Course Information:

Instructor: C. Fee
Meeting Time: MW 2:10-3:25 PM
Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 311
Office: Breidenbaugh 406
Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00 AM, and by appointment
Office Phone: x6762
Home Phone: 528-4799 (Call before 10:00 PM)
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Course Description:

In Search of Beowulf: Fact, Fiction, & Fantasy

Students in this course explore ancient Denmark and Scandinavia with Beowulf—the archetypal Tough Guy—as guide, maneuvering a mystical landscape of trolls, dragons, and witches, plying icy waters with Grettir the Strong, tasting Fafnir’s blood with Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer, swearing blood-brotherhood with Boðvar Bjarki, Bear-Warrior, and oh, so much more! Placing the Anglo-Saxon epic in the context of ancient Germanic legend, folklore, and myth, this course helps students to understand the literary geography of the poem, as well as giving them the tools to navigate this topography by introducing them to the rudiments of manuscript study and the Old English language.

Beowulf is well-known to students of English literature everywhere and even the manuscript itself is now readily available through the Electronic Beowulf project. Less familiar, though, are the sites of the epic. The location of the great hall of Heorot has long been postulated to have been somewhere in the vicinity of Roskilde in Denmark. For generations no physical evidence seemed likely to corroborate such suppositions, but recent discoveries at Lejre have reinvigorated this investigation. Archaeological work now is allowing us to place the poem in a physical geography; this opens up more fully our understanding of the world which produced the poem. In addition to a fantastic literary work, therefore, we may now begin to understand Beowulf as an artifact in a historical setting.
It is expected that students in this course have read *Beowulf* before; whether or not this is the case, carefully (re-)reading the poem in its entirety in the first week of the course is likely to pay dividends. The emphasis in this course will be to ground the epic in the landscape(s), language(s), and literary tradition(s) of the original narrative(s), as well as within the context of contemporary criticism. A SparkNotes ® overview is likely to prove insufficient.

**Course Objectives:**

This course is designed to help students to attempt to ground the great epic of the Anglo-Saxons in ancient landscapes and literary traditions which help to enrich our knowledge of the mythic, folkloric, legendary, and historical background of the poem, as well as to engage our imaginations and to enliven our reading of the narrative. It is the purpose of this course to help students to gain an intimate knowledge of a poem which weaves together the narrative traditions and material cultures of early Scandinavia with those of Anglo-Saxon England. Moreover, as any traveler who wishes to be more than a tourist knows, some basic conversance—however limited—with the language of a country is every bit as vital as a working knowledge of its geographical features and anomalies. Therefore, while the bulk of the material we read for this course will be in Modern English, we will learn the rudiments of Old English, the language in which *Beowulf* was recorded, and students who so desire to do so will leave this course with a firm linguistic foundation for pursuing further study.

**Specific Learning Goals:**

Students thus will gain from this course a broad understanding of how language, literary history, and landscape may shape or be perceived to shape each other. Within the outline of such broad strokes students will develop some detailed knowledge of literary aspects of the poem *Beowulf*, linguistic attributes of the original language of its composition, its major Old Norse analogues, and sites and objects associated with the epic through archaeology. Thus this course is of special interest to those with an interest in medieval narratives, Germanic languages, the history of Scandinavia and the British Isles, the History of the English Language, or the confluence between literary traditions and material cultures.

Moreover, this course utilizes relevant critical readings concerning the poem *Beowulf* as a nexus of narrative traditions, history, and archaeology in tandem with the on-line *Medieval North Atlantic* multimedia project in order to ground each student’s experiences of the text within specific sites, structures, and artifacts which are informative and evocative. It is thus a primary goal of this course to challenge students to ask probing and perceptive questions concerning possible connections between literature and history, and between imagination and geography: How does the study of our ancient cultural forebears inform us about who they were, where they lived, and what was important to them? How does such information illuminate our own sense of identity, our own perceptions of physical space, and our own fundamental priorities?

