

Beowulf

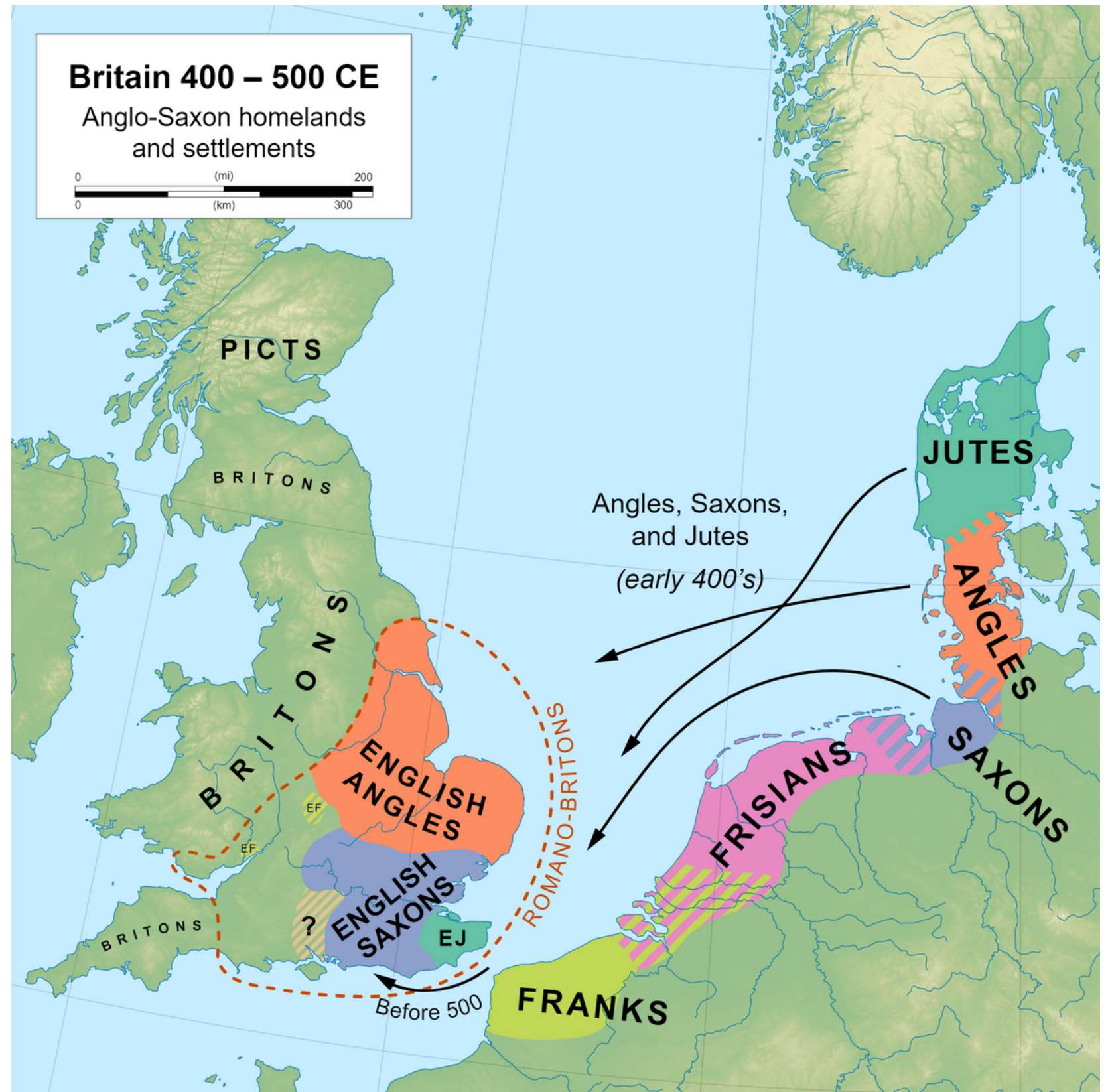




Today's Agenda:

- Textual History, Genre, and Language
- Close-Reading of opening lines
- Discussion Leader:
- Reading Response Guidelines





The background is a solid light beige color. In the top-left and bottom-right corners, there are abstract, torn-edge-like shapes in a vibrant red color. A thick white line follows the inner curve of these shapes. In the top-right corner, there is a cluster of several red, downward-pointing arrowheads or chevrons of varying sizes, arranged in a roughly circular pattern.

WHAT LITERARY
GENRE IS BEOWULF?

Genre: Epic Poem

An epic is a long, often book-length, narrative in verse form that retells the heroic journey of a single person or a group of persons.

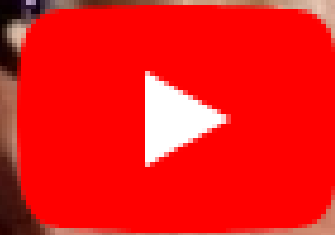
- Hero embodies ideals of a particular nation or culture
- The struggles encountered also reveal much about what their respective culture values
- Heroes are aided by divine or supernatural forces
- Written in an elevated style (formal tone or quality)
- Long descriptions of history, physical appearance, weapons, warriors, etc.
- Boast: stirring speeches made by leaders to inspire heroism (we'll talk a bit more about this one)



Beowulf: The Epic in Performance - Benjamin Bagby, voi...



