

Pagan and christian aspects of beowulf essay sample

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



Beowulf is an epic poem featuring a conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs. Within this context there is a continuous theme of good versus evil. Beowulf is a Christian hero who is endowed with superhuman strengths representative of paganism. He battles Grendel and Grendel's mother, pagan monsters, whose lineage can be traced back to Cain, a biblical figure. Years later Beowulf takes on a monstrous dragon, a creature of pagan mythology.

The story begins with our hero Beowulf seeking out a pagan monster Grendel who is terrorizing the Danes. Beowulf boasts of his strength and fairness and therefore announces that he will fight Grendel barehanded. He believes that God and the Fates will decide who should win. When Beowulf fights Grendel he displays his superhuman strength by being able to rip Grendel's arm off. Grendel retreats and Beowulf claims victory.

In retaliation for her son's dismemberment Grendel's Mother kills Hrothgar's closest friend prompting Beowulf to search for her. When he finds her lair he again exhibits paganistic powers by being able to hold his breath for hours while he searches for her. During the fight Beowulf believes he is being protected by God but again uses unnatural strength by picking up a giant's sword " so massive that no ordinary man could lift it." Using this sword Beowulf kills Grendel's mother and decapitates Grendel thereby ridding Herot of the evil creatures.

Nearly fifty years after his battles with Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf's kingdom is threatened by a vicious dragon. Even though he decides to use armor and weapons, Beowulf is again given unnatural powers when he is able to withstand the dragon's flames. After killing the dragon but

being mortally wounded by it, Beowulf's comrade Wiglaf administers the last rites, a Christian custom, for Beowulf before he dies. Beowulf's followers build a giant tower to entomb him, a somewhat paganistic custom.

The presence of pagan and Christian customs in Beowulf may seem like a conflict of interests, but it all flows together to make an entertaining story. This clash of polar beliefs was a sign of the times. When Beowulf was written Christianity was on the rise. It was spreading throughout Europe and eastern Asia. This increase in Christian beliefs coincided with the downfall of paganism. Both of these differing ideas were present throughout the poem.