Not incidentally, this course is designed to enrich and to be enriched by potential opportunities to travel to and study in situ any number of related sites, objects, and museums throughout Scandinavia and the British Isles. Very many Gettysburg College students study abroad, and a great many Americans travel to Britain; one implicit goal of this course is to challenge such potential travelers to see potential for intellectual growth in such opportunities.
Outcomes Assessment:

How will we know that students in this course have achieved the course objectives? Students will demonstrate their growing mastery of the material in a number of ways: Language skills will be developed and assessed through an ongoing series of exercises and quizzes; literary and historical knowledge will be cultivated and illustrated through the composition of daily queries; retention and synthesis of the major themes of the course will be facilitated and manifested in the successful completion of final projects and exams. A much more significant measure of the success of this course, however, would be evidence of student interest in and conversance with the ancient cultures of Northern Europe: This course will have been successful if students—perhaps long after the present semester— are empowered and inspired to choose to seek out and to attempt to contextualize related texts, objects, and locations. If it results in or enriches subsequent forays into epic literature, or later visits to Roskilde or Lejre or the British Museum or Sutton Hoo, this course will have been amply successful.

Specific Course Requirements:

Preparation & Participation:

Each student is expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable. One need not be a big talker to do well in this class (although it doesn't hurt!), but one does need to be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This is always a touchy and somewhat subjective area to evaluate, so do us both a favor by trying to put in your two cents!

Translation Exercises and/or Quizzes:

Translation exercises will be straightforward and will begin with baby steps; if you do them regularly, you will find it much, much easier to keep up! In general, you will be given some lines of text and asked to provide three things: 1) a word-for-word transliteration from Old English into Modern English; 2) a smooth, idiomatically correct translation into Modern English; 3) grammatical information (part of speech, function in the sentence, etc.) for some of the terms in that line of text. If you prepare your translation with any degree of conscientiousness, you won't find these exercises particularly difficult. It is not my intention to trick or trap you in any way; just make an honest attempt to do your translations!

If everyone in the class keeps up with the translation exercises, we may be able to dispense with the language quizzes. In any case, language quiz material comes directly from these exercises, so the wise student will go over these exercises until mastery is apparent! If you do the reading and complete the exercises (which are pretty easy to master, not very time consuming, and almost fun) you will do very well on the quizzes; if you don't, odds are you won't!

Daily Queries:

Take note of those issues which interest, intrigue, annoy, or confuse you, and email to me, at least two (2) hours before each class period, at least two (2) substantive questions pertaining to the material at hand for that day. One query should deal with the primary text(s), while the other should concern the
critical reading. I will keep these in a file until the end of the term; this portion of your grade will be
determined by the quantity and quality of the queries you generate over the course of the term in
response to the reading. As these exercises are meant to spur and extend class discussions, queries may
not be made up. If the majority of the class consistently asks intelligent and interesting questions about
the daily reading, there will be no need to institute a series of comprehension quizzes in their place.
Furthermore, the unexpected crops up in all our lives from time to time, rather like a threatening sail on
the horizon. For that reason, any student may fail to send in queries for any two class periods with no
penalty.

*Beowulf* Dramatic Monologue:

Gaining some intimacy with the original language of *Beowulf* is a key component of this course, and for
that reason a dramatic monologue is a necessary and traditional component of such a course; consider
all of your in-class reading to be practice. The non-traditional spin here is that you can record your
recitation (either audio or video is fine, but if you turn in an audio file, please include a still image of you
in the act of recitation!) and turn it in as an email attachment. This way you can be certain that you’ve
got your recording the way that you want it, with the added bonus that you spare yourself the misery of
your instructor’s Grendel-like piercing stare as you try to remember your lines! In any case, before the
end of the second-to-last week of class each student must recite aloud and record 10 or more lines from
any of the sections we have translated during the course of the term. You may choose any selection you
please, and you need not consult with me about it in advance, so long as the scene involved is grounded
in a specific location, such as Heorot or Grendel’s Mere.

*Group Video Project:*

Each student will participate in a Group Video Project, which will involve the re-enactment of a key
sequence from *Beowulf* or one of its primary analogues grounded in a specific location, such as the
Meadhall, Dragon’s Lair, Grave Mound, Water Troll’s Lair, etc. This video should be brief, probably no
more than 1-3 minutes, as the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity, and the intellectual
challenge is to envision how a sense of place permeates that given scene. Students may substitute a
photo-montage slideshow if they prefer, but in any case the video and photos must be originals taken by
the students themselves.

