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## The Fight of Good Vs Bad As Depicted In the Beowulf Poem

Traditionally, light means good and dark means evil. This assumption is proven in many instances of Beowulf, though in all three battles we also see contradictions to this assumption. Sometimes, what we see or assume may not always be just that. The light and dark imagery used in Beowulf helps to create this ambiguous theme and furthermore makes the contrasts between the battles more evident.

In the Grendel episode, light and dark imagery are very evident. Before Beowulf arrives in the Danish kingdom he hears stories of the powerful Grendel and how he never dared to touch king Hrothgars glorious throne. This is the first instance where light and dark imagery collide. Grendel wouldnt touch the throne because the throne represented glory, or light, and Grendel represented evil, or dark. The second occurrence is the actual attack of Grendel. He moved quickly through the cloudy night toward that gold-shining hall. In this imagery we see an obvious light and dark conflict but we also see a good vs. evil conflict as well. Grendel comes to attack the mead hall at night, which reveals that the dark, or evil, is attacking the light, or good, in which case the good overcame the evil. We notice this in the third example. When morning came, crowds surrounded to behold the monsters great staggering tracks and watch as his great body was dropped deep in murky darkness as hell opened to receive him. Evil was defeated, and treasures were given in return. In this case, the death of Grendel is representative of darkness and the treasures Beowulf received is representative of light.

After Grendels death, Grendels mother seeks revenge against Beowulf for his actions. Beowulf dives into the lake, representative of the underworld, or hell. This symbolism of hell is one example of light and dark imagery in Beowulf. Its almost like a religious battle that Beowulf is taking on. Beowulf represents an ambassador from heaven to defeat the evils of hell. Only Beowulf would risk his life in that lake but Beowulf and fear were strangers. Like light and dark, Beowulf and fear were strangers, or opposites unknown to each other. In the midst of the darkness was but a glimmer of light, being a sword. This is the second illustration of light and dark imagery. The sword, portraying light, was blessed with [the giants] magic and was used to conquer Grendels mighty mother, portraying dark; once again, good has defeated evil.

In the last episode with the Dragon, both of the examples of light and dark images are manifested through the archetype of the tower. The tower is the place of residence of the Dragon and is representative of a place of evil or isolation of oneself. That tower was heaped high with hidden treasure [and] left in the darkness. Here, Beowulf approaches the darkness of

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the tower in which he must overcome in order to reach the light, which is the glory of defeat of the Dragon. It had flown in the darkness once, before fighting its final battle. (So gold can easily triumph, defeat the strongest of men, no matter how deep it is hidden!) And over everything he saw a strange light, shining everywhere. This quote is another example of light and dark imagery in the Dragon episode. After defeating the Dragon he saw a light which is most likely similar to the light shining down from heaven when a saint has done a wondrous deed. This is parallel to the Christian motif of the religious symbolism of the battle with Grendel's mother. The light he sees represents triumph; darkness has been defeated for a last and final time.

Many of the contradictions between light and dark imagery occur in the setting or the surroundings of the battle. In the Grendel episode, Herot Hall is predominately in the darkness and we see little to no images of light except for the gruesome light in Grendel's eyes. Here, the darkness of Herot Hall is merely the typical darkness of the night without any implications that this darkness represents evil. Also, we have the light that was seen in Grendel's eyes, though in this case the light is considered evil because of the source from which it came, Grendel. In Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, the light and dark images become more diverse. Beowulf entered the lake, the brilliant light[of] fiery flame[s] constantly burned all around him as he slain Grendel's mighty mother and brought home Grendel's head as a terrible trophy. Here we have the light image of fire though its evil because of its location, being the underworld. Another contradiction between the light/good, dark/evil assumption is the fact that he brought back a terrible trophy to the Danes. Trophies are typically representative of goodness and reward, but here, it's described as terrible which implies an evilness about it. Also in this episode is the fact that the fiery light surrounding the lake was only a glow, as compared to the brilliant, incandescent light that appeared only after the death of Grendel's mother. The Dragon in Beowulf is representative of light because of its many descriptions using fire images, such as the flaming dragon came flying through the darkness, wrapped in fire. The Dragon waited hours till the Almighty's candle went out, and evening came to attack out of wildanger...[and] glowing rage. These are some of the few dark images shown in this episode, and though these images seem negative, they seem to have a bit of goodness in them. The fall of nighttime was described by using a religious being, implying a bit of light embodied within the darkness. The theme of these battles is much like the story of Robin Hood. Robin Hood steals from those who are rich in order to help out the poor. Though he does an evil deed, he is seen as a hero and a good guy to the people. Just another proof that some things aren't always as they seem.

Within all three episodes, the contradictory light and dark images seem to be very ambiguous and far from what they seem. Dark images prevail in the battle with Grendel and seem to be balanced in the second episode, with his mother, but in the third, light prevails; though it's negative. This contradicts all assumptions that good always wins in the end. In all the battles it seemed as though evil was defeated by goodness, but through these paradoxical images, as compared to the literal light and dark imagery, we see that it's not the good that predominately

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prevails, its the evilnot what most would assume.

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