

Questioning the Centrality of the Hero in *Beowulf*

Malek J. Zuraikat *

ABSTRACT

Most *Beowulf* critics argue that placing *Beowulf* "at the center of the center" is the main goal of the entire narrative (Halverson, 1969: 594) and that *Beowulf* uses different factors and deploys various narrative techniques to reinforce and celebrate the hero's "superhuman" heroic exceptionalism. Relying on this valid viewpoint, this paper explains how the *Beowulf* poet promotes *Beowulf*'s heroic status and centralizes that heroism in the epic through different narrative strategies, such as introducing characters without names and denying humans weapons any value in *Beowulf*'s battle, and juxtaposing heroes to demons, etc. The paper discusses the poet's functional usage of such strategies and argues that while these strategies are significant to centralizing *Beowulf* and heroism in the epic, they indirectly undercut *Beowulf*'s heroic culture. In short, this paper explores how juxtaposition and other narrative techniques are used by the *Beowulf* poet to promote *Beowulf*'s superior heroic identity and its culture.

Keywords: *Beowulf*, epic genre, Old English, English poetry, heroism, centrality, narrative.

Introduction

The 'epic' is identified as a narrative poem that celebrates "the adventures and accomplishments of one hero" (Deutsch, 1969: 49) who "should be distinguished and more our concern" (Scott, 1965: 93). Critics agree that "Almost all epic poems must devote much of their time to developing the 'heroic niche'" (Irving, 1968: 46) and to celebrating the hero's unrivaled abilities in settling down catastrophic problems. In view of this significant centrality of the hero, *Beowulf* focuses on *Beowulf*'s heroic personality and complementary heroic traits. To underscore *Beowulf*'s unprecedented superiority, the *Beowulf* poet reports the situation that motivates the hero to take the journey to the Danes-Land and celebrates the hero's talent of figuring out people's catastrophic hardships. As a result of that journey, as the poet declares, *Beowulf* becomes Heorot's heroic savior and center. The Danish situation constitutes an integral part of the epic's overall narrative strategy of foregrounding *Beowulf*'s heroism and viewing it as the main center of the narrative.

However, the *Beowulf* critics agree that the hero's centrality in this epic is shaped through the hero's position as a leader of his own *comitatus* while taking on several journeys to various destinations in order to fight against monstrous entities.¹ Although this viewpoint is well-researched, I believe that the hero's heroic superiority is narratively reinforced through numerous instances of juxtaposition against lesser warriors, other kings, and monstrous creatures. In order to make of *Beowulf* the sole center of the epic, the poet does not only rely on the hero's journey to Heorot and other place to fight against the enemy; rather, he/she centralizes *Beowulf* by deploying several narrative techniques,

* Department of English, Yarmouk University, Jordan. Received on 14/9/2017 and Accepted for Publication on 12/9/2018.

¹ Regarding the various factors used by the *Beowulf* poet to centralize *Beowulf* and his heroism in *Beowulf*, see Nicholson's *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (1972) and Baker's *The Beowulf's Reader* (2000). These two references include great articles about *Beowulf* and its center written by critics, such as (Tolkien 1936), (Marijane Osborne 1978), (Eric John 1973), (Levin L. Schucking 1929), (H. Munro Chadwick 1912), (F. A. Blackburn 1897), (Marie Padgett Hamilton 1964), (Kemp Malone 1948), (Morton W. Bloomfield 1949), (D. W. Robertson 1951), (H. L. Rogers 1951), (Herbert G. Wright 1957), (R. E. Kasse 1958), and (Margaret E. Goldsmith 1962).

