

Film Title: *Beowulf: A Hero with Hidden Depths* (2014)

Length of Film in Minutes: 31 minutes

Film Genre: Documentary/Lecture

Reviewer Name and Grade: Stefano T., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: May 29, 2022

Thomas Shippey, Ph.D., seeks to bring out the “hidden depths” of *Beowulf*, especially the rarely-mentioned weaknesses present in each character. He begins by brilliantly summarizing the epic, remaining true to the text, while also providing the audience with crucial historical and cultural context. As his narration progresses, one is bound to develop a close bond with the protagonists; he enthralls the audience, re-enacting scenes of this captivating story in simple, understandable language. Yet every now and then, we are exposed to Anglo-Saxon phrases from *Beowulf*, helping us gain a deeper understanding of the ancestor of English. Through recounting the tale, Professor Shippey sets a foundation for the lecture’s ultimate goal—to shed light on the underlying message of *Beowulf*.

Once the audience understands the plot, the lecture seeks to ground the tale in history, where it can be viewed together with notable historical events. Interestingly, although *Beowulf* is an Anglo-Saxon poem, the author makes no mention of Britain; it seems as if he only knew about Scandinavia. Furthermore, the characters and background events in *Beowulf* are mostly historical, including the legendary Hygelac. Delving deeper into manuscripts and history, Shippey uncovers accounts of Chochilaicus, who he believes was Hygelac with a Latinized name. This not only helps us get a better grasp of the legend, but it helps us understand the audience, for these events were common knowledge back then. Thus, the ancient listeners could focus on the deep, hidden meanings, rather than the complex plot that seems so outlandish to us.

Toward the end, Shippey explains that beneath the action and heroics, there is an impending doom on everyone: Hrothgar perishes and Denmark falls into chaos; Hygelac dies on a raid in Frisia, and Beowulf must ascend the throne; Beowulf himself falls at the hand of a dragon, and the Geatas are left in disarray. The moral is that *