

BRITISH LITERATURE LECTURE 01



Overview of Course

The Types or Genres of Literature we will cover will include:

- Short Stories
- Excerpts from Novels
- Excerpts from Biographies
- Excerpts from Autobiographies
- Sermons
- Diaries
- Plays
- Newspaper Editorials
- Poems
- Histories
- Hymns
- Political Essays

Brief Introduction to Elements of Literature

- Character
- Point of View
- Setting
- Structure / Plot
- Conflict
- Theme
- Moral Tone
- Worldview of the Author

Worldview of the Author

- Worldview of Author is the sum-total of what the author believes about truth and the meaning of life.



Typically in Communication, we have two-way communication. But with reading, we - as the Reader - do not get to respond to the author. So it's one-way communication.

- The author's worldview influences every aspect of what he or she writes
- And then our very own personal worldview influences how we understand the author
- Therefore, understanding worldview is important!

Booker's Seven Basic Plotlines

Active Reading versus Passive Reading

- An active reader is one who is in the habit of asking questions while he/she reads! :-D

UNIT ONE – THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

- The Middle Ages - "Dark Ages" (roughly from end of Roman Empire in 476 to sack of Constantinople in 1453) 500-1500
- The Old English Period in England (roughly from the Anglo-Saxon Invasion to the Norman Invasion) 450-1066

Invasions – Roman & Germanic!

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Roman | - Julius Caesar (55-54 BC) |
| | - Claudius (AD 43) |
| Germanic | - Anglo-Saxon (449) |
| | - Scandinavian (787 first arrive; 850 conquest begins) |
| | - Norman (1066) |

Christianity arrives in Britannia via Augustine (597) and other missionaries

Ecclesiastical Latin influences English (Angle-ish)

This Week's Works:

- *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Venerable Bede **Genre:** _____
- *Caedmon's Hymn* by Venerable Bede **Genre:** _____
- Beowulf – an **Epic** by an unknown author **Genre:** _____
EPIC - an extended narrative poem in elevated or dignified language, celebrating the feats of a legendary or traditional hero.
An epic has a DIDACTIC function to teach the reader by implanting a pattern of heroic conduct in reader's mind
- Riddles **Genre:** _____
- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1016) **Genre:** _____

Assignment:

The Old English Period & Beowulf

- **Due:** Next Week

Characters in Beowulf

Principal Characters

Beowulf - The protagonist of the epic, Beowulf is a hero from Geat who fights the monster Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a fire-breathing dragon. Beowulf is the strongest, ablest warrior around. In his youth, he personifies all of the best values of the heroic culture. In his old age, he proves a wise and effective ruler. Beowulf comes to assist King Hrothgar because Hrothgar once helped out his father, Ecgtheow.

King Hrothgar - The king of the Danes. Hrothgar enjoys military success and prosperity until Grendel terrorizes his realm. A wise and aged ruler, Hrothgar represents a different kind of leadership from that exhibited by the youthful warrior Beowulf. He is a father figure to Beowulf and a model for the kind of king that Beowulf becomes.

Grendel - A demon descended from Cain, Grendel preys on Hrothgar's warriors in the king's mead-hall, Heorot. His ruthless and miserable existence is part of the retribution exacted by God for Cain's murder of Abel.

Grendel's Mother - An unnamed swamp-hag, Grendel's mother is worse than Grendel. Her terrorization of Heorot is motivated by her desire for vengeance.

The Dragon - An ancient, powerful serpent, the dragon guards a horde of treasure in a hidden mound. Beowulf's fight with the dragon constitutes the third and final part of the epic.

Other Danes

Shield Sheafson ("Scyld the Sheaf-Child") - The legendary Danish king from whom Hrothgar is descended, Shield Sheafson is the mythical founder who inaugurates a long line of Danish rulers and embodies the Danish tribe's highest values of heroism and leadership. The poem opens with a brief account of his rise from orphan to warrior-king, concluding, "That was one good king"

Beow - The second king listed in the genealogy of Danish rulers with which the poem begins. Beow is the son of Shield Sheafson and father of Halfdane. The narrator presents Beow as a gift from God to a people in need of a leader.

Halfdane (Healfdene in our translation) - The father of Hrothgar, Heorogar, Halga, and an unnamed daughter who married a king of the Swedes, Halfdane succeeded Beow as ruler of the Danes.

Wealhtheow - Hrothgar's wife, the gracious Queen of the Danes.

Wulfgar - A minor character who meets Beowulf & his men when they arrive in Daneland. He is impressed with the warriors and recommends that King Hrothgar welcome them.

Unferth - A Danish warrior who is jealous of Beowulf, Unferth is unable or unwilling to fight Grendel, thus proving himself inferior to Beowulf.

Hrethric - Hrothgar's elder son, Hrethric stands to inherit the Danish throne, but Hrethric's older cousin Hrothulf will prevent him from doing so.

Hrothmund - The second son of Hrothgar.

Hrothulf - Hrothgar's nephew, Hrothulf betrays and usurps his cousin, Hrethric, the rightful heir to the Danish throne. Hrothulf's treachery contrasts with Beowulf's loyalty to Hygelac in helping his son to the throne.

Aeschere - Hrothgar's trusted adviser.

Other Geats

King Hygelac - Beowulf's uncle, king of the Geats, and husband of Hygd. Hygelac heartily welcomes Beowulf back from Denmark.

Hygd - Hygelac's wife, the young, beautiful, and intelligent queen of the Geats.

Wiglaf - A young kinsman and retainer of Beowulf who helps him in the fight against the dragon while all of the other warriors run away. Wiglaf adheres to the heroic code better than Beowulf's other retainers, thereby proving himself a suitable successor to Beowulf.

Ecgtheow - Beowulf's father, Hygelac's brother-in-law, and King Hrothgar's friend. Ecgtheow is dead by the time the story begins, but he lives on through the noble reputation that he made for himself during his life and in his dutiful son's remembrances.

King Hrethel - The Geatish king who took Beowulf in as a ward after the death of Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father.

Breca - Beowulf's childhood friend, whom he defeated in a swimming match. Unferth alludes to the story of their contest, and Beowulf then relates it in detail.

Helpful Terminology

Heorot = the Mead-Hall of King Hrothgar

Thane = a nobleman who is a warrior in service to a king or chief

Scyldings = The Danes

Hygelac's thane = Beowulf (Hygelac is King of Geats)