Analysis On Beowulf Essay, Research Paper

I have just completed the reading of Beowulf, which was translated by Burton Raffel.

1) Beowulf is an extremely exciting and fascinating story about a character who lived in medieval Europe. The shocking thing for me about this work was to find out that it is the earliest poem in a modern European language. Beowulf is to the English what Homer and the Odyssey were to the Greeks. Although this is the earliest poem, it is still fun and exciting to read. I didn’t believe that a poem which has been around for more than twelve centuries, could keep my interest. I was wrong. The book is filled with more blood and guts then the average summer horror flick. After the battle with Grendel, the monster which has been ravaging the Danish countryside and killing countless men, Beowulf makes sure that all people know that he had injured the great monster. It is translated that, “…no Dane doubted the victory, for the proof, hanging high from the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster’s arm, claw and shoulder and all” (Raffel, 49). It was the shocking use of detail and exciting battles that was left with me when I finished the book. I guess all books, regardless of their age can still be fun and entertaining to read.

2) Good literature has a very precise definition for me. I judge a piece of literature on three different criteria, 1) does it have memorable characters, 2) does the work take me to a place and let me experience things that I have never experienced before, and 3) will the work stay with me long after I have completed reading it. This is the criteria on which I judge a book and according to this, I believe that Beowulf should be considered “good” literature.

I always ask myself, when I am done reading a book, did the book have memorable characters. In Beowulf, the characters were memorable. A minor character in the book, the king of the Danes, named Hrothgar, is a character who sticks out greatly in my mind. Hrothgar was a king of the Danes and built for them a huge mead hall in which men were able to eat drink and be merry. It was then that the great monster, Grendel, came and destroyed the utopia which was Herot by eating and feasting on the Danish warriors. Hrothgar sticks out in my mind because I could envision him, in the time before Beowulf came to the Danes, in anger and despair over this monster that wouldn’t stop killing his soldiers and friends. This minor character is memorable in my mind, as are all the characters in this work.

I have never read a book about medieval Europe. I am not a big fantasy book reader, so in my reading, I hardly, if ever, experience monsters and dragons and sword fights. I was pleasantly surprised to find that I enjoyed reading about these fantastic adventures of Beowulf and his clan. This book allowed me to experience a time, place and adventures that I have never experienced before.

After reading Beowulf, the instances in the book stayed with me long after I was done. Instances like the battle with Grendel’s mother underneath the ocean, Beowulf’s rise to king, and finally the great warriors last stand against the dragon were memorable. .

Because Beowulf meets all of my criteria of “good” literature, I believe that this work is in fact a worthy read.

3) The climax in a work is the point of highest tension followed by a resolution. In Beowulf, the climax occurs during Beowulf’s battle against the fire-breathing dragon, which has been killing Beowulf’s people, the Geats. One of the most climactic lines in the work is when Raffel translates,

“Then the famous old hero, remembering days of glory, lifted what was left of Nagling, his ancient sword, and swung it with all his strength, smashed the gray blade into the beast’s head.” (106)

This is the climax of the work because it is the point of highest tension in the work and after this, the resolution occurs.

For Beowulf, the main character in the work, the climax determines his ultimate demise. The hero of heroes, the warrior of warriors, dies in this last battle but only after he has killed the dragon and makes sure that his country is once again safe. This is what the climax determines for the main character, Beowulf.

4) An important quotation from the book that expresses an important point about the book occurs between lines 908 and 913. The quotation is as follows: “A king born, entrusted with ancient treasures and cities full of strong hearted soldiers, his vanity swelled him so vile and rank that he could hear but his own. He deserved to suffer and die…” (51). This quotation expresses the most important point of the book which is the constant struggle between right and wrong and the loyalty to those who do you right. A man, especially a king, who allows himself vanity and egotism while he is ruling his country is not a good ruler. A ruler who would put himself before his country does not deserve to rule. Good, honest, people should rule and the others should be killed. This is the important point, and important political statement given by this quotation.

5) The theme of this work is one of the oldest themes known to man. It is the theme of good against evil, right against wrong, God versus the Devil. Beowulf is god’s chosen warrior, who will purge evil from the lands of Europe. Grendel was known as the “Almighty’s enemy,” and since Beowulf defeated Grendel he represented God’s warrior on earth. In medieval times, the common people needed a hero like Beowulf to show that good does triumph over evil and that God can defeat all of the devil’s henchmen. This is the theme of Beowulf.

6) I would not change the ending of the work. Beowulf ends with Beowulf killing the dreaded dragon and then dying himself. He is then built a shrine by the Geats that generations to come can see. This way Beowulf the greatest of all warriors would never be forgotten. I think that this is a perfect ending to the work. This warrior and great leader who fought so many battle and so many monsters, dies in the most fitting way, in battle. It was the last good versus evil battle in the work and Beowulf makes sure that all evil is gone from is land before he dies. He is truly the soldier of God and thus the ending is a fitting memorial to this great warrior.

7) One of the greatest conflicts in the work is Beowulf’s conflict against Grendel’s mother. This was a glorious conflict which took Beowulf underneath the ocean. He fought and killed Grendel’s mother and finally killed her son, the terrible monster known as Grendel. This is such an important conflict because it is this conflict that sets Beowulf apart from all other heroes of the time. Beowulf does this slaying with his bare hands while under water! This conflict is so important because from this point on, Beowulf becomes known throughout the land as the great warrior he is. The battle against Grendel where he made Herot a safe haven once more, was great, but the battle against Grendel’s mother truly shows divine intervention. The battle seems as if Beowulf was embodying the hand of God himself. This is the most significant conflict in the story.

8) The author gave this work the title Beowulf because it focuses around the adventures of the main character, Beowulf. Would a rose by any other name smell as sweet? Yes, the book would be as interesting if it were called The Geat’s Wonderful and Noble Warrior, but why make it confusing? This story has been passed down for twelve centuries and the title serves it well even today.

9) The author of Beowulf is unknown and what I have read is just a translation by Burton Raffel. If the unknown author had written another work, I think that I would be inclined to give the book a shot, because I enjoyed reading Beowulf. As it stands now, however, we will never know.

Beowulf is the very earliest action adventure sort of entertainment. The action adventure genre in films and on television is a multi-million dollar a year industry in present day society. The theme is the same today as it was when Beowulf was written, good triumphs over evil. Even today movies such as Die Hard, and Rambo put the protagonist in a situation where there are over whelming odds against, him and he somehow makes it out alive. Although today’s action adventure entertainment aren’t nearly as romantic as Beowulf, and do not dive into the realm of divinity that Beowulf did, the basic principle remains the same, good will triumph over evil. Maybe Hollywood should take a cue from the old classics. I think it could be worth a couple of million.