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Origin of the Danish Kingdom:

Their first father was a foundling: Scyld Sceffing.
He spent his youth fists up, browbeating every
barstool-brother,
bonfiring his enemies. That man began in the waves,
a baby in a basket,
but he bootstrapped his way into kingdom, trading
loneliness for luxury. Whether they thought kneeling
necessary or no,
everyone from head to tail of the whale-road bent
down:

There's a king, there's his crown!
That was a good king. (lines 4-11)

Comitatus Bond

the thane or soldier swears to defend a lord to their
death, while he provides them with the protection and a
share of his wealth and weapons

ex: The man was more than just talk:
he gave good gifts. His war-wedded wore kings' rings,
and drank their leaders' mead. Nightly, he feted his fight-
family with fortunes. The hall loomed, golden towers
antler-tipped; it was asking for burning. . . You know how
it is: every castle wants invading, and every family
has enemies born within it. (lines 78-84)





Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley Beowulf (lines 203-709 or pg. 12-33)
- Group C: Literary Entry #1





Today's Agenda:

- Group Activity: Identifying Themes
- Discussion Leader:
- What is Wergild?
- Writing Prompt





Themes

- Identity
- Fate
- Gender Roles
 - Strength/Courage/Bravery
- Family, lineage, origin

Boast

A ritual where you praise yourself extravagantly with speech. In a boast, the person:

- reveals an impressive historical lineage
- lists great deeds accomplished
- asserts victory
- thrills the audience
- creates drama or tension

Wergild

The value of a man's life payable to his family by his murderer.

Writing Prompt:

Beowulf had no shame about boasting. In fact, the Geatish warriors had to let the world know who they were, who their noble parents were, their great accomplishments, and what they planned to do next. This boasting was polite and even expected to gain entry into Hrothgar's kingdom.

Write a formal boast about yourself in the style of Old English poetry (feel free to include kennings or alliteration).

- Self-identification (I am _____, daughter/son of _____)
- Your immediate ancestry and something about your lineage (daddy/mama)
- Your bravery (not gonna take nothin' from nobody)
- Your beliefs (honor, glory, loyalty, honesty, decency, etc.)
- Boasts of at least 3 past achievements (academic, athletic, musical, social, artistic, complete lies, etc.)
- Boast of achievements to come (you can make these as outlandish as you like)

Writing Prompt:

Here's an example from an anonymous student:

I am Samantha, the only descendant of the Great Grammar Goddess and the Baron of Banking. Baking every snowfall has made me marvelous. I prepare precise parcels for all I love. Gift giving, I got it from Grandma, She slaved away, Sundays mostly, to be sure we were content. I, the sweet-toothed teenager, was tempted by the luscious idea of baking. I started off small, Saturdays with mom. Soon enough the Matron of Molasses mounds made me move on. Dad, devourer of my developments, decided my delicacies were delectable. The edges brown & crispy, while the inside fluffy and flavorful. Fresh out of the oven these savory temptations

melt in mouths. Cookies, the sweetest sin, are what I've come to love. But now that I have a new tasty trial, the temptations of a better life have haunted me. I plan to provide plenty of cookies for all. The next Martha Stewart, that's who I'll be! I'll sneak up on them all, Kevin's cupcakes will be no competition. I'll beat those Pepperidge Farm people next. Then when she least expects it, I'll take on Betty Crocker, the mother of all good cookies. The doughboy of Pillsbury will be no match for me! Finally I'll take on that perfectionist criminal herself. Martha won't know what hit her. My cookies and treats will rock this world! No one will stop me! Stealth is my secret weapon. Slowly their businesses will suffer. Until at last there is one ruler left – me.



Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley Beowulf (lines 710–1241 or pg. 33–55) = fight scene, hyfr!
- Continue working on your Reading Response





Today's Agenda

- Grendel?????
- Literary Theory Spotlight: Monster Theory & Praxis
- Discussion of Key Scenes: Battle, Rewards, two digressive episodes





PICADOR

L. GARDNER

... novel
... and the
... of art which it is'

... poetic tale'

... as funny and as elegantly written as anything I have read
... excellently entertaining from beginning to end'

... (SPECTATOR)

... it is ferociously ugly and inventive, and very good'

... absolutely marvellous: witty,
... ful, so totally a work of the
... creates its own world ...
... it too highly'

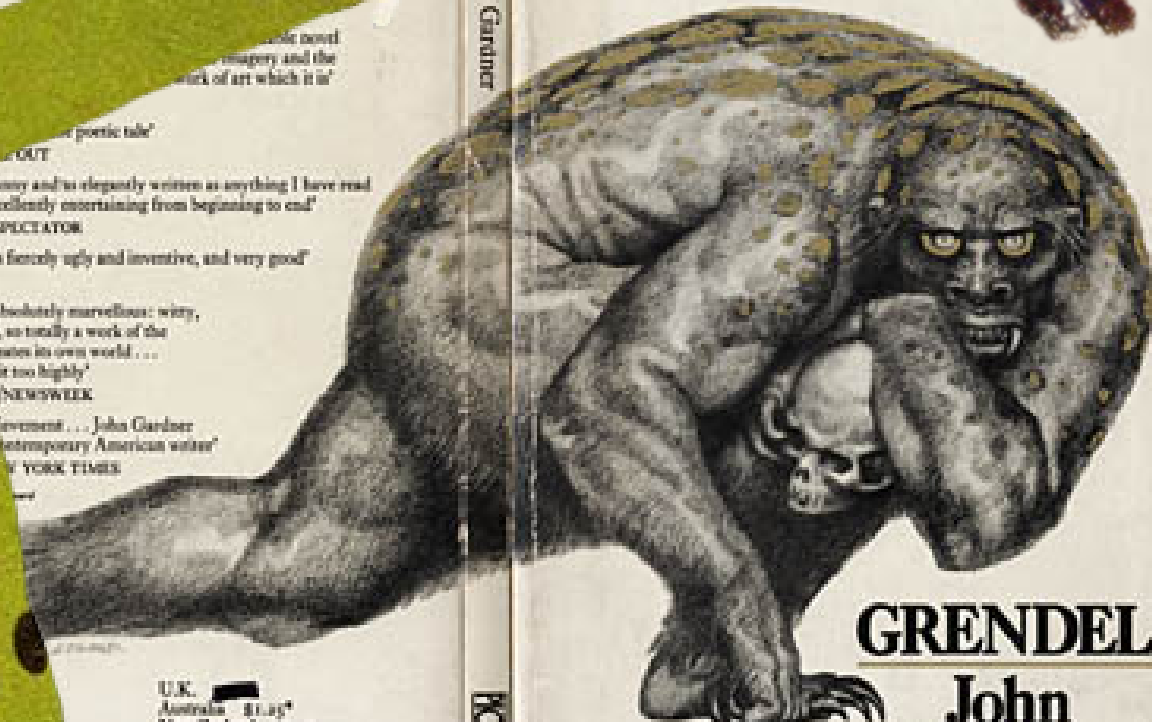
... (NEWSWEEK)