such as denying humans weapons any value for Beowulf's fights, referring to warriors without names, and marginalizing the *comitatus* and its significance for the hero. Interestingly, these elements and techniques are functionally deployed to centralize Beowulf; simultaneously, they indirectly undercut Beowulf's status and heroic culture. This paper argues that although the hero's centrality is established in *Beowulf* through checking the personality of Beowulf against the dominant heroic code of the Anglo-Saxon, many heroic figures and elements are downgraded and sacrificed in favor of the hero. The paper contends that the hero's centrality in *Beowulf* is made at the cost of the heroic code of the Anglo-Saxon, a process that suggests the destructiveness of the hero's centrality in *Beowulf*. Understanding the sort of destructiveness of the hero's centrality in the epic may help in explaining some mysterious episodes of the narrative, such as Beowulf's insistence to not allow Wiglaf to help him in his own fight against the dragon. However, to understand that texture of Beowulf's centrality, the paper discusses how juxtaposition and other narrative techniques are deployed by the *Beowulf* poet to promote Beowulf's superior heroic identity and culture.

2. Discussion

One of the main techniques used by the poet to form the centrality of Beowulf in the epic is the creation of the problem or disaster that no one can handle, except the hero. Portraying the Danish dilemma in Heorot, the poet writes:

Swá ðá maélceare maga Healfdenes
singála séað. ne mihte snotor hæleð
wéan onwendan. wæs þæt gewin tó swýð
láp ond longsum þe on ðá léode becóm,
nýdwracu níþgrim nihtbealwa maést.

("So then the son of Half-Dane agonized continually over the sorrow of the time. The wise man could not turn away woe; the strife, that on the people came, was too strong, hateful and enduring, fearfully cruel, violent trouble, the greatest night-evil" 189-193)².

The poet reports how Heorot, "the center of the [Danish] world" (Halverson, 1969: 593), is put to disorder and chaos and how Hrothgar sits unable to do anything against the ongoing evil but to lament and weep the loss of his retainers and honor. Whether or not this demotion of Hrothgar is historically valid, it suggests that the killer of Grendel is stronger than kings and therefore should be viewed as "the champion of mankind" (Malone, 1948: 143). Supporting this designation, the poet states that Grendel is the "grimma gaést" ("grim ghost" 102) and "féond mancynnes" ("enemy of mankind" 164) that savagely smashes warriors, drinks blood, and devours humans' limbs. Although those traits make Grendel a cannibalistic creature, it's noteworthy that it's never seen eating or chasing warriors outside Heorot. Thus, contrary to Raymond Chambers's belief that "Grendel hardly differs from the fiend who were always in the ambush to waylay a righteous man" (qtd. in Tolkien, 1936: 69), Grendel seems totally different from other cannibalistic monsters known for people at that time. This isn't to free Grendel of his crimes or to celebrate his difference from other creatures, but to demonstrate that its inexplicability makes the mission of fighting it more dangerous and heroic than fighting against anything else and makes the hero who kills it extraordinary, exceptional, and unprecedented. In short, by focusing on Grendel's evilness as well as on the Danes' inability to withstand that evilness, the poet develops "with care the different aspects of the situation into which Beowulf must come" (Irving, 1968: 45).

Due to his killing of Grendel, Beowulf is viewed by great people, including Hrothgar, as the sole source of safety and peace in Heorot. Therefore, in response to the attack of Grendel's Mother against Heorot, Hrothgar addresses Beowulf thus, "Nú is se raéd gelang eft æt þé ánum" ("Now is the remedy dependent upon you alone once again" 1376-

² The modern English translation of *Beowulf* throughout the paper is mine; yet I have taken counsel from Bradley's translation (1982) on occasion.

1377). Whether Grendel's mother has the right to revenge the death of her son (Kiernan, 1984), her presence provides Beowulf with an opportunity to show his power and prove his uniqueness, superiority, and incomparable strength: "sé wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest" ("he was of mankind of the greatest strength" 196). Through the presence of Grendel's mother, "the challenge is far too great; a great king and a great nation lie in paralysis before it" (Irving, 1968: 46). This isn't mainly to criticize Hrothgar or sympathize with his paralytic status, but to emphasize Beowulf's superiority to kings and all warriors in the epic. That is to say, in order to centralize Beowulf, the poet constructs "the problem [Beowulf] must solve, the deteriorating situation no one else can deal with, the space only a hero is large enough to fill" (Irving, 1968: 46). The poet speaks of the Danish crisis as well as the uniqueness of Grendel and its mother, in an attempt to exalt Beowulf's heroism and centralize it in the narrative.

