

# Beowulf's hero journey – an epic of a quest hero

Literature



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## Hero's Journey Paper

As he battles Grendel and slays the great dragon, Beowulf is seen as Joseph Campbell's Quest Hero. However, in addition, as the poem Beowulf is analyzed, Beowulf seems to be portrayed as a sacrificial scapegoat. For the most part, Beowulf does follow Campbell's hero's journey outline, thus making him a quest hero. Beowulf can be viewed as a sacrificial scapegoat at the end of the poem in the battle with the dragon.

Throughout the epic, Beowulf is described as the perfect hero, flawless in almost all manners. So when he hears of the terrors of Grendel he is called to adventure (109-115). The next step in Campbell's outline is the "refusal of the call," however; Beowulf is seemingly the perfect hero and has no refusal. Beowulf then enters the hall of Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, and accepts his quest to slay Grendel. Beowulf continues to say that "he needs no weapons and fears none. Nor will I," (168-169) therefore showing that he is a "perfect" hero, having no need for weapons. The next couple steps in the hero's journey outline involve outside help, whether it is from people or objects. It is made apparent that Beowulf has no need for help.

Unlike in other hero stories, there is no major threshold or door he must pass to continue on his quest. The closest moment in the story is between lines 128 and 134 when Beowulf and his men are welcomed to Herot: "over the open Sea you have come bravely and you are welcome Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets," (129-131). Chronologically, Beowulf has his "brother battle" with his equal, Unferth, where Unferth said that Beowulf was foolish: "'You're Beowulf, are you - the same Boastful fool who fought a

swimming Match with Brecca, Both of you daring And young and proud,” (239-242). This quotation goes to show that maybe Beowulf is not perfect and that there area token group of people that dislike him. However, at the same time, the quotation solidifies that point that he is a good hero because he was proud and daring when he was young. His quest takes him to the land of the Danes, in Herot, where he faces his first “ dragon battle.” His first battle is with the mysterious monster Grendel, whom he fights without a weapon. “ And Grendel’s great teeth came together, Snapping life shut... And was instantly seized himself, claws bent back as Beowulf leaned up upon one arm” (426-431). It then goes on to tell that Grendel’s arm was pulled off by Beowulf, which showed his great strength. Beowulf truly crosses a threshold when “ he sank through the waves; At last he saw the mud of the bottom.” (573-574) This is considered a threshold because it is the first time Beowulf crosses over to a place that is truly unknown to him. Then, Beowulf goes on to kill Grendel’s mother: “ And struck with all the strength he had left, Caught her in the neck and cut it through, broken bones and all, “ (641-643) According to Campbell’s outline, Beowulf was now the master of two worlds, he has conquered both familiar and unfamiliar worlds. This is why Beowulf is a quest hero.

Beowulf is portrayed as a sacrificial scapegoat through the next part in his hero’s journey. In his third and final dragon battle, which was literally a dragon battle, Beowulf must face a menacing, greedy, and rich dragon. Beowulf became a sacrificial scapegoat because he had to make up for the people’s sins, meaning the gold and treasure that they took from the great

dragon. Beowulf knew that he had to sacrifice himself for the “ sins” of his people, as he was king.

Beowulf is a seemingly flawless hero, he does not need any assistance, is strong, and a true warrior; all attributes of a good Anglo-Saxon hero and leader. Unlike the complex epics of Greece and the Middle-east, the epic poem of Beowulf gave the people a simple, and moral man to look up to.