... movement ... John Gardner
... contemporary American writer'

... (THE NEW YORK TIMES)

GRENDEL, John Gardner

PICADOR



GRENDEL

John Gardner

U.K. £1.99
Australia \$1.99
New Zealand \$1.99

PICADOR

The "Monster" Problem:

blemmyae

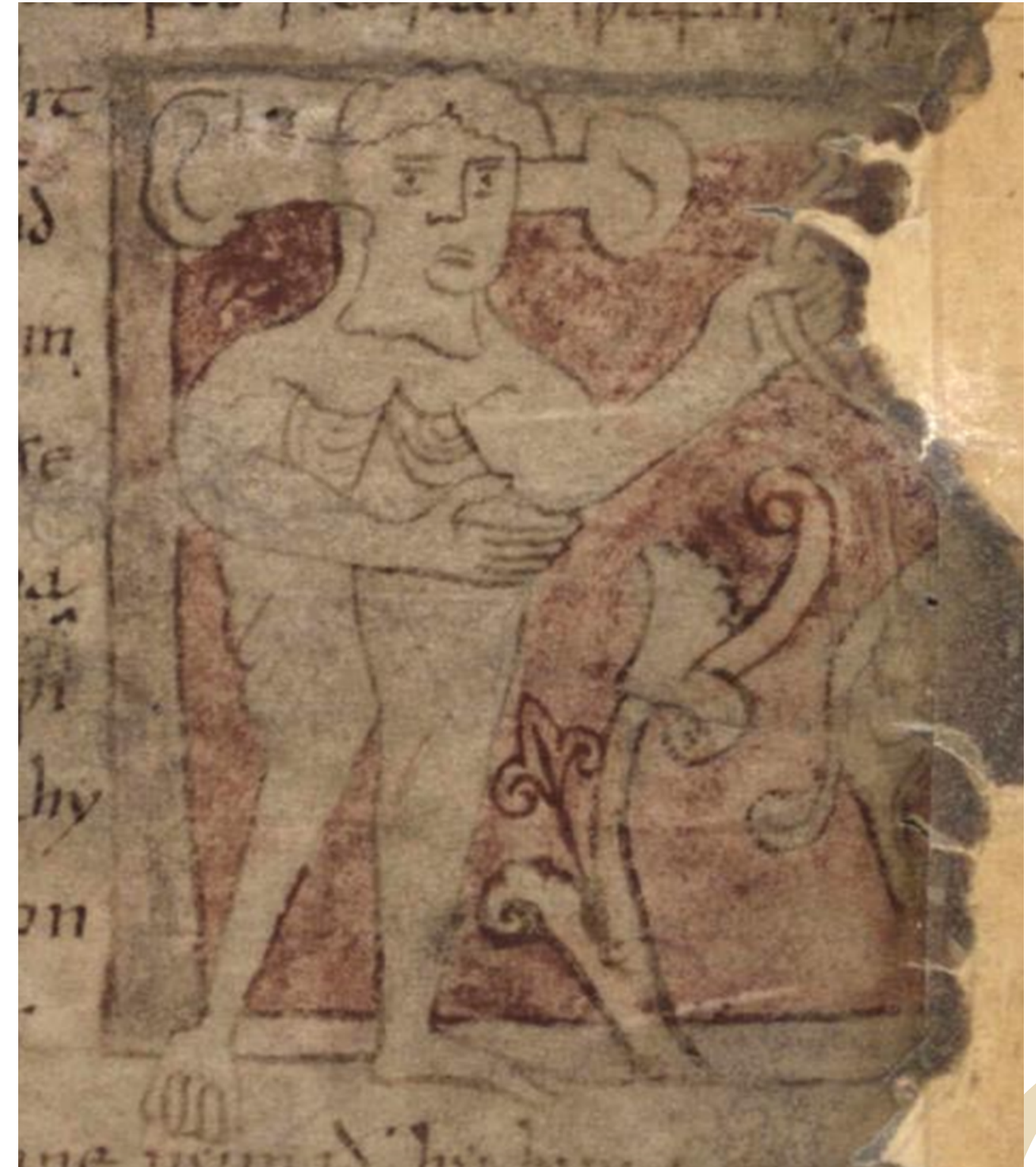
Then there is another island, south of the Brixontes, on which there are born men without heads who have their eyes and mouth in their chests. They are eight feet tall and eight feet wide. There are dragons born there which are one hundred and fifty feet in length, and are as thick as great stone pillars. Because of the abundance of the dragons, no one can journey easily in that land.



The "Monster" Problem:

panotii

Going east from there is a place where people are born who are in size fifteen feet tall and ten broad. They have large heads and ears like fans. They spread one ear beneath them at night, and they wrap themselves with the other. Their ears are very light and their bodies are as white as milk. And if they see or perceive someone in their lands, they take their ears in their hands and flee far, so quickly that the belief is that they flew.



