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**BEOWULF: THE FIRST EPIC OF ENGLISH LITERATURE****Rajabova Shohista Qambarjon qizi**

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ABSTRACT. This article explores Beowulf as the earliest and most significant epic poem in English literature. Composed between the 8th and 11th centuries in Old English, Beowulf reflects the cultural, moral, and spiritual values of Anglo-Saxon society. The study examines the poem's historical background, narrative structure, and central themes, including heroism, loyalty, fate, and the conflict between good and evil. It also highlights the fusion of pagan and Christian elements that define the poem's moral tone. Through an analysis of Beowulf's character and the poem's poetic devices such as alliteration and kennings, this article emphasizes Beowulf's literary importance as a foundation of English epic tradition. Ultimately, the discussion affirms Beowulf's enduring relevance as both a reflection of early medieval culture and a timeless expression of human courage and moral integrity.

KEY WORDS: Beowulf, epic poetry, Anglo-Saxon literature, heroism, Old English, paganism, Christianity, fate, loyalty, morality.

INTRODUCTION. Beowulf is recognized as the first great epic of English literature and one of the most important works of the Anglo-Saxon period. Written in Old English by an anonymous poet, the work is estimated to have been composed between the 8th and 11th centuries. Although its author remains unknown, Beowulf has survived as a single manuscript known as the Nowell Codex. The poem reflects the early medieval world's cultural and moral values, presenting a blend of historical reality and mythical imagination.

Historical Background. The story of Beowulf originates from Scandinavian legends but was preserved in the English literary tradition. The poem was transmitted orally before it was written down by a Christian monk, which explains its mixture of pagan heroism and Christian morality. It represents a transitional period in English history — when ancient Germanic traditions met Christian beliefs. As Greenfield (1982) notes, Beowulf “embodies both the heroic code of the past and the spiritual reflection of the Christian era.”

Plot Overview. The narrative centers on Beowulf, a heroic warrior from Geatland (modern-day Sweden), who comes to the aid of King Hrothgar of Denmark. Hrothgar's great hall, Heorot, has been attacked by the monster Grendel. Beowulf defeats Grendel and later kills Grendel's vengeful mother in an underwater battle. After returning home, Beowulf eventually becomes king of the Geats. In his later years, he faces a dragon that threatens his kingdom. Though he





kills the dragon, Beowulf is mortally wounded, and the poem ends with his noble death and funeral — symbolizing the passing of a heroic age.

Themes and Literary Elements. The central themes of Beowulf include heroism, fate (wyrd), loyalty, good versus evil, and the transience of life. The hero embodies the ideal Anglo-Saxon warrior — brave, strong, loyal, and honorable. Yet, the poem also emphasizes moral virtues such as humility and self-sacrifice.

The poem's style is rich in alliteration, kennings (compound metaphors like "whale-road" for sea), and repetition, which give it a rhythmic and oral quality. Christian references — such as Beowulf's faith and gratitude to God — coexist with pagan notions of destiny, reflecting a society in religious transition (Tolkien, 1936).

Cultural and Literary Significance. Beowulf serves as both a historical and literary monument. Culturally, it preserves the worldview of the Anglo-Saxons — a society built on loyalty to leaders and kinship bonds. Literarily, it influenced the development of English narrative and poetic traditions. Modern authors, including J.R.R. Tolkien and Seamus Heaney, have drawn inspiration from its mythic tone and moral vision. As Heaney (2000) remarks, Beowulf "speaks to us from the dawn of a culture and yet remains startlingly modern in its sense of human limitation and courage."

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, Beowulf stands as the foundation of English literary history. It captures the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon world while addressing universal human themes such as bravery, loyalty, and the search for lasting honor. Through its fusion of pagan heroism and Christian ethics, Beowulf not only defines the early English epic tradition but also continues to inspire readers and writers across centuries.

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