The Theme Of Heroism In Beowulf

There is always a place for heroism in our life. No matter where you live, what time, era, how old you are, what race or origin you are, you can be considered a hero if you have done something heroic. An act for which you can be respected, which has benefited a large number of people or even the whole nation. Such as is shown in the poem Beowulf. Here the author shows the king Beowulf, who made a heroic act for the benefit of the people, as the central positive hero.

The notion of being a good king for everyone is different. The author of the poem Beowulf shows his understanding of being a good king using the examples of the description of different kings. The first king that is described by the author of the poem as a good king was Scyld Scefing: “Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes, from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, awing the earls. Since erst he lay friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him: for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, till before him the folk, both far and near, who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gifts: a good king he!”(F.B. Grummere, 1993, lines 4-11). Speaking about another king whose name is Hrothgar :”On their lord beloved they laid no slight, gracious Hrothgar: a good king he!”(F.B. Grummere, 1993, lines 765-766). And the last one is also considered to be a good king: For shelter he gave them, sword-death came, the blade’s fell blow, to bairn of Hygelac; but the son of Ongentheow sought again house and home when Heardred fell, leaving Beowulf lord of Geats and gift-seat’s master. — A good king he!” (F.B. Grummere, 1993, lines 2382-2386).

” In the poem Beowulf, Beowulf is described as an ambitious hero. Beowulf is a hero because he has a physical strength and he gives the glory to God. Beowulf battled for the entire kingdom. His heroism is presented in the case when he takes the bravest men in his land to go help the king Hrothgar. He helps him because he wants to uses his strength given by God to the best of his ability. As soon as Beowulf heard of the troubles in this land, he set sail without any hesitation. Beowulf continues to show his thankfulness to God for giving them safe travel across the sea. Being a fair man, he decides not to use weapons in his battle against Grendel since Grendel apparently does not use them. This fact is proven by the author’s words: “I do not consider myself a lesser fighter than Grendel does himself; therefore I will not kill him with a sword, and deprive him of life in that way… No: this night we two will abstain from swords…” (F.B. Grummere, 1993, lines 19-20).

Once again, the influence of Christianity shows in Hrothgar’s speech to Beowulf. It was the ‘Almighty’ who sent Beowulf and it was ‘with the Lord’s help’ that Beowulf was able to defeat Grendel. Hrothgar wants to make it known throughout the world that Beowulf is considered the strongest man and a proven hero.

Grendel’s Mother is about to seek revenge. Another one of Beowulf’s heroic deeds of kindness is seen when he goes after Grendel’s mother even though that was not a part of the original ‘deal.’ Hrothgar is beside himself. “Anguish has descended on the Danes” (F.B. Grummere, 1993, line 36).

Beowulf’s heroic reputation is more evident than ever when he comforts Hrothgar on the death of his friend. He offers his ‘services’ once again by offering to kill Grendel’s mother. Here

Beowulf once again shows the traits that makes him a true hero. That is, the deliberation of others, generosity and his mortality. Unlike past battles, there is no mention of God's help. Beowulf, in this battle, is relying on his own bravery.

Once more Beowulf will prove his heroicalness when he fights a dragon. He is not sure he will win it, but still he shows his courage and a distinguished attempt to protect his people. The dragon makes his strikes at night, burning down all the houses so that nothing is spared, not even Beowulf's hall or throne. When Beowulf finds out that his house has been destroyed; his first thought is that he did something to anger God, and he feels guilty. When Beowulf prepares to fight the dragon, he remembers his battles against Grendel and Grendel's mother. "He, who caused the trouble to begin with, a downcast captive, was the thirteenth man in the troop: he had to show him the place humbly" (F.B. Grummere, 1993, line 63). Beowulf realizes that he's not as strong as he was when he fought Grendel and the risk of dying is inevitable. Though Beowulf has not any more his physical strength, his heroic courage makes him think like a hero.

Beowulf's speech that he gives before this battle is different from previous ones. Now that he is an old man Beowulf's confidence in himself has decreased. As a hero, it is Beowulf's job to accomplish the impossible, and as an old man, he still wants one last moment of glory. "… As an aged king, I shall still seek battle and do glorious deeds, if the wicked ravager will come out of the earth hall to meet me" (F.B. Grummere, 1993, lines 65-66). That does not keep him though, from killing the dragon. Beowulf manages to hit the dragon but not fatally. This blow to the dragon upset him dearly and responds by covering Beowulf in a great ball of fire. Seeing the fire of the dragon the warriors run away, thinking only of saving their own lives. For them, saving themselves has become more important than giving Beowulf the dignity that he deserves. These actions are examples of what separates a hero from a great warrior. Like an athlete, Beowulf has the tenacity to stick with to the end, even if he is the only one. Beowulf has an ability to kill the dragon, but unfortunately, he dies.

In the end, Beowulf proved to be a real brave man. God was always on his side and even if he was not, he had a brave heart, strength and a great desire to make his people happy. The author also says that despite the fact that Beowulf was a good king, he suffered the same fate as a mere mortal man. However, it's not the fact of death that matters, it's what you've done in your life, isn't it?

References

1. F.B. Grummere, (1993). Retrieved from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50114/beowulf-modern-english-translation