

# Beowulf is a christian hero religion essay



**ASSIGN  
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Have you ever had the privilege of reading George Orwell's novel known as *Animal Farm*? If so, you are probably well aware that it is a book that reflects the government and leadership of the days in which it was written. Many people believe that *Beowulf* is similar to *Animal Farm* in that it also reflects a part of the culture of its day. But instead of reflecting government, like *Animal Farm*, *Beowulf* reflects the changes in the religious culture of England. While describing the background of *Beowulf*, Burton Raffel points out, "When *Beowulf* was composed, England was changing from a pagan to a Christian culture." Therefore, *Beowulf* signifies the Christian culture that is overcoming and replacing the pagan culture, which is signified by Grendel, his mother, and the dragon. *Beowulf*, the poem, may have been written by a heathen (which is a debate for another paper) but *Beowulf* the character was a Christian.

Raffel's point can be taken a step further. Not only did *Beowulf* symbolize the Christian culture, but he also symbolized Christ himself. Along with that comes the idea that Grendel, his mother, and the dragon not only symbolize the pagan culture but also Satan, the devil, or simply evil. The most obvious act of displaying Christ seen in *Beowulf* is when he sacrificed his own life to kill the dragon and ensure the safety of his people. The next example is not quite as obvious as the first but is still reasonable. Throughout the entire poem, Grendel and his mom are both referred to as the devil or a demon several times. "So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall/ Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend, Grendel..." (Raffel 39). Later on, after Grendel attacked and killed some soldiers in Herot, the "name calling" continues: "In Herot, a mighty prince mourning/ The fate of his lost friends

and companions,/ Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn/ His followers apart." (Raffel 40). Later on when Hrothgar tells Beowulf of what his people have seen, they describe Grendel and his mother in the following way: " And they've said to my wise men that, as well as they could see,/ One of the devils was a female creature." (Raffel 49).

Sometimes the author is not as flagrant in his or her references to Grendel and his mom as the devil or demons. Sometimes the author simply hints at the idea. Speaking of Grendel he says, " living down in the darkness," where the " darkness" is referring to hell (Raffel 39). The most obvious hint at the idea is when Grendel will not touch Hrothgar's throne because it was protected by God: " Though he lived/ In Herot, when the night hid him, he never/ Dared to touch King Hrothgar's glorious/ Throne, protected by God - God,/ Whose love Grendel could not know." (Raffel 41). This point can be further understood after reading James 2: 19. Grendel knows of God yet lives in fear of him. The last hint the author gives is when he calls Grendel's mother's cave " the God-cursed roof" to once again have the place where they live resemble Hell (Heaney 211).

Considering the fact that Beowulf defeated these demons or devils pushes the idea even further that he is a Christ figure throughout the poem. Now thinking realistically, how could a story about a pagan who resembles Christ last for several centuries if never written down? It simply could not have. Realistically, for an oral story to last so long, the Christ figure must have intentionally been depicted by a Christ follower or else the story would have basically no meaning or value to anyone at all and therefore be forgotten.

Throughout the text, God, as well as many Biblical characters and events, are mentioned and recognized and even prayed to by Beowulf himself. In the very beginning, literally the seventh line of the poem, the Creation is spoken of: " The Almighty making the earth, shaping/ These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,/ Then proudly setting the sun and moon/ To glow across the land and light it" (Raffel 39). Not too long after that, Cain and Abel are mentioned: " Conceived by a pair of those monsters born/ Of Cain, murderous creatures banished/ By God, punished forever for the crime/ Of Abel's death." (Raffel 39-40). The most significant segment is when Beowulf prays to God and thanks him for his " loot" or treasure: " For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth..." (Raffel 59). This shows us not only that Beowulf acknowledged God's mere existence but that he also considered Him the " Ruler of the Earth" and knew that He was the one who brought him all of his wealth. Yes, it is true that even Satan himself believes in God's existence and that He is the " Ruler of the Earth." In James 2: 19 the Bible states, " You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder." But Beowulf's belief in and of God goes further and deeper than the demon's belief. This is backed up later on when Beowulf's eternity in heaven is mentioned.

Please do not take my word and my translation of the poem alone. This is not just a personal opinion. Other literature experts have said the exact same thing that I am. Larry D. Benson suggested that the pagan material was added to Beowulf in order to arouse sympathy (Ogilvy 169). An anonymous student wrote a short paper on the matter. Speaking of the poem Beowulf, he said, " Although showing signs of being a pagan story, Beowulf is

primarily a Christian story." The argument for Beowulf as a Christian poem goes hand in hand with my first point that it signifies the religious and cultural changes that were taking place in its time.

Now here are a couple of the top arguments that try to say Beowulf is not a Christian. Arguably the most popular argument is that Beowulf does not believe in God but instead believes in fate. Someone that wrote a paper on Beowulf, who is known as Ultisch said, " Many times throughout Beowulf, the author will reference fate, while speaking of God..." To reword, they are saying that, yes, Beowulf does mention fate, but when he does, he is referring to God's ultimate sovereignty and control and not something of pure chance or luck. Some people also like to argue that Beowulf's death bed wish to see the treasures he just earned, instead of his family or something of more long term value, is proof that he was not a Christian. " As he dies, Beowulf asks Wiglaf to bring him the treasure that the dragon was guarding." (Raffel 58). Now think reasonably. How can this logically prove that he was not a Christian? He is simply being reasonable and realistic. He knows he does not have enough time left and that he can not see his family. In their book, J. D. A Ogilvy and Donald C. Baker say, " Beowulf is dying - why not see the treasure?" Even if this was not the case and Beowulf was being greedy, it still would not prove anything. Is a man's greed proof that he is an unbeliever? The obvious answer is no. In Roman 3: 23 the Bible says, " For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." Just because a man sinned does not mean he is not a Christian.

In conclusion, Beowulf was a Christian man and did go to heaven in the end. Yes, there is more proof for that too. At the end of the poem, Beowulf's death

is described in this way: " His soul left his flesh, flew to glory." (Raffel 59). The word " glory" here quite obviously means heaven. Also, before he fights the dragon, Beowulf says, " I've never known fear," (Raffel 54) saying that he is not afraid to die. This shows us that he knows his eternity is secure in the Lord. This proves that Beowulf's belief in and of God goes further than that of the demons and that he truly is a child of God.