The "Monster" Problem:

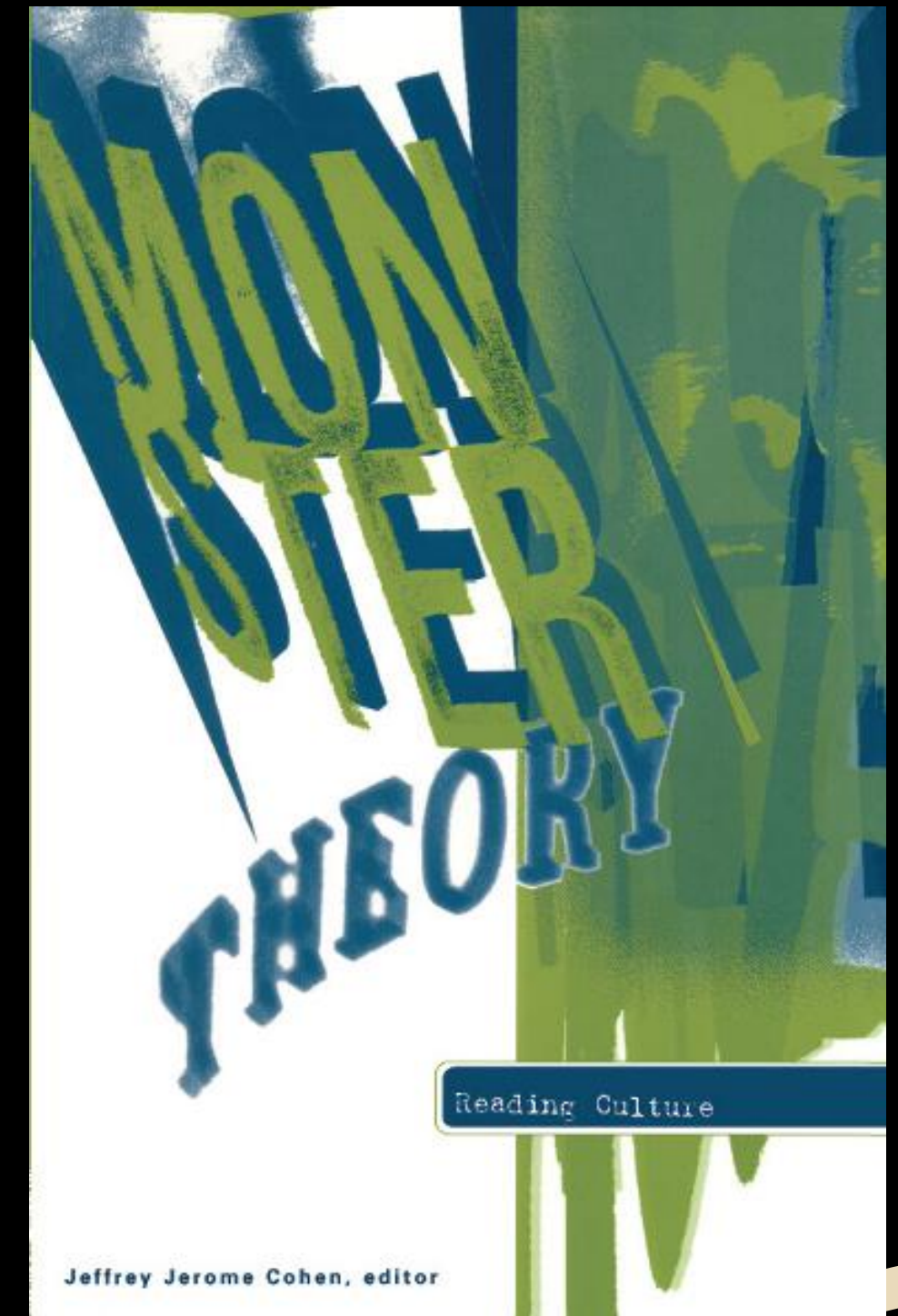
sigelwara

Then, there is a kind of tree, which grows there, on which the most precious stones sprout. There is also a group of people there of dark color in appearance, who are called Ethiopians (*sigelwara*).



Literary Theory Spotlight: Monster Theory

The monster, according to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, is an embodiment of 'difference'—of any quality, whether it's ideological, cultural, sexual, or racial, that inspires fear and uncertainty in its creators. The monster is frequently a "disturbing hybrid" that defies categorization—its hybridity rebels against nature. And though there are fictional monsters, real people can become monsters too. So, in order to bring "freaks" under control, those who abide by the standard codes of the day ascribe monstrous identities to those who do not. Anxiety is what breeds monsters and defines their existence. By locating the origin of monsters, Cohen strives to reveal our culture's values and tendencies.



THE FINNESBURGH FRAGMENT

Hildeburh, daughter of the Danish king Hoc, is married to the Frisian king Finn. When the Danish prince Hnaef visits his sister Hildeburh in Frisia, he and his sixty warriors are attacked by Finn's men. Hnaef (fighting for the Danes) and her son (fighting for the Frisians) are both killed. She has their bodies burned together on the same funeral pyre.

Replacing Hnaef, Hengest has taken charge of the Danish forces. Finn, Hildeburh's husband, recognizes that he does not have the military strength to continue the fight and calls for a truce with Hengest and the Danes. The terms of this truce are that 1) the surviving Danes will be given housing in Frisia; and 2) the Danes will be granted equal honor and status in Frisia and in Finn's hall.

In time, however, the Danes renew the fighting. Finn is killed, and Hildeburh returns to her Danish homeland bereft of brother, son, and husband.





Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley *Beowulf* (lines 1242–1650 or pg. 55–72) and Toni Morrison “Grendel and His Mother”
- Group D: Literary Entry
- Reading Response due at 11:59 p.m. on Monday





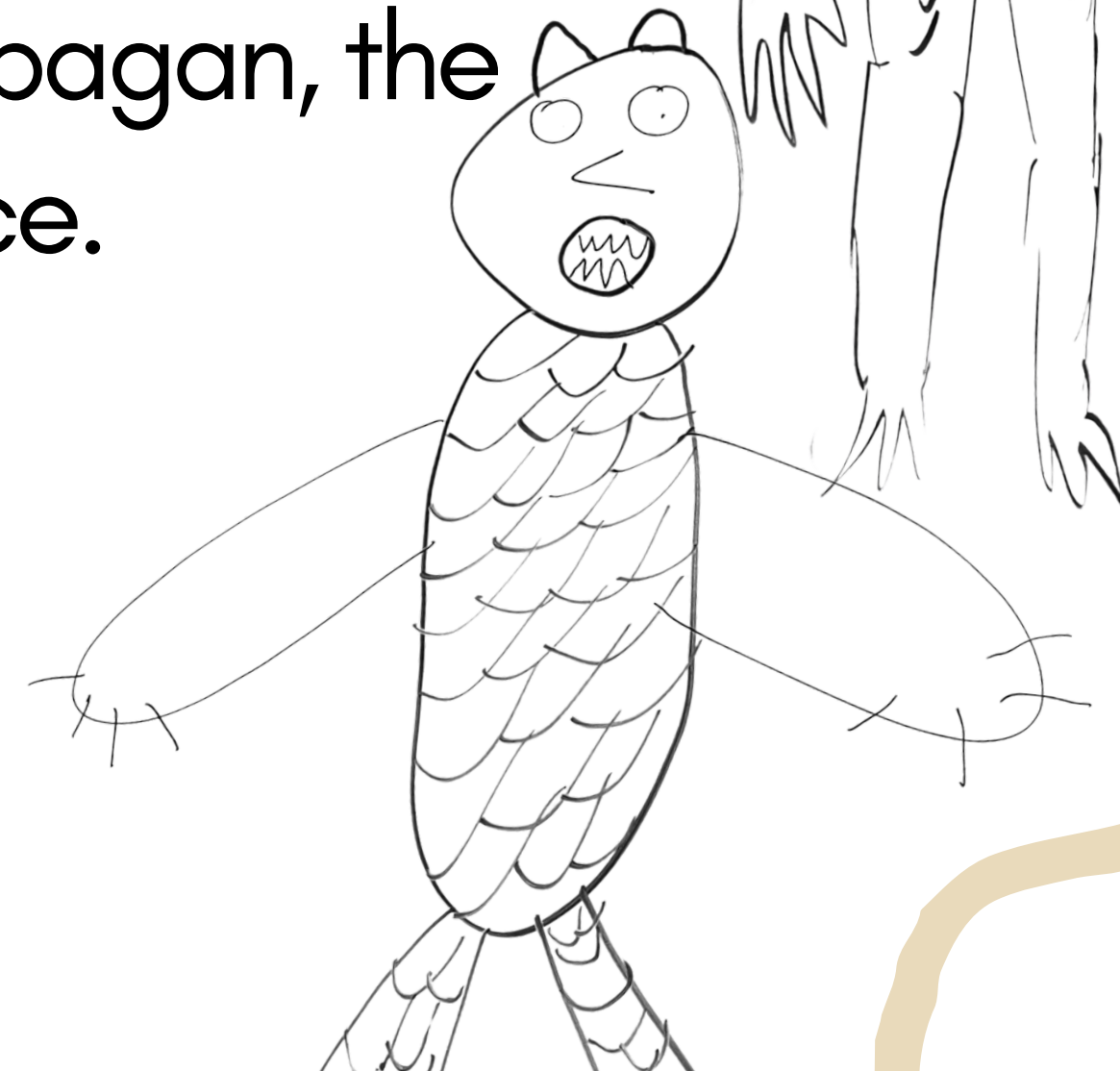
Today's Agenda:

- Literary Criticism: Toni Morrison
- Discussion Leader:
- The Task of Translation (Group Collab)



Recap: Reading & Visualizing Grendel

Monsters represent ideological, cultural, sexual, or racial difference. Grendel presents an incoherent body that cannot be categorized – he can be read as the harbinger of evil, pagan, the unknown, and even, as a different race.





'A rhapsodic work... Intricate and inventive' *New Yorker*

'Breathtaking' *Daily Mail*

'A triumph'
Margaret Atwood,
New York Times
Book Review

Toni Morrison

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison

AUTHOR OF BELOVED

What is Literary Criticism?

The consideration and analysis of literary works and historical, cultural, or contemporary issues. It applies, as a term, to any argumentation about literature.



"Grendel and His Mother"

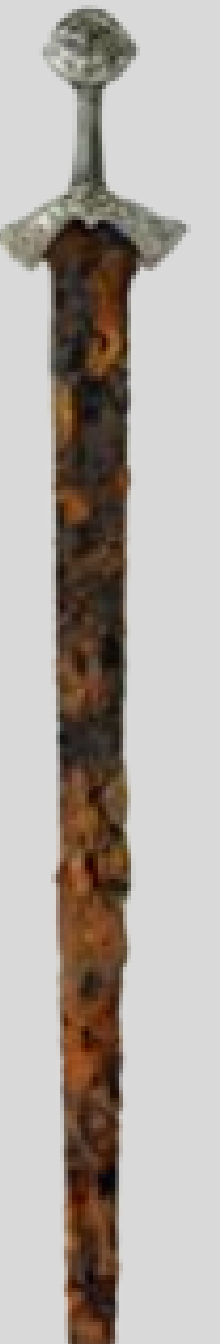
Toni Morrison



- Published in her 2019 collection of essays, *The Source of Self-Regard*.
- Focuses on the marginalized, racialized, and gendered figures who are not just props to help the character development of our hero, Beowulf.
- Begins by insisting that literary criticism is always performed through the lens of its moment and urges readers to consider premodern texts as "fertile ground on which we can appraise our contemporary world" (255).

