Mind Over Might (Beowulf) Essay, Research Paper

What is a hero? Would one label a hero as a bloodthirsty warrior? Today, this epitomizes the opposite of our society s heroic standards. However, in Anglo-Saxon times, blood and guts was all the rage. The epic poem Beowulf is a prime example of these values. In the last 1,500 years the characteristics of a true hero have changed drastically. An almost bipolar comparison can be made between today s realistic, humble heroes and the mythical, self-righteous heroes of the Anglo-Saxons.

This description of Anglo-Saxon value is at its height in the literature of the times. Since, their stories were originally oral traditions, they are not completely accurate, but there is not mistaking a general theme: An Anglo-Saxon hero is portrayed as humanly flawless, without any faults (Goldsmith 65-72). Our modern heroes are more humble. A ruggedly human persona is very valued. Accomplishments lose to a personality that accepts that, although they are good at what they do, there will always be someone better than himself or herself. Beowulf, on the other hand would, first of all, brag relentlessly of his conquests. First, Unferth accuses him of being a braggart You re Beowulf, are you-the same/ Boastful fool (239-240). Also, in the poem, Beowulf tells of his battles. They have seen my strength for themselves,/ Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,/ Dripping with my enemies blood (151-153). This is also an example of the other characteristic of Anglo-Saxon literature, brutal, pointless violence.

The best look at this violence comes through the novel Grendel, which was written at a time (the 1970 s) when mindless violence was often under the spotlight. In the novel, the author makes the Beowulf antagonist, Grendel, into an innocent victim of the violent humans. At one point in the novel, Grendel witnesses the spinning of tails by the Shaper. Grendel says, So he sang or intoned He sang of the battles, marriages, of funerals and hanging, the whimperings of beaten enemies, of splendid hunts and harvests (Gardner 74). The Shaper was the tribe s source of entertainment; ergo he reflected their bloody beliefs. Even Beowulf himself drives into a battle he cannot win purely for the gold and the fight in it. Fought with fate against him, with glory/ Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword and struck at the dragon s scaly hide (724-726).

In conclusion, today we find our heroes in those who are neither boastful nor violent. A wonderful example of this is the giving to humanity most often expressed by Mother Theresa. She devoted her entire life to abolishing the types of values that Beowulf and his followers fought for. She was unconcerned with position gained through military exploitation or political savvy. Instead, her life gave us what our world needs the most at our bleakest moments: hope.

Works Cited

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