Beowulf Summary Essay, Research Paper

Beowulf Summary

Beowulf is a heroic epic poem, which takes place in the early 16th century. Beowulf has no known author but was translated by Burton Raffel. Some of the significant characters are Beowulf, Grendel, Hrothgar, and Wiglaf. This has a second person narrative point of view. In this story Beowulf is trying to protect the Dane?s warrior from the hideous and ruthless monsters and continue his wealthy heritage. [Beowulf slays the monsters and dragons that plague the Dane?s people, and finds someone to give his precious jewels and riches.]

Long ago in Hrothgar’s Danish kingdom lived a gruesome giant monster named Grendel, who nightly roamed the countryside. Rising from his marshy home, he would stalk to the King’s high hall, and there devour fifteen of Hrothgar’s sleeping warriors. Then, before leaving, the monster would seize fifteen more men with his huge arms and bear them back to his watery lair. For twelve years the slaughter continued. Word of this terror spread across the sea to the land of the Geats. Beowulf, Hygelac’s principal advisor and warrior and a man of great strength and courage, heard the tale of Grendel’s murderous attacks. So, he set sail hoping to free the Danes from the demon.

They marched to Hrothgar’s high hall. There the King held a banquet feast in Beowulf’s honor; the mead cup was passed around, and the celebrating

began. The Danish warrior, “drunken with wine,” taunted the Geat. The Geat answered boldly that he had not only emerged victorious in the race, but had been forced to kill nine deadly sea monsters during the course. After the feast, Hrothgar and his warriors went to their rest, leaving Beowulf and his men in the hall. Then the fiendish Grendel came, “with an unlovely light, like a hellish flame in his eyes.” The ironbound door burst open at the touch of his fingers, and he rejoiced at the rich feast of human flesh awaiting him. He seized one sleeping warrior and drank the blood in streams. Then he quickly consumed the entire corpse “as a wolf might eat a rabbit.” Without shield or spear, Beowulf took hold of the dreaded monster, wrenching off his right arm; and the maimed Grendel fled back to his home. The brave hero was honored once more with a delicious feast and magnificent priceless gifts.

But on the next night, Grendel’s miserable mother made “a sorry journey to avenge her son.” Rushing into the great hall, she seized Aeschere, Hrothgar’s closest counselor and a famous and brave warrior, and fled into the darkness. After vowing to rid the people of this second, even more wretched demon, Beowulf turned to comfort the King with his sage philosophy of life and death.

Unferth offered the use of his own blood-hardened sword. As Beowulf sank beneath the murky waters he finally came to the cave of Grendel’s mother and began to do battle. Beowulf failed in his first attempt to wound the monster with Unferth’s sword, but succeeded when he turned to his mighty handgrip, which was strong enough to “match the strength of thirty men.” He was able to

grasp the monster by the shoulder and throw her to the ground. He lay on the floor of the lair, in the midst of other weapons pried from the hands of fallen warriors. Stretching with all his might, he managed to reach and take hold of the “invincible and strong-edged blade” and plunge it into the heart of Grendel’s mother. She rose, then collapsed in a dying heap. Beowulf turned and saw Grendel himself, lying crippled on the ground nearby. Swiftly, he swung the sword again, and severed Grendel’s gruesome head from its body. Then, as the hero swam to the surface of the marsh, the wondrous sword melted, leaving only the head and hilt intact.

Upon seeing Beowulf alive and undefeated, the Danes celebrated with a great feast. Beowulf stole away a golden goblet that he presented to his King, hoping to gain favor. But the dragon, discovering that the goblet was missing, rose up in fury and began to ravage the Geat villages with fire. Beowulf was now an old man. Nevertheless, he determined to rid his kingdom of this devil and to win the dragon’s rich hoard for his people. Beowulf advanced toward the dragon’s cave, ordering his warriors to withdraw so that ?he alone might engage the beast in battle.? He plunged on through the flames and struck the dragon’s side with his famed and ancient sword had no effect. The furious dragon only spewed out more intense flames. Once again Beowulf was forced to rely on his powerful grip. Wiglaf, a younger kinsman, stood by to defend his ruler. The dragon rushed and sank its terrible teeth into Beowulf’s neck. But Wiglaf fearlessly stabbed the beast on its underside with his sword, and Beowulf gave it

the deathblow. Weak from loss of blood, the old hero was dying. As his last act, Beowulf gave loyal Wiglaf, the last of his family line, precious jewels and armor.

Beowulf, the highly artistic action filled epic poem, is filled with Christian theology mixed with pagan mythology. This testifies to the different influences that occurred in northern civilizations as the poem took form during the early Middle Ages. Speeches, pronouncements, songs, chants, and remembrances of battles past interrupt the principal narrative.