

ENGS 134: Beowulf

Professor, Christopher Vaccaro, Ph.D.
302 Old Mill / Hours: MWF 11am-12pm
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656- 1221

Course Description:

Early medieval England influenced by Ireland, Scandinavia, and continental Europe – particularly Rome. *Beowulf*, a poem rife with masochistic and sadistic male heroes, warrior queens, saintly submission, feminized/gender-queer kings, a celibate/(asexual?) protagonist, the ecstasy of death, and intra-male same-sex love.

This course tackles one of the earliest and most exciting poems in the English language, the anonymous *Beowulf*, composed as we have it sometime around 750 CE. We approach the poem as both a literary and historical artifact capable of stirring readers' imaginations, providing insights into the lives of kings and scribes of pre-Norman England, and foregrounding the worldview of a diverse Germanic culture influenced by Roman and Irish Christianities.

This discussion-intensive course provides an opportunity to experience *Beowulf* in the original language, but knowledge of Old English is not necessary as we will utilize four translations, the first by J.R.R. Tolkien, the second by Roy Liuzza, the third by Seamus Heaney, and the fourth by Maria Headley (author also of *The Mere-Wife*, who will be visiting our class). Class time will be spent examining the gender/sexuality subjects mentioned above in conjunction with the following subjects: elegy/eulogy, heroism, medieval Others, kingship/queenship, history and myth. In addition, we will focus on those customs and rituals so central to Anglo-Saxon culture: banqueting, gift giving, speech making, vengeance, remembering loved ones, funeral rites, and ritualized battle. This course is cross-listed with Classics and GSWS and students can tailor their assignments accordingly as can those with knowledge of Old English.

Course Texts

Translations (All are required)

Headley, Maria, trans. *Beowulf: A New Translation* - 0374110034
Liuzza, Roy, trans. *Beowulf*. [Dual-language Edition] - 9781554811137
Seamus Heaney *Beowulf* [Dual-language Edition] - 9780393320978
Tolkien. *Beowulf: A translation and commentary* - 0544570308

Old English Grammar (Optional; purchased through Amazon)
Baker, Peter. *Introduction to Old English*

On Line:

Beowulf Text

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf-oe.html>

Bosworth-Toller. An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary

<http://beowulf.engl.uky.edu/~kiernan/BT/Bosworth-Toller.htm>

Dictionary of Old English A- I

UVM Howe Library Data Base

Work Required

1. Reciting/Pronouncing first 11 lines of Beowulf in Old English 10%
(Students must receive a passing grade on this in order to receive credit for the class.)
2. A six-page response paper 20%
(Papers are evaluated based on ideas, organization, support, style, and grammar)
3. A twelve-page term paper 35%
4. Discussion/Participation: 35% [Plus portfolio of all work done.]
[Please note: Students are allowed 3 unexcused absences before the grade is affected. The 5th unexcused absence results in “no credit” or F for the class. All absences affect the participation grade.]

Schedule: Monday/Wednesday/Friday

Week One

Monday, January 17th Martin Luther King Holiday – No Class

Wednesday, January 19th

Translations/Reading Aloud: Opening lines of poem (ll. 1-11)

Summary: Any Orchard

Maria Dahvana Headley. *Beowulf*, Introduction [In class]

Friday, January 21st

J.R.R. Tolkien. “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics”

The Ninth Hour: A Beowulf Story [25 minutes]

Week Two

Monday, January 24th (Manuscripts and Dates)

Zupitza. Facsimile. In class.
The Ninth Hour: A Beowulf Story [25 minutes]

Wednesday, January 26th (Authors, Audience, Tone)

Raymond Tripp, "Humour, Word, Play, and Semantic Resonance in Beowulf"

Friday, January 28th Gender Issues

Clare Lees. "Men and Beowulf" (pp. 140-146)

Week Three [Lines 1-370]

Monday, January 31st (The Danes and Grendel) ll. 1-190

Tolkien, (ll. 1-186) pages 13-19
Heaney, pages 3-13
Liuzza, pages 55-67
Headley, pages 1-11

Wednesday, February 2nd (Beowulf's Arrival) ll. 190-370

Tolkien, (ll. 187-366) pages 19-26
Heaney, pages 13-27
Liuzza, pages 67-77
Headley, pages 11-19

Friday, February, 4th

Helen Damico. from *Beowulf's Wealththeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*

Week Four [Lines 371-790]

Monday, February 7th (Beowulf and Unferth) ll. 371-558

Tolkien, (ll. 367-491) pages 26-30
Heaney, pages 27-37
Liuzza, pages 77-91
Headley, pages 19-27

Wednesday, February 9th (Beowulf fights Grendel) ll. 558-790

Tolkien, (ll. 492-616) pages 30-34
Heaney, pages 37-53
Liuzza, pages 87-101
Headley, pages 27-36

Friday, February, 11th

Carol Clover, “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe”

Week Five [Lines 791-1191]

Monday, February 14th (Kings: Hrothgar, Sigemund and Heremod) ll. 791-990

Tolkien, (ll. 617-680) pages 34-36
Heaney, pages 53-67
Liuzza, pages 102-113
Headley, pages 36-44