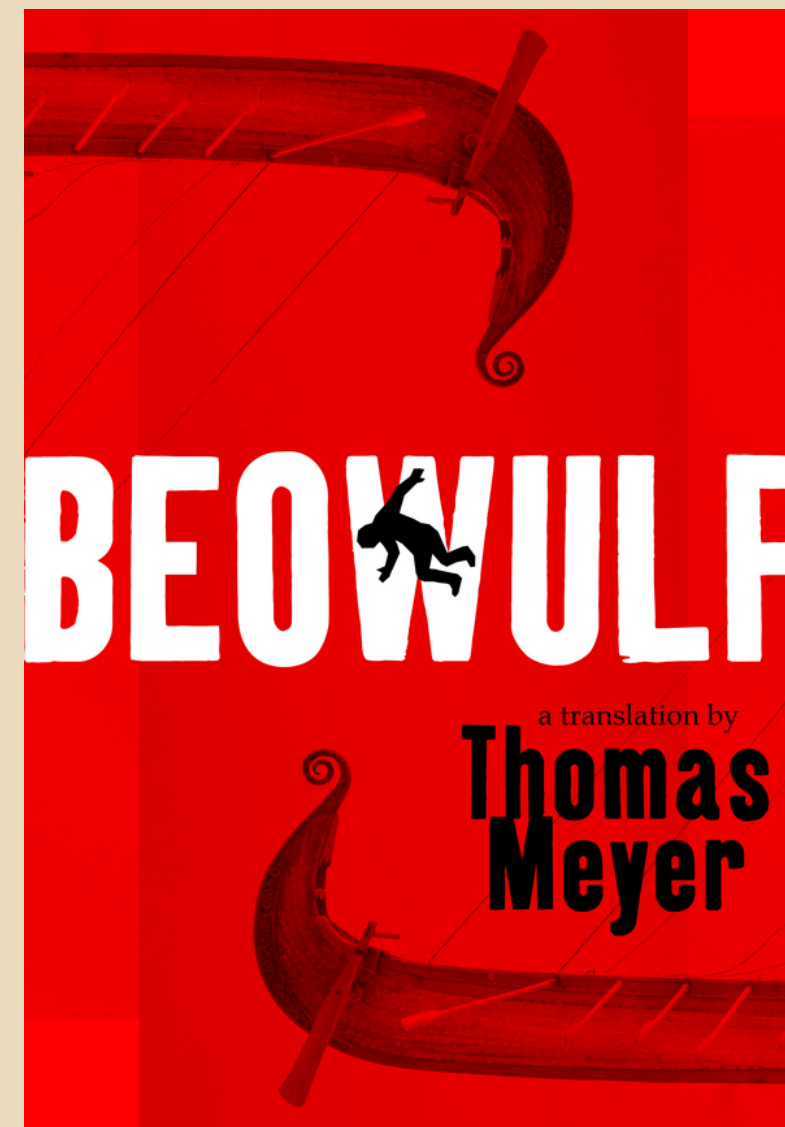
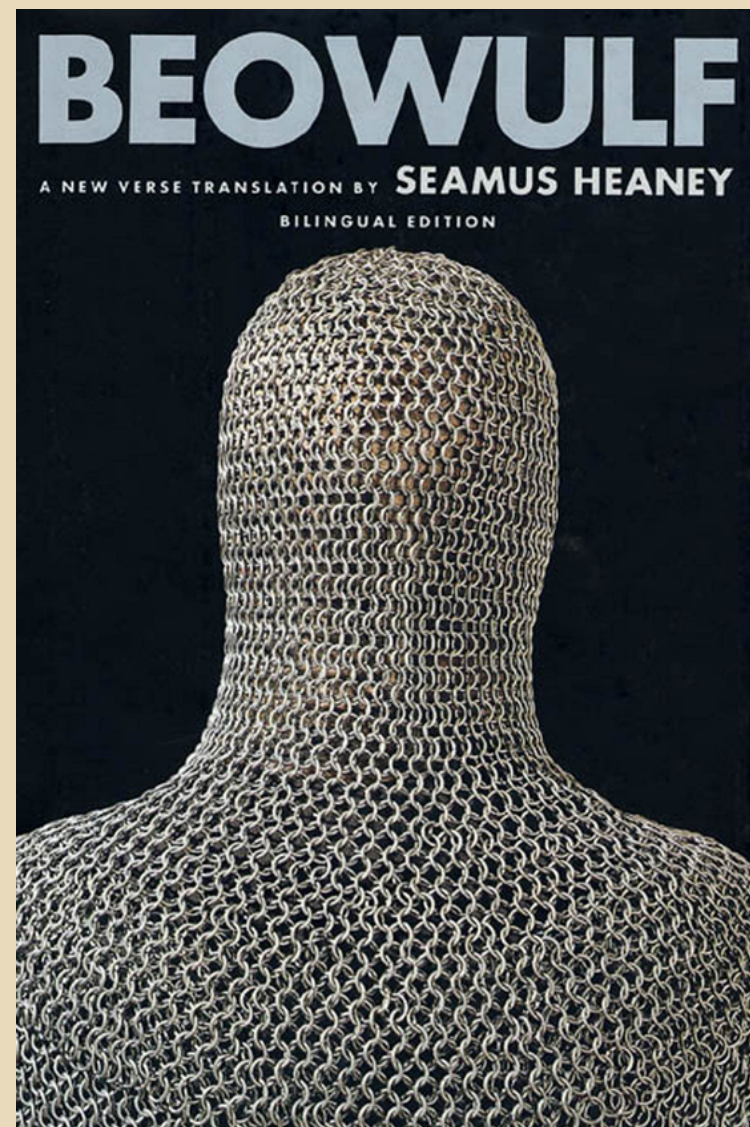
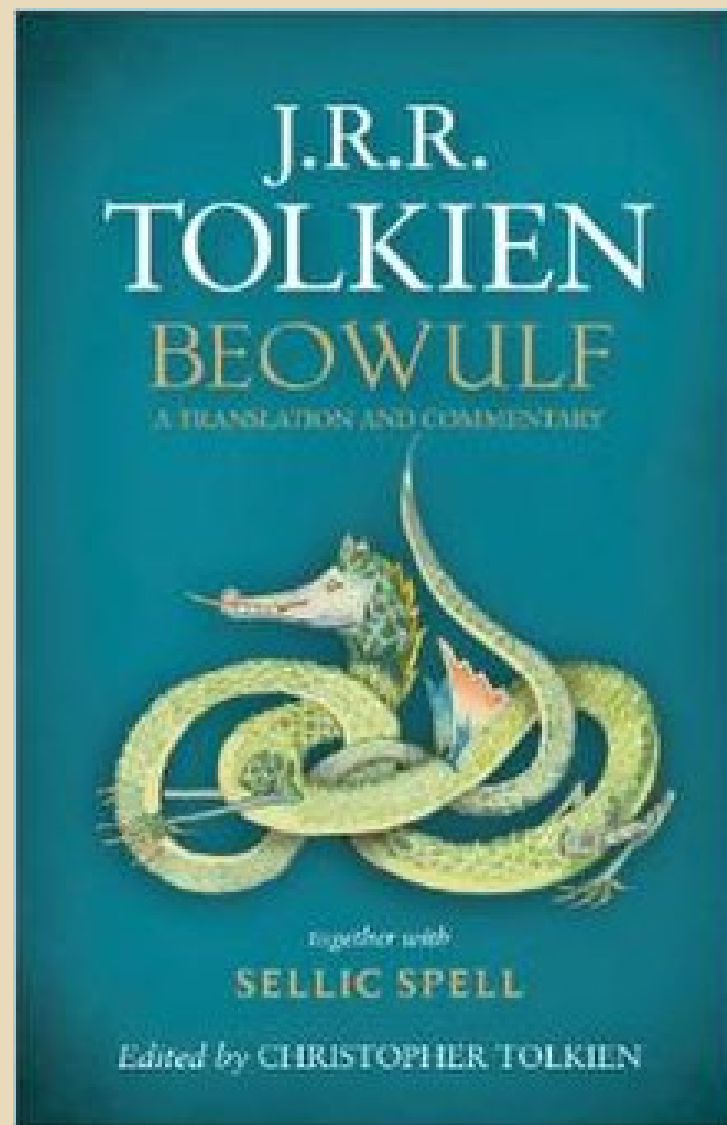
Morrison points out that Grendel was an unintelligible figure to the Danes. No one knows why he placed the men of Heorot Hall on his menu, she explains "[Grendel] did not want to rule their land or plunder their resources or rape their women, so there could be no reasoning with him. No bribery, no negotiations, no begging, no trading could stop him. Humans, even at their most corrupt, selfish, and ignorant can be made available to reason. . ."(256). She suggests that both medieval and contemporary society are uneasy about the idea of pure, unmotivated evil.





