

Compare and Contrast Beowulf from Modern Day Heroes

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This essay seeks to compare and contrast epic heroes to modern day heroes. First, this essay examines the traits of an epic hero and that of a modern day hero. Secondly, it contrasts the two heroic traits and then examines the characteristics of both Beowulf and modern day heroes that make them typify an epic hero and modern day hero simultaneously.

A hero can be defined in an array of ways. Scully (2016) defines a hero in four different ways. First, Scully argues that a hero is viewed as a divine ancestry in mythology and legend, who is gifted with strength, courage, celebrated for his feats, and gets favor from the gods. Secondly, she views a hero as a person who risks his/her life and makes sacrifices for a cause. Thirdly, a hero, according to Scully is a person respected for his or her accomplishments in a particular field. Lastly, Scully claims that a hero is usually a principal male character in a poem, novel, a movie or a dramatic presentation. From the definitions as mentioned earlier by Scully, several traits of an epic and a modern day hero can be extracted for comparison and contrast.

According to Grandfield (2001), an epic hero is viewed as a male character with supernatural powers or abilities. These abilities are many a time universal qualities possessed by all beings but in a magnified way. Examples can include strength, brevity, and courage. Accordingly, an epic hero is considered a leader whose leadership is put to the test in a quest. Subsequently, an epic hero is like a demi-god who dares travel on a path or a world where no ordinary being can dare (Allingham, 2005). Lastly, an epic hero may appear defeated or to have given up, and then all of a sudden resurrects and takes his rightful place (Allingham, 2005; Grandfield, 2001). An example of an epic hero is Beowulf, in Beowulf.

Beowulf is the only known oldest surviving epic poem written in the English language as well as the first piece of the European vernacular writing. It was recorded in the Old English, the tongue of Saxons. Initially untitled, in the nineteenth century, the piece began to be labeled by

the name of the Scandinavian hero, whose war adventures are its prime focal point. Historical elements are running throughout the poem. However, both the hero plus the tale are fiction(Lawrence, 1928). The hero, Beowulf, in Beowulf, depicts many heroic traits that make him an epic hero.

Beowulf depicts characteristics that are far much superior to those of an ordinary young man. They include spectacular strength, wisdom, great loyalty, humility, and many more other qualities. In his search for fame and glory, Beowulf wants to be remembered by the next generations as a person whose accomplishments came courtesy of brevity and strength. Since this, according to him, is the measure of a real hero.

For instance, Beowulf fights and kills three monsters. The first of the three monsters, he kills it with his bare hands, asserting “I will not put him to sleep with a sword, so take away his life, though surely I might. He knows no good tools with which he might strike against me, cut my shield in pieces, though he is strong in a fight. But we shall forgo the sword in the night—if he dares seek war without weapon—and then may wise God, Holy Lord, assign glory on whichever hand seems good to Him”(Nye, 2012). In order to kill Grendel’s mother, Beowulf swims for hours under water until the time when the sword of Giants kills her. Lastly, Beowulf kills the final monster and gets the treasure for his people, but foreshadowed, in the process, he loses his life.

Despite the modern day heroes sharing some traits with epic heroes such as self-sacrifice, courage, leadership, and brevity, Peter Garret-Australian hero,(as quoted by Scully, 2016) contrasts real modern day heroes as those who do not look for applauses or cameras. Considering individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Gandhi, whom today we look up to as heroes, it is lucid that physical status is no longer a yardstick for measuring one’s heroism.

Today, one is considered a hero via his or her impact and difference in making the world a better place. Unlike Beowulf, a modern day hero does not look at the fame that comes with a deed but the difference that it brings. The story of Beowulf illustrates that modern day heroes are supposed to be confident in their deeds but modest in their achievements.

In conclusion, Beowulf, and modern day heroes share a lot of heroic traits such as courage, self-sacrifice, brevity, loyalty, and leadership. However, physical strength is not a yardstick for measuring modern day heroes, and neither do they look for fame in their quest to achieving heroic status.

References

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