Wednesday, February 16th (Finnsburg Episode) ll. 990-1191

Tolkien, (680-979) pages 36-47
Heaney, pages 67-85
Liuzza, pages 114-127
Headley, pages 44-53

Friday, February 18th

Whitelock “The Heathen English”

Week Six [Lines 1192-1570]

Monday, February 21st President’s Day Holiday

Wednesday, February 23rd (Beowulf Fights Grendel’s mother) ll. 1192-1382

(Grendel’s Mother Attacks Heorot)

Tolkien (ll. 980-1153), pages 47-53
Heaney, pages 86-97
Liuzza, pages 127-137
Headley, pages 53-61

Friday, February 25th ll. 1383-1570

Tolkien (ll. 1154-1314), pages 53-58
Heaney, pages 97-109
Liuzza, pages 137-149

Headley, pages 61-69

Jane Chance. "Grendel's Mother as Epic Anti-Type of the Virgin and Queen" [Fulk]

Week Seven [1570-1962]

Monday, February 28th (Beowulf's Victory, Hrothgar's Advice) l. 1571-1816

Tolkien (ll.1315-1520) , pages 58-66

Heaney, pages 109-123

Liuzza, pages 149-163

Headley, pages 69-79

****Six-page Response Paper: due by Monday**

Wednesday, March 2nd (Beowulf's Amorous Departure Scene) ll. 1816-1962

Tolkien (ll. 1521-1645), pages 66-70

Heaney, pages 123-135

Liuzza, pages 163-171

Headley, pages 79-85

Friday, March 4th

[To be determined]

Spring break March 7th-11th

Week Eight [Lines 1963-2311]

Monday, March 14th (Beowulf's Account to Hygelac; Ingeld Legend) ll. 1963-2143

Tolkien (ll. 1645-1786), pages 70-75

Heaney, pages 135-147

Liuzza, pages 171-183

Headley, pages 85-92

Wednesday, March 16th (50 Winters Later, Awakening the Dragon) ll. 2144-2311

Tolkien (ll. 1787-1954), pages 75-81

Heaney, pages 147-157

Liuzza, pages 183-193

Headley, pages 92-100

Friday, March 18th

[To be determined]

Week Nine [Lines 2312-2751]

Monday, March 21st (Beowulf's Time with the Geats) ll. 2312-2537

Tolkien (ll. 1954-2129), pages 81-87

Heaney, pages 157-171

Liuzza, pages 193-207

Headley, pages 100-108

Wednesday, March 23rd (Beowulf and Wiglaf Fight the Dragon) ll. 2536-2751

Tolkien (ll. 1954-2309), pages 87-93

Heaney, pages 171-185

Liuzza, pages 207-219

Headley, pages 108-118

Friday, March 25th

[To be determined]

Week Ten [2753-3182]

Monday, March 28th (Beowulf's Final moments) ll. 2753-2945

Tolkien, (ll. 2309-2470), pages 93-99

Heaney, pages 185-199

Liuzza, pages 220-231

Headley, pages 118-127

Wednesday, 30th (Beowulf's Funeral) ll. 2945-3182

Tolkien (ll. 2470-2665), pages 99-105

Heaney, pages 199-213

Liuzza, pages 231-245

Headley, pages 127-136

Friday, April 1st

Joyce Hill. "Dæt Wæs Geomuru Ides: A Female Stereotype Examined"

Gillian Overing. "The Women of Beowulf: A Context for Interpretation" [Baker]

Week Eleven

Monday, April 4th Kingship, Comitatus, and Male Bonding

Hroðgar's wise words to Beowulf (Lines 1700-1784)
Ingeld and vengeance (Lines . . .)

Jane Roberts. "Hroðgar's Admirable Courage" (pp.)

****Six-page Response Paper: due by Tuesday, November 6th****

Wednesday, April 6th

Hroðgar at Beowulf's departure scene (1841-1865)**
Hroðgar's affection for Beowulf (1866-1880) **(Translation extra credit)

David Clark. "Heroic Desire?" (pp. 130-147)
Allen Frantzen. "Kiss and Tell" (pp. 89-107)

Friday, April 8th

[To be determined]

Week Twelve

Monday, April 11th

Sturla Gunnarsson, *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005), 103 minutes

****One-Page Term Paper Abstract and Bibliography due**

Wednesday, April 13th

Gunnarsson, *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005)

Friday, April 15th

Discussion on Gunnarsson, *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005)

Week Thirteen

Monday, April 18th

Graham Baker, *Beowulf* (1999); 95 minutes

Wednesday, April 20th

Baker, *Beowulf* (1999)

Friday, April 22nd

Discussion on Baker, *Beowulf*

Week Fourteen

Monday, April 25th

Zemeckis *Beowulf* 2007; 115 minutes

Wednesday, April 27th

Zemeckis *Beowulf* 2007

Friday, April 29th

Zemeckis *Beowulf* 2007

Week Fifteen

Monday, May 2nd

Discussion on Zemeckis *Beowulf*

Wednesday May 4th

Office Hours (Recitation of opening lines)

Friday, May 6th Conclusions

****Term Paper: due by Saturday, May 7th 5pm****