowulf: how christianand pagans view immortality

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Pagan Immorality

In the Anglo-Saxon epic poem Beowulf, translated by Charles W. Kennedy, religious beliefs and ideals from various groups combine to create the story of an epic hero. During this time period, immortality and life after death were the most important achievements to those of Christian and Pagan religion. Because of this, much of their lives were based on the fight for glory and remembrance after they die. This ideal influences Beowulf to be an epic hero on the path to greatness; Looking for immortality, fame, glory, and how to achieve it with a strong mind and body.

Throughout the poem, Beowulf sacrifices his life many times in order to save others, proving himself to be a true hero in all senses. His physical strength and great heart have the efficacy to create a god-like creature with the Greek ideals of a strong body and mind. These characteristics shape his journey and lead to his impending goal of glory and life after death. Besides the fact that Beowulf is as strong as thirty men, he was also a sympathetic and brave man who gave himself to many causes. Shown in the quote, " Of living strong men he was the strongest, Fearless and gallant and great of heart (132)", Beowulf is looked up to as a peerless hero, with intentions to admonish all endangering them. Beowulf shows himself to be ideal in all sense of Greek life throughout his battles, including his adventure with Grendel's mother. When Beowulf chooses to fight her alone to save his men, in a setting even animals would never dare to enter, he proves himself to be a larger than life human in more ways than one. The quote, " That if doing your service I meet my death You will mark my fall with father's love. Protect

my kinsmen, my trust comrades, If battle take me (982)" truly emphasizes his character and intentions.

The idea of immortality and life after death play a substantial role in the epic poem, Beowulf. Religious beliefs and quotes are combined throughout the poem to emphasize the importance of working hard during one's life, so one will be rewarding after death, either in going to heaven, for Christians, or becoming immortal, for the Pagan religion. Throughout the poem, Beowulf volunteers to endanger himself in many dangerous journeys to try and gain glory. He completed many impossible tasks and often refused help with the intention of being remembered for his strength and braveness for completing these adventures alone. In the beginning of the poem, Beowulf first reveals his strength and intent of glory by sailing to another country to kill Grendel. He says, " With hand-grip only I'll grapple with Grendel; Foe against foe I'll fight to the death, And the one who is taken must trust to God's grace! (342)". This quote shows Beowulf's dedication to glory and the idea that God will grant him this right if he truly deserves it. He believes that by going after Grendel, he will earn immortality for his efforts, whether he comes out victorious or not.

With his devotion to glory, Beowulf completes many dangerous tasks in the pursuit of life after death. This ideal influences him to endanger himself in the fight for a greater good, and also gives him purpose in life. Beowulf feels that he is intended to do all he can to keep others safe, and when he does not fully complete his tasks, he feels he has not done enough. This can be shown after his fight with Grendel, when he survived and kept Grendel's arm

as a token, leaving him deeply injured, but felt that he had not done enough, and needed to end it completely. Even when others celebrated him, he felt he was not worthy of their devotion to him. He says, " But i might not hold him or hinder his going For God did not grant it, my fingers failed" (706). Not killing Grendel deeply hinders Beowulf and he does not feel truly complete until he has finished the deed and killed not only Grendel, but his mother as well. Another quote that emphasizes Beowulf's devotion to glory says, " And play the part of a valiant earl. By deeds of daring I'll gain the gold or death in battle shall break your lord" (1505). In this, he asks his men not to help him during his battle, for he would rather die and have his story remembered as he wishes. Because of this request, he dies as a result of injury in battle, though his men keep his story alive. They even modified it to honor him more, and builded a memorial for all ships passing by to see. Because of their dedication to their lord and his devotion to glory, he was granted the one wish he had worked for his entire life, and lived on through his story.

Overall, the story of Beowulf is an epic poem of heroism and the fight for immortality. As an epic hero, Beowulf achieves many great things that contribute to his fame, but also his death. Success and glory, while they can be rewards in some ways, can be the downfall for those that cannot handle the recognition and power, such as Beowulf, who was unable to follow his mentor's advice, and died because of it. Although he was not able to finish his last task, he was rewarded after death with immortality when his men remained loyal and told his story. Therefore, his actions, though done to advance himself, saved many people, and he was rewarded with the one thing he had done everything for, pagan immortality.

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