Centralizing heroism stands as the apparent purpose of the epic genre in general, yet fulfilling such a goal sometimes leads to conflation of heroism and monstrosity.³ Accordingly, while praising the hero's unprecedented heroism, the *Beowulf* poet seems more interested in promoting its *righteousness*. The poet introduces Beowulf as the son of a man known among nations for his prowess and wisdom, the traits which Beowulf inherits from his father and through which he becomes ideally qualified to lead bold warriors. Due to his familial history and righteous lineage, Beowulf is introduced as the "æþele ond éacen" ("noble and powerful" 198) and the "superhuman" who successfully bridges the various borders between force and power, between the Geats and the Danes, and between the past, present, and future (Gwara, 2008: 358). It's interesting that the poet relies on Beowulf's familial heritage to construct the righteousness Beowulf needs to travel to Heorot. The hero is reported taking the journey to Heorot in order to pay off his father's debt to Hrothgar (*Beowulf* 470). Whether or not this alibi absolves Hrothgar from any debts to Beowulf, it not only proves that Beowulf *morally* deserves to fully inherit his father, but also exempts him from accusations of selfishness and irresponsible self-indulgence, thus makes him righteous.

To maintain and reinforce Beowulf's heroic righteousness, the poet underscores the hero's ability to act without being influenced by anybody. The poet celebrates Beowulf's independence from Hygelac's *royal* dominance thus,

Ðæt fram hám gefrægn Higeláces þegn
gód mid Géatum, Grendles daéda.
sé wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest
on þaém dæge þysses lífes
æþele ond éacen. hét him ýðlidan
gódne gegyrwan. cwæð: hé gúðcýning
ofer swanráde sécean wolde
maérne þéoden þá him wæs manna þearf.

("That from his homeland, Hygelac's thane, a good man of the Geats, heard of Grendel's doings. He was of mankind the greatest in strength at that time in this life, noble and powerful. He ordered a good wave-crosser to be prepared to him. He said that he wished to seek the war-king, the mighty clan-chief, across the swan-road, since he [Hrothgar] was in need of men" 194-201).

After introducing Beowulf as "Higeláces þegn" ("Hygelac's thane"), his plan and decision of sailing to Heorot are reported as a heroic reaction against Grendel's crimes in the Danes-Land. Beowulf doesn't take counsel from anyone, including Hygelac the king, but independently starts preparing himself for that heroic mission. Explaining the quickness of Beowulf's decision to travel to the Danes-Land, Levin L. Schücking writes, "the laconic brevity of this passage seems intended by the poet to bring out the rapidity of the decision, the firmness of the will, the sureness of the

³ For information about the conflation of heroism and monstrosity in *Beowulf*, see Lawrence's *Beowulf and Epic Tradition* (1961): 21 and Bjork and Niles's *A Beowulf Handbook* (1997): 275-279.

action" (1929: 47). Beowulf's "rapidity," "firmness," and "sureness" regarding voyaging to the Danes-Land imply his independence from Hygelac and make him the fulcrum of the heroic actions in the epic. By declaring, "sé wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest/ on þæm dæge þysses lífes" ("He was of mankind the greatest in strength at that time in this life"), the poet makes it clear that Beowulf, relying on his own righteousness, has the most necessary qualifications to make grand decisions.