*Individual Research Project:*

This short paper should concern a key site from *Beowulf* or one of its primary analogues in tandem with
a multimedia presentation suitable for inclusion on the *Beowulf in Denmark* website. The emphasis
should be on rigor rather than bulk, and the focus should concern how a sense of place permeates some
aspect of the narrative. The articles required for this course and the bibliographies thereof give a good
indication of the types of critical readings which might well inform such an effort. The paper should be in
the range of 1500 words, and the presentation should contain about a half dozen slides or equivalent.

*Midterm Exam:*

The Midterm Exam will cover the primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, language quiz
material, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. In other words, all assigned
course material is fair game, including that which we have not discussed in class. The exam will be
divided into three sections: Short-answer identifications; passage identifications; and essay questions concerning major themes which we have discussed in class.

**Final Exam:**

The Final Exam also will cover the primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, language quiz material, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. It will have the same format as the Midterm Exam, and will be comprehensive.

**Course Evaluation:**

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation &amp; Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translation Exercises and/or Quizzes</td>
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<td>Daily Queries</td>
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<td><em>Beowulf</em> Dramatic Monologue</td>
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<td>Group Video Project</td>
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<td>Individual Research Project</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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*ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.*

**Course Texts:**


**Additional Course Readings:**


Niles, John D. “*Beowulf's* Great Hall.” *History Today* 56, no. 10 (October 2006): 40-44.


On-line Texts:

http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/resources/IOE/index.html (The Electronic Introduction to Old English)

Alternatively, a link to the full text Sweet’s Anglo-Saxon Primer is available from the course webpage.

On-line Exercises:

http://faculty.virginia.edu/OldEnglish/OEA/index.html

On-line Resources:

http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/MedievalNorthAtlantic/index970x650.html

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/young_explorers/childrens_online_tours/sutton_hoo/sutton_hoo.aspx

http://faculty.virginia.edu/OldEnglish/anthology/beowulf.html

http://www.pastperfect.org.uk/sites/yeavering/images/sparrowclip_c.html


http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june00/beowulf.html

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0503/resources_geo.html


http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/anglo_saxons/stories_and_pastimes/
Schedule of Classes:

Each week is organized around a discussion of a particular section of the primary text(s), related critical readings, relevant site visits to the Medieval North Atlantic, and translation and discussion of a relevant short passage of the original Old English text of Beowulf: For the first several weeks, simple linguistic exercises are combined with instructor-annotated passages from the original (see “Beowulf Language Exercises”); by the middle of the term we work up to simply assigning a short given passage from Jack (Beowulf: A Student Edition) for the week.

Start of Classes

Week 1: All Aboard the Way-Back Machine! Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England, Old English Language and Literature, the Age of Migrations, and the World of Beowulf. Primary Reading: Scyld Seafing’s Funeral Ship: Donoghue, ll. 1-63; Jack, ll. 1-11. Critical Reading: Campbell, Howe, Hughes. Old English Assignment: Complete the “Old and Modern English Vowels” Exercise set in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 1. Multimedia Tours: Sutton Hoo (BM) and Viking Ship Burials (MNA)

Week 2: Fixin’ Up the Medieval Man-Cave: The Great Hall & the Hero. Primary Reading: The Description of Heorot and the initial coming of Grendel: Donoghue, ll. 64-188; Jack, ll. 32-52. Critical Reading: Cramp, Niles (2006), Owen-Crocker. Old English Assignment: Complete the “Elements of the Sentence” and “Old English Case” (“Nominative Case”, “Accusative Case”, “Genitive Case”, and “Dative Case”) Exercise sets in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 2. Homework Quiz. Multimedia Tours: Heorot in Lejre (MNA); Yeavering Saxon Royal Palace (Pastperfect)

Week 3: A Hero Is More than a Sandwich: Introducing Beowulf, the Man, the Myth, the Legend! Primary Reading: The Hero Comes to Heorot and the Feast at Heorot: Donoghue, ll. 189-661; Jack, ll. 405-426a. Critical Reading: Hills, Hines, Webster. Old English Assignment: Complete the Old English “Pronouns”, “Nouns”, and “Adjectives” Exercise sets in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 3. Homework Quiz. Multimedia Tour: Viking ships at Roskilde (MNA)


Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 5. **Homework Quiz. Multimedia Tour:** Introduction to The Electronic Beowulf.

