

Judaism and character beowulf assignment

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Beowulf In the story of Beowulf, written by an anonymous writer between 700 and 1000 A. D, there are many references to Paganism and Christianity. People believed that the writer of this poem was indeed a Christian even though he held strong Pagan views. Many ask the question is Beowulf a Pagan or a Christian hero, but the real question to be asked is what is the true religion behind this English epic poem? Although there are many Christian references in the poem, they are only used in order to draw familiar parallels to the character Beowulf's' belief in Paganism.

During the time of Beowulf, society was gradually converting from Paganism to Christianity. The Anglo-Saxons were struggling with this conversion and having a hard time believing in only one God. The narrator clearly tries to make Beowulf a story of Christian influences. However, looking at the main character Beowulf, we know he is a Pagan and this poem will always be a Pagan poem at heart. Beowulf encounters three major battles as he progresses throughout the poem. In his first battle he fights a Giant named Grendel who terrorizes Herot Hall for many years.

Grendel went to Herot Hall looking to kill everyone in his path, “ Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred, Grendel came, hoping to kill anyone he could trap on this trip to High Herot” (392-394). The narrator describes Grendel as having hatred as strong and powerful as God. Hatred is looked down upon in the religion of Christianity but is strongly practiced Paganism. It is understood that God does not have hate in his heart and that he loves every living thing.

The narrator uses God only to show how mighty Grendel's hatred is for Herot Hall. The narrator also compares Beowulf's strength to that of God, " Now He discovered??? once the afflictor of men, tormentor of their days??? what it meant to feud with Almighty God: Grendel saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at His hands" (490-495). Our writer explains that God has amazing strength but then goes on to say that Beowulf uses that God like strength to inflict pain upon Grendel.

Beowulf's strength is being compared to God's; however, the hero's strength is being used for his own glory, not Gods, making the first battle Pagan and not Christian. Our great hero's second battle was against Grendel's mother. Beowulf had to face the wrath of a mother whose son was injured and eventually died. She came for revenge and would stop at nothing until Beowulf was dead. " Scholars have shown that Anglo-Saxon values were not eradicated after conversion to Christianity; many, including the revenge ethic, continued to coexist with Christian values for many years" (Brenner 20).

Although Grendel's mother is a woman, she proved to be even more competition for Beowulf than Grendel was, " He'd have traveled to the bottom of the earth, Edgetho's son, and died there, if that shining woven metal had not helped??? and Holy God, who sent him victory, gave judgment for truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens, Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting. Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy sword.... But so massive that no ordinary man could lift its carved and decorated length.

He drew it from its scabbard...lifted it high over his head and struck with all the strength he had left, caught her in the neck and cut it through, broke bones and all..."(627-649). The narrator gives us the sense that with God anything is possible. He shows that God was the one who gave Beowulf the strength to rise and defeat Grendel's mother. Although Beowulf's strength came from God, he uses it again in an ungodly like manner and kills Grendel's mother. Our hero felt no remorse for what he had done, " Her body fell to the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet with her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight" (643-645).

Rejoicing because of someone's death is against the religion of Christianity completely. Christians believe that since God gave you life he should be the only one to take it away. Beowulf took the life of Grendel's mother and did not feel any pain or sorrow for what he had done. His thoughts and emotions were strictly pagan although he felt that God gave him the strength to fulfill this task. In Beowulf's final battle he tries to defeat the dragon. He leaves his followers behind knowing that he may never return. Beowulf, by this time, is all about himself.

He feels as though he is the only person that could ever defeat this dragon. " We shall see, soon, who will survive this bloody battle, stand when the fighting is done. No one else could do what I mean to, here, no man but me could hope to defeat this monster. No one could try. And this dragon's treasure, his gold and everything hidden in that tower, will be mine or war will sweep me to a bitter death! " (680-687). Beowulf has strayed so far away from being humble about the situation which is not Christian like. He

thinks everything should revolve around him and that everything belongs to him.

Most Christians are taught to be thankful for what they have and to not be greedy. Although the dragon was defeated, so was Beowulf. Wiglaf, Beowulf's cousin who had fought along side of Beowulf during the battle, brought him the treasures as he was laying there dying. Beowulf is quick to thank God for these treasures but then contradicts himself by saying, " For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank our father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth??? For all of this, that His grace has given me, allowed me to bring to my people while breath still came to my lips...Wiglaf lead my people, Help them; my time is gone.

Have the brave Geats build me a tomb, when the funeral flames have burned me, and build it here, at the water's edge high on this spit of land, so sailors can see this tower, and, remember my name, and call it Beowulf's tower..."(802-816). He recognizes that God was the one that made it possible for him to have the treasures but he goes on to tell Wiglaf to get the Geats to build him a tomb in honor of himself. He doesn't mention anything about building a church to represent all that God has done for him, he wants everything to be about himself and that is not something a Christian would do.

Although our story Beowulf was written during the time of the Anglo-Saxon conversion from Pagan to Christianity, we can clearly see that our character and our story is truly Pagan influenced. The Christian references had little effect on the true feelings of our main character even though he did try and

incorporate them into his thinking. In the end he was always true to his Pagan beliefs which made this story a true Pagan English Epic poem.