Still, in order not to let Beowulf's righteous independence look as a form of foolish vainglory at any point, the poet declares that Beowulf's decision to take the journey to Heorot is supported by the Geatish Wise Men. The poet writes, "snotere ceorlas/ lýt hwón lógon þeah hé him léof waére/ hwetton higerófnehaél scéawedon" ("The clear-headed chaps hardly caviled at him over that expedition though he was dear to them; they urged on the valiant-hearted one, and observed the omens" 202-204). Whether or not the Wise Men's observation of omens has been really effective on Beowulf's heroic decision, the symbolic act of taking counsel from the Geatish representative figures of *sapientia* makes Beowulf's heroic decision and journey fully righteous. This not only means that Beowulf isn't a brainless machine, "a king of *fortitudo*" (Kaske, 1958: 290), but also indicates that he is superior to king Hygelac who lacks *sapientia*, as clearly proved in "hyne wyrd fornam/ syþðan hé for wlenco wéan áhsode" ("Fate took him away after he from pride sought misery" 1205-1206). Hygelac is full of pride, which is never wise, and that's probably why he dies in misery. Still, criticizing Hygelac isn't by itself one of *Beowulf's* main goals; rather, it functions as a technique to promote Beowulf and emphasize his superiority to all characters and figures in the narrative.

Promoting Beowulf is reinforced by demoting Hygelac, which is accomplished through celebrating the Geatish Wise Men's *sapientia*; nevertheless, maintaining Beowulf's righteous status *ironically* demands for sacrificing the respectful status of the Geatish Wise Men themselves. After supporting Beowulf's decision of travelling to Heorot by the Wise Men's counsel, the poet tries not to let Beowulf look inferior to them. Therefore, the perfection of the Wise Men's *sapientia* is discursively checked against *uncontaminated* Wisdom. The Wise Men are reported encouraging their *beloved* Beowulf to go on a journey from which he may not return, against untainted wisdom that recommends maintaining the hero to fight for his own homeland and people. While the Wise Men might have made their counsel, as John Hill believes, "having read Beowulf's deep luck in their casting of signs" (2008: 5), to risk the life of the hero for the sake of a foreign land is never wise or innocent, as it involves risking the safety and peace of the hero's entire nation. That is to say, although the Geatish Wise Men seem significant for Beowulf's heroic righteousness, they are inferior to him and can never be essential to his independent status.

Again, in order to centralize the hero, Beowulf's retainers, rivals, and enemies are all marginalized and denied any significance. The poet demotes the status of almost all characters either by muting them or by placing them in the *devil-party*. Monsters are presented as Cain's descendants, whereas all other figures, including Hrothgar and Hygelac, are indirectly portrayed as inferior to Beowulf. For instance, the poet states that Hygelac's death results from his own pride (1206) and that Hrothgar's *sapientia* is full of "mistakes as the marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld and, apparently, the unwise toleration of Hrothulf at the Danish court" (Kaske, 1958: 285). Also, he proclaims that Beowulf is dear to the Geatish Wise Men, whose king seems completely devoted to physical power, while Hrothgar's Coastguard, whose king seems fully devoted to wisdom, is fond of Beowulf's physical appearance and power. Probably, Hygelac's Wise Men love Beowulf because he already has what their king lacks, namely *sapientia*, while the Danish Coastguard is fond of Beowulf's *fortitudo*, which Hrothgar falls short of. In Kaske's words, Hygelac and Hrothgar "constitute a melancholy presentation of the ideal [*fortitudo* and *sapientia*] divided"; eventually, the *epic-situation* demands for "a Hrothgar-Hygelac [figure] apt for all occasions, a Beowulf" (1958: 291). Thus, contrary to John M. Hill's viewpoint that Beowulf isn't superior to Hrothgar who is a great king despite his inability to protect Heorot (2008: 43), one can conclude that "[the] Danish lack of *fortitudo*...[and the] Geatish lack of *sapientia*" (Kaske, 1958: 295) indicate the inferiority of both Hygelac and Hrothgar to Beowulf.

Another technique used by the *Beowulf* poet to keep his hero superior and at the center of everything is the depiction of most people around Beowulf without naming them. The Geatish Wise Men, for instance, aren't called by

their personal names and their *wise* sayings are never quoted. Similarly, the members of Beowulf's troop are never called by names. The poet writes,

Hæfde se góða Géata léoda
cempan gecorone þára þe hé cénoste
findan mihte. fíftýna sum
sundwudu sóhte. secg wísade

("The worthy one had chosen champions, those who were the boldest he could find from the Geatish peoples. Fifteen together, they sought the sea-wood" 205-208).

