

STYLISTIC AND LINGUOPOETIC ANALYSIS OF EPIC POEM “BEOWULF”

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Abstract. This article provides a brief overview of linguopoetics and analyzes the epic poem “Beowulf”. “Beowulf” is the oldest known epic poem written in English, although its date is not known with any certainty (the best estimate being 8th Century CE, and definitely before the early 11th century CE). The author is likewise unknown, and represents a question that has mystified readers for centuries. It is generally thought that the poem was performed orally by memory by the poet or by a “scop” (a travelling entertainer), and was passed down in this way passed down to readers and listeners, or that it was finally written down at the request of a king who wanted to hear it again.

Keywords: Beowulf, linguopoetic, epic poem, Denmark, Old English, traditional poetry, characters, stylistic analysis.

Materials and Methods.

Because of the unified structure of the poem, with its interweaving of historical information into the flow of the main narrative, the poem was most likely composed by one person, although there are two distinct parts to the poem and some scholars believe that the sections which take place in Denmark and the sections which take place back in [Beowulf](#)'s homeland were written by different authors.

It is written in a dialect known as Old English (also referred to as Anglo-Saxon), a dialect that had become the language of its time by about the early part of the 6th Century CE, in the wake of the occupation of the Romans and the increasing influence of Christianity. Old English is a heavily accented language, so different from modern English as to appear almost unrecognizable, and its poetry is known for its emphasis on alliteration and rhythm. Each line of “Beowulf” is divided into two distinct half-lines (each containing at least four syllables), separated by a pause and related by the repetition of sounds. Almost no lines in Old English poetry end in rhymes in the conventional sense, but the alliterative quality of the verse gives the poetry its music and rhythm.

The poet also makes use of a stylistic device called “kenning”, a method of naming a person or thing by using a phrase that signified a quality of that person or thing (e.g. a warrior might be described as “the helmet-bearing one”). Another characteristic of the poet’s style is his use of litotes, a form of understatement, often with negative overtones, which is intended to create a sense of irony.

Most often the characters just deliver speeches to one another, and there are no real conversations as such. However, the story is kept moving quickly by leaping from one event to another. There is some use of historical digressions, similar to the use of flashbacks in modern movies and novels, and this interweaving of events of the present and the past is a major structural device. The poet also sometimes shifts the point of view in the midst of an action in order to offer multiple perspectives (for example, to show the reactions of the warriors who are looking on as an audience in almost every battle).

“Beowulf” is part of the tradition of epic poetry that began with the poems of [Homer](#) and [Virgil](#), and it deals with the affairs and deeds of brave men, but, like its classical models, it makes no attempt to portray a whole life chronologically from beginning to end. It also functions as a kind of history, blending past, present, and future in a unique, all-encompassing way. It is not just a simple tale about a man who kills monsters and dragons, but rather a large-scale vision of human history.

As in the earlier classical epic poems of Greece and Rome, the characters are generally presented in realistic fashion, but also from time to time as the poet considers they ought to be. Occasionally, the poet breaks his objective tone to offer a moral judgment on one of his characters, although for the most part he lets the actions of the characters speak for themselves. As in the classical tradition of epic poetry, the poem is concerned with human values and moral choices: the characters are capable of performing acts of great courage, but conversely they are also capable of suffering intensely for their deeds.

The poet attempts to some extent to reconcile the “human” and the “heroic” sides of [Beowulf](#)’s personality. Although he is described as greater and stronger than anyone anywhere in the world, and clearly commands immediate respect and attention, he is also portrayed as courteous, patient and diplomatic in his manner, and lacks the brusqueness and coldness of a superior and hubristic hero. He boasts to Hrothgar of his bravery, but does so mainly as a practical means of getting what he wants.

Although [Beowulf](#) may act selflessly, governed by a code of ethics and an intuitive understanding of other people, a part of him nevertheless has no real idea of why he acts the way he does, and this is perhaps the tragic flaw in his character. Certainly, fame, glory and wealth are also among his motivations, as well as practical considerations such as a desire to pay his father’s debt. He seems to have no great desire to become king of the Geats and, when first offered the throne, he refuses, preferring to play the role of warrior-son. Likewise, he never appears quite certain whether his success as a warrior is due to his own strength or to God’s help, indicating some spiritual conflicts which raise him above the level of a mere stock hero figure.

The Danish king Hrothgar is perhaps the most human character in the poem, and the person with whom it may be easiest for us to identify. He appears wise, but also lacking the courage expected of a great warrior-king, and age has clearly robbed him of the power to act decisively. After [Beowulf](#) has killed [Grendel](#)’s mother, Hrothgar takes [Beowulf](#) to one side in a very concerned and fatherly manner and advises him to guard against wickedness and the evils of pride, and to use his powers for the betterment of other people. When [Beowulf](#) is departing from Denmark, Hrothgar shows that he is not afraid to show his emotions as he embraces and kisses the young warrior and bursts into tears. The old king’s modest show of vanity in building the huge hall, Herot, as a permanent monument to his achievements is perhaps his only real flaw, and it could be argued that this display of pride or vanity is what attracted [Grendel](#)’s attention in the first place and set the whole tragedy in motion.

The character of Wiglaf in the second part of the poem, although a relatively minor character, is nevertheless important to the overall structure of the poem. He represents the young warrior who helps the aging King [Beowulf](#) in his battle against the dragon in the second part of the poem, in much the same way as the younger [Beowulf](#) helped King Hrothgar in the first part. He is a perfect example of the idea of “comitatus”, the loyalty of the warrior to his leader, and, while all his fellow warriors flee the dragon in fear, Wiglaf alone comes to the aid of his king. Like the young [Beowulf](#), he is also a model of self-control, determined to act in a way that he believes to be right.

The monster [Grendel](#) is an extreme example of evil and corruption, possessing no human feelings except hatred and bitterness toward mankind. However, unlike human beings, who can contain elements of good and evil, there seem to be no way that [Grendel](#) can ever be converted to goodness. As much as he stands for a symbol of evil, [Grendel](#) also represents disorder and chaos, a projection of all that was most frightening to the Anglo-Saxon mind.

The main theme of the poem is the conflict between good and evil, most obviously exemplified by the physical conflict between [Beowulf](#) and [Grendel](#). However, good and evil are also presented in the poem not as mutually exclusive opposites, but as dual qualities present in everyone. The poem also makes clear our need for a code of ethics, which allows members of society to relate to one another with understanding and trust.

Another theme is that of youth and age. In the first part, we see [Beowulf](#) as the young, daring prince, in contrast with Hrothgar, the wise but aging king. In the second part, [Beowulf](#), the aging but still heroic warrior, is contrasted with his young follower, Wiglaf.

Conclusion.

In some ways, “Beowulf” represents a link between two traditions, the old pagan traditions (exemplified by the virtues of courage in war and the acceptance of feuds between men and countries as a fact of life) and the new traditions of the Christian religion. The poet, probably himself a Christian, makes it clear that idol worshipping is a definite threat to Christianity, although he chooses to make no comment on [Beowulf](#)’s pagan burial rites. The character of [Beowulf](#) himself is not particularly concerned with Christian virtues like meekness and poverty and, although he clearly wants to help people, in a Christian sort of way, his motivation for doing so is complicated. Hrothgar is perhaps the character who least fits into the old pagan tradition, and some readers see him as modelled after an “Old Testament” biblical king.

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