Translation(s)

In 2020, the Beowulf's Afterlives Bibliographic Database listed approximately 688 translations of the poem.



The Task of Translation

Select 8–10 lines from the poem. Then, compare and contrast two translations of the same passage. Discuss the following and post your answers on the Discussions board:

1. What words or phrases are used to describe the characters? Are they different from Headley's translation?
2. Does the translation maintain the same attitudes about heroism, revenge, gender, etc.? In other words, does this translation attempt to alter our perspectives about the poem?
3. Any other distinctions between the two translations that you notice?



Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley Beowulf (lines 1651–2209 or pg. 72–95)
- Reading Response due today at 11:59 p.m.
- Pop Quiz #2 before our next class session.
- Group A: Literary Entry #2





Today's Agenda

- Thoughts on Translations
- Discussion Leader:
- Mock Trial





Non-Linear Narratives

A non-linear narrative is a narrative technique in which the storyline is told out of chronological order. That can take many forms: by using flashforwards, flashbacks, dream sequences, or foreshadowing, non-linear plotlines can mimic the recall of human memory, or weave in fantastical elements like time travel or clairvoyance.







Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley Beowulf (lines 2210–2693 or pg. 95–116)
- Group B: Literary Entry #2





Agenda:

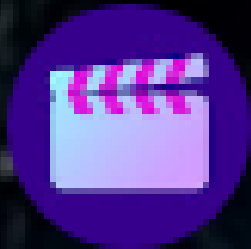
- Mock Trial
- Discussion Leader:
- Clips from *Beowulf* (2007)



Consider the third part of Beowulf, when he is preparing to fight the dragon. Beowulf is adamant about fighting the dragon alone, even though he senses his death.

Do you think this emphasizes his bravery as a warrior? Or his foolishness?