While the heroic troop includes fourteen bold warriors besides Beowulf, none of them are mentioned by name, and none of their feats are praised. Furthermore, almost nothing heroic is attributed to them, except their being the context through which Beowulf's heroism is amplified and exalted. As Irving states, "While Beowulf clearly rises above the many warriors who surround him, in such passages they seem also to be in part reflections of his power and sounding boards for his heroic qualities. The hero is extended and amplified by surrounding mirrors" (1968: 61-62). The 3182-line poem doesn't name almost any of Beowulf's men or celebrate any of their heroic deeds, except their carrying of Grendel's head, which has been chopped off by Beowulf. None of Beowulf's warriors are mentioned by name, except Hondscio, to whom Beowulf devotes five lines of his report on the Danish adventure to Hygelac. Beowulf says,

þaér wæs Hondsciö hilde onsaége
feorhbealu faégum. hé fyrmest læg
gyrded cempa. him Grendel wearð
maérum maguþegne tó múðbonan.
léofes mannes líc eall forswealg.

("A sinking battle, deadly evil, was there for Hondscio, for the doomed man. He, the girded man, fell first. For him, Grendel, (who) was the famed thane of distinction, a slayer by mouth, swallowed up the beloved man's body completely" 2076-2080)

These lines embody the generous *wergild* that Hondscio has gotten for his death, namely being mentioned *by name* by Beowulf as well as the *Beowulf* poet. Still, the life and death of Hondscio aren't the main concern of these lines; rather, it's Beowulf's heroic deeds that attract the poet's attention and that acquire the most considerable importance within whole narrative. The lines emphasize how "doomed" Hondscio is killed by Grendel whose fearful monstrosity brings into relief its killer's magnificent power: "nó ðý aér út ðá gén ídelhende/...ac hé mægnes róf mín costode" ("he was unwilling to leave the hall so soon empty-handed, but he, famed for his strength, tested me" 2081-2084).

The main function of Beowulf's warriors, whether alive or dead, is limited to the chorus role in a play or the loudspeaker in a concert hall. The *comitatus* is emasculated and its heroic deeds are muted, in favor of deifying its lord and centralizing him in the narrative. On behalf of the hero's exceptionality and centrality, the *Beowulf* poet castrates the *comitatus* and denies its members almost any level of heroism, except their being led by Beowulf. In more than one occasion, the poet states that warriors cannot help the hero in his fights (Rogers, 1951: 234), which stand beyond humans' abilities and limitations. Thus, Wiglaf, "a hero of the poem second in nobility to Beowulf" (Wright, 1957: 326) tries to help Beowulf in fighting against the Dragon, but his help is never appreciated. Compared to Beowulf, "The young man is at best a spokesman and a witness, at worst a mere pretext, whose presence offers Beowulf an opportunity to deliver his own epitaph" (Louviot, 2016: 81-82). Thus, instead of getting praised for fighting besides his lord, Wiglaf appears as an absent-minded warrior who fails to comply with his lord's heroic orders and instructions. Regardless of his *innocent* intentions, Wiglaf's interval in Beowulf's fight against the Dragon stands as a violation of

the *comitatus*'s heroic codes and a form of defilement of heroism in general. Although Beowulf's death is apparently caused by the Dragon, Wiglaf's unpardonable interval makes of Wiglaf the *actual murderer* of Beowulf, who dies to save his honor against all anti-heroic violations and forms of humiliations (Baum, 1963: 357). However, whether or not Wiglaf is responsible for Beowulf's *death*, it's noteworthy that viewing Beowulf as "the incarnation of the heroic spirit and the [only] radiant center of the poem" (Irving, 1968: 246) demands for demoting Wiglaf and castrating his heroism.

However, due to people's uplifting of him to a higher human level over other kings and warriors, Beowulf eventually takes pleasure and pride in that superiority and behaves accordingly. Before his last fight, the hero addresses his troop thus, "Gebíde gé on beorge /...nis þæt éower síð/ né gemet mannes nefne mín ánes" ("you, wait here on the barrow. It isn't your adventure, nor in the power of men, save mine alone" 2529-2533). While this declaration, as Hill argues in chapter 5 of *The Narrative Pulse of Beowulf* (2008), might have stemmed from the heroic codes which Beowulf and his retainers sternly follow, it essentially reflects Beowulf's genuine belief that he is superior to other warriors. Similarly, the last phrase in *Beowulf*, "lofgeornost" ([the] most eager for praise), clearly summarizes Beowulf's heroic conduct in terms of *excessive* eagerness to winning and promoting his heroic reputation. Although Beowulf "can be defended against the charge of foolish overconfidence" (Nelson, 1989: 79), it's undeniable that such eagerness castrates the *comitatus* and costs the hero his life and his nation its peacefulness. Because of his "genuine selfishness" (Gwara, 2008: 10), Beowulf's *comitatus* different from the splendid ones depicted in most Old English poetry, such as *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Wanderer*, stands as empty and useless.

Part of the poet's technique of castrating the *comitatus* in favor of maintaining Beowulf's renown throughout the narrative is viewing humans weapons as valueless in Beowulf's fights. For instance, Hrunting is introduced as a marvelous sword (1455, 1525, 1810) that "naéfre hit æt hilde ne swác manna aéngum" ("never had it failed any man in a fight" 1460) and that "næs þæt forma síð/ þæt hit ellenweorc æfnan scolde" ("it was not the first time that it courage-work had been obliged to perform" 1463-1464). Nonetheless, it fails to help Beowulf. The poet declares, "ðá wæs forma síð/ déorum mádmæ þæt his dóm álæg" ("this was the first time for the precious treasure that its glory failed" 1527-1528). Obviously, Hrunting's magnificent past is exalted "so that its subsequent failure is made to seem more remarkable" (Rogers, 1951: 247). Thus, Hrunting's failure to serve Beowulf in his fights ultimately reinforces the superiority of Beowulf to humans and their weapons. If Hrunting had succeeded in killing Grendel's mother, Beowulf's status as an unparalleled hero might have suffered. That is to say, maintaining Beowulf's superhuman standing demands for the failure of Hrunting and the emergence of a mysterious sword that can serve the hero in his supernatural battle. The poet reports that the gigantic sword "was mare ðonne aéng mon óðer/ tó beaduláce ætberan meakte" ("was more than any other man could carry to battle-play" 1560-1561). The sword is heavier and greater than what normal men can carry; consequently, the person who can use it should be superior to other men.

By using the gigantic sword, Beowulf proves his exceptionality; nevertheless, maintaining that exceptionality ironically demands for the vanishing of that same sword. As Beowulf wins the fight and proves his power through the gigantic sword, that same sword disappears from the epic completely: "hit eal gemealt íse gelficost" ("it all melted like ice" 1608). Whether or not the sudden disappearance of the sword has anything to do with "the heat...[of] the monsters' blood" (Staver, 2005: 76) or the mysterious nature of "God's help" (Puhvel, 1979: 120), that action is necessary to reinforce Beowulf's independence from humans and nonhumans help and weapons. It's for this purpose that the poet celebrates Beowulf's ability of fighting bare-handed and by "wællseaxe" (a dagger or short knife) against the Dragon (2702-2705). For Lawrence, "It is a matter of pride with Beowulf that he encounters the dragon single-handed" (226). Yet, whether pride is good or bad, viewing Beowulf fighting "single-handed" and by "wællseaxe", rather than by the gigantic sword or Nægling, is a way to demote the significance of humans weapons and promote Beowulf as the sole, independent center of the entire epic.