Week 6: Don’t Go Messin’ with Mama’s Little Monster! **Primary Reading:** The Revenge of Grendel’s Mother; Beowulf’s Descent into the Mere & Battle with Grendel’s Mother: Donoghue, ll. 1251-1650; Jack, ll. 1563-1590; Grettir in the Lair of the Water-Hag, *Grettir* Chapters 65-66 (pages 150-153); *GHK* (“Grettir’s Descent into the Water-Troll’s Cave” & “Beowulf’s Journey into Grendel’s Mere”—124-126). **Critical Reading:** Christensen (1991). **Multimedia Tour:** Grettir Sites (MNA).

Week 7: Midterm Exam (No Class Monday; Exam Wednesday)

Week 8: My Cup Runneth Over…: Cup-bearing, Gift-giving, Status, and Symbols on the Home Front in Heorot. **Primary Reading:** The Cup-bearing and Gift-giving Sequences: Donoghue, ll. 1651-2199; Jack, ll. 2016b-2046a. **Critical Reading:** Fee, *Beag & Beaghroden*.

Week 9: **Survivor,** Medieval-Style: Last One on the Island Buries all the Loot! **Primary Reading:** The Lone Survivor Passage: Donoghue, ll. 2200-2509; Jack, ll. 2247-2270a. **Critical Reading:** Frank (1999). **Multimedia Tour:** Burial Mounds (MNA).

Week 10: Fighting the Five-Alarm Fire: Dragon Slaying 101. **Primary Reading:** The Dragon’s Rage and Beowulf’s Final Battle: Donoghue, ll. 2510-2820; Jack, ll. 2631-2660; Sigurd Slays Fafnir, *Volsungs* Chapters 15-20 (pages 59-66). **Critical Reading:** *MM* (“The Norse Dragon-Slayer Hero”—pages 3-26) and *GHK* (“Sigurd the Dragon Slayer” & “Beowulf’s Battle with the Dragon”—pages 130-133). **Multimedia Tour:** Burial Mounds (MNA).

ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY AT THE CROLL LECTURE WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON OF WEEK 10; IF YOU HAVE A CONFLICT, CLEAR YOUR ABSENCE IN ADVANCE WITH THE INSTRUCTOR, WHO WILL ARRANGE AN ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU.

Week 11: Beowulf’s Barrow: The Hero’s Final Journey. **Primary Reading:** Beowulf’s Death and Funeral: Donoghue, ll. 2821-3182; Jack, ll. 3137-3168. **Critical Reading:** Osborn (Both essays). **Multimedia Tour:** Burial Mounds (MNA).

Week 12: **Group Video Projects Due on Monday before Thanksgiving:** Presentations in Class (Copies of Videos to PLA *in advance of class* to be posted on Course Webpage).

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Week 13: **Individual Projects Due:** Presentations in Class (Copies of Slideshows to PLA *in advance of class* to be posted on Course Webpage).

Week 14: In Search of *Beowulf*: Fact, Fiction, or Fantasy? Putting Together Some Pieces of the Puzzle. **Critical Reading:** Niles (2007). **Catch Up & Prepare for Final Exam.**

**Reading Days**

**Final Exams**
Hwæt se deofol is going on here!?! Gettin’ all Medieval on Beowulf....

Recap of Schedule of Weekly Old English Exercises & Quizzes:

Week 1: Complete the “Old and Modern English Vowels” Exercise set in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 1.

Week 2: Complete the “Elements of the Sentence” and “Old English Case” (“Nominative Case”, “Accusative Case”, “Genitive Case”, and “Dative Case”) Exercise sets in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 2. Homework Quiz.

Week 3: Complete the Old English “Pronouns”, “Nouns”, and “Adjectives” Exercise sets in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 3. Homework Quiz.

Week 4: Complete the Old English “Verbs” Exercise set in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 4.

Week 5: Complete the Old English “Adverbs & Conjunctions” and “Prepositions” Exercise sets in The Old English Aerobics Workout Room available through our course “Online Exercises” link; Beowulf Language Exercise 5. Homework Quiz.

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change