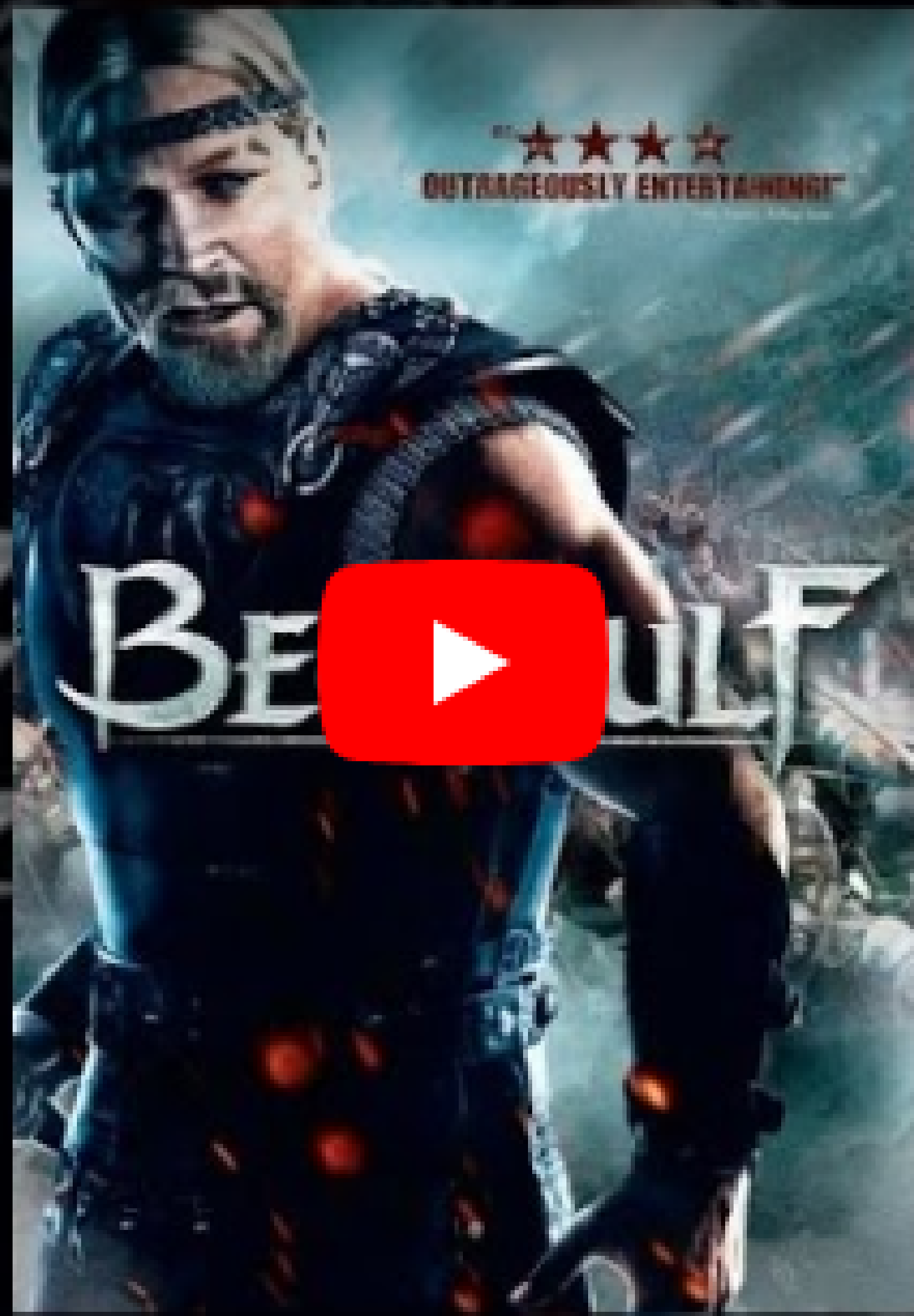




Beowulf



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Homework:

- Maria Dahvana Headley Beowulf (lines 2694–end or pg.116–136)
- Group C: Literary Entry #2





Agenda:

- Discussion Leader: Ryan B.
- So What? Premodern Texts, Contemporary Issues
- Analytical Essay Guidelines
- Subverting the Boast: Roast
- Exit Slip



So What?

Retributive Justice

a theory of punishment that when an offender commits a crime, justice requires that they suffer in return, and that the response to a crime is proportional to the offence.



So What?

Marginalization

Every culture makes distinctions between what is inside the social order and what is outside, between the human and the non-human (a category which can include animals, plants, natural processes, monsters and the miraculous). Cultures organize themselves to contain or exclude these “outside” things; social organization also works to control certain violent human tendencies inside the culture (anger, lust, fear, greed, etc.).



So What?

Redistribution of Wealth (Radical or Medieval?)

The comitatus bond requires that lords and kings give their warriors treasure in exchange of protection and loyalty — this system eventually bred greed and the desire for glory both of which led to betrayal, death, and the collapse of the Geatish kingdom.



So What?

Straight Outta Context: The (Mis)Interpretation of Texts

Along with much else from the European medieval world, medieval literature – its language, allusion and symbolism – has been used to transmit white supremacist messages that promote religious and racialized violence.



Boast

A ritual where you praise yourself extravagantly with speech. In a boast, the person:

- reveals an impressive historical lineage
- lists great deeds accomplished
- asserts victory
- thrills the audience
- creates drama or tension



Roast

To humorously mock or humiliate someone with a well-timed joke, diss or comeback; might also be considered a subversion (or undermining) of a boast.

- Focus on a character's imperfections. Emphasize them. Get creative, you won't hurt anyone's feelings.
- ex: Undermine their accomplishments
- Use alliteration or kennings
- Create drama or tension



Beowulf,
Everybody back home disliked you so much that you had to runaway to another Kingdom to prove your masculinity. Even then, you had to keep repeating yourself to try to convince yourself and others that you're worth anything at all. You're violent, brutish, and you never had a wife because no woman would ever love you. How does it feel to be a 75 year old bachelor? You died a sad death for rusty treasures, leaving your Kingdom to

Exit Slip

1. What has been most helpful for your learning in this class so far? (e.g., Describe the time(s) in this class when you were most engaged).
2. What suggestion(s) can you make that would enhance your learning experience in this class?
3. What participation grade would you give yourself and why?
4. (Optional) Additional thoughts, comments, song recommendations, etc.



Homework:

- Shakespeare *Othello*, Act 1
- Group D: Literary Entry #2