3. Conclusion

Although one may not disagree with the overall consensus that placing Beowulf "at the center of the center" is the

main goal of the entire narrative (Halverson, 1969: 594), it's hard to deny that Beowulf's centrality is chiseled at the cost of the epic's other elements. His centrality in the narrative is formed through muting men and warriors, introducing people without names, emasculating the troop's heroic deeds, castrating the *comitatus*, preventing warriors from helping the hero, denying humans weapons any value for the hero's battles, and distorting peoples' *sapientia* and *fortitudo*. That is to say, instead of deploying different narrative techniques to celebrate and eternalize the whole heroic community and system of the Geats and Danes, the *Beowulf* poet sacrifices almost everything for the sake of centralizing his own hero. Thus, the many techniques deployed to reinforce Beowulf's heroic superiority and to contribute to the epic's cohesion and sense of completeness indirectly generates self-contradiction, flattens humans' distinctiveness, and undermines the entirety of the heroic culture.

The poet views Beowulf as the epic's center that "unifies in an ideal manner pride with modesty, devotion to God with self-confidence, daring with caution, joie de vivre with piety, who enjoys possessions but is not greedy, he is thankful, pious, and reverent towards ages" (Schücking, 1929: 47), but he does that by intermingling oppositions. Beowulf's heroic superiority is promoted through merging together monsters and humans, Geats and Danes, Sigemond and Hygelac, and other opposing elements. Juxtaposing oppositions is narratively functional, yet it can undercut its own symmetry. Fajardo-Acosta writes, "Beowulf's character is paradoxical. His personality and behavior display widely discordant features. Sometimes he is characterized as gentle and likeable while at other times he is comparable to no one but the monsters themselves" (1989: 12). While the mutual resemblance between humans and monsters mayn't be peculiar when viewed in light of humans nature, any resemblance between Beowulf and his enemy monsters is very compromising to the heroic superiority of Beowulf-- due to Beowulf's perfection, righteousness, and what he represents. What makes Beowulf, rather than any other warrior or king, a hero is his ability to recognize, hate, and kill enemy monsters; therefore, any resemblance between him and monsters indicates a defect in his identity in particular and in humans' heroism in general. Accordingly, having Beowulf touched by monsters (Greenfield, 1982: 294-295) and centralizing his heroism through monsters and monstrosity *ironically* undermine Beowulf's heroic idealism and the heroic ideals which he represents.

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محورية البطل في ملحمة "بيولف"

مالك زريقات*

ملخص

يرى معظم نقاد ملحمة "بيولف" أن إظهار البطل كمركز رئيس للأحداث هو الهدف الأساسي للملحمة، ولهذا فمن الطبيعي أن يوظف الشاعر معظم أسطر الملحمة وتقنياتها السردية في صياغة شخصية البطل الاستثنائية والتعني بها. وعليه، فإن هذه الدراسة تناقش أهم العناصر والتقنيات السردية التي يوظفها شاعر قصيدة "بيولف" الملحمية لإظهار محورية البطل ومثاليات البطولة في النص. تركز الدراسة على العديد من التقنيات مثل إهمال الشاعر لكل شخصيات الملحمة ما عدا البطل وذلك بعدم الإشارة لهم مطلقاً أو الإشارة لهم دون ذكرهم بالاسم، بالإضافة إلى إنكار أهميتهم ودور أسلحتهم في مساعدة البطل لتحقيق انتصاراته. وبعد مناقشة مثل هذه الاستراتيجيات السردية، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن شاعر "بيولف" يبالغ في توظيف كل عناصر قصيدته لإبراز محورية البطل، لدرجة أن التقنيات السرية المستخدمة لهذا الغرض تؤثر، وبشكل غير مباشر، سلباً على صورة البطل المثالية وعلى القيم البطولية التي يمثلها.

الكلمات الدالة: بيولف، الشعر الملحمي، اللغة الانجليزية القديمة، الشعر الانجليزي، البطولة، المحورية، السرد.

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