

Beowulf prepares to fight Grendel's mother

*3. Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.
For every one of us, living in this world
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,
that will be his best and only bulwark.*

(1384–1389)

Beowulf utters this compressed statement of the heroic code after Grendel's mother kills Aeschere, Hrothgar's trusted advisor. Although Hrothgar's grief seems understandable in light of the principle of loyalty that operates in this culture, Beowulf speaks of it as an "indulgence"—an inappropriate and ineffective way of responding to the death of a comrade. Beowulf's reminder to Hrothgar that vengeance is the real warrior's response and the truest sign of love and loyalty reflects a fundamental value of warrior culture, namely an aggressive approach to life. Part of this approach involves the understanding that only reputation will perpetuate a warrior's existence after death.

These lines reveal much about the social codes of the heroic society. Beowulf says, "It is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning" (lines 1384-85). Avenging a death is the best way for a hero to win glory. It is well to remember that although there are Christian elements in the poem, they all refer to the Old Testament rather than the New. The forgiveness of sins as taught by Christ is absent. The law of the heroic code is an eye for an eye

Beowulf, for example, sees life as a race to glory ("Let whoever can / win glory before death"). This speech expresses the poem's tension between fate and death, on the one hand, and the necessity of behaving courageously and honorably, on the other. Throughout the poem, the reader can feel the pessimism surrounding the inevitability of death. However, Beowulf's energetic emphasis on action helps temper this pessimism

*4. Beowulf got ready,
donned his war-gear, indifferent to death;
his mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail
would soon meet with the menace underwater.
It would keep the bone-cage of his body safe:*

...

*[His helmet] was of beaten gold,
princely headgear hooped and hasped
by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders. . . .
(1442–1452)*

These lines describe Beowulf's preparation for his battle with Grendel's mother. The treatment of weaponry and armor is of great importance to the Beowulf poet. These lines seem to imply that the success of a weapon in battle is related to the skill with which it was crafted. The poet pays a great deal of attention, in general, to the craftsmanship that goes into physical objects.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/b/beowulf/study-help/full-glossary-for-beowulf> FULL GLOSSARY of Beowulf

Further reading and analysis

the symbol of the mead hall as opposed to Grendel's cave

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/b/beowulf/critical-essays/major-symbols-in-beowulf>

ANSWER

1. what role does the Mead-Hall play in Anglo-Saxon warrior culture?
2. does the Mead Hall play a symbolic role in Beowulf? How does it compare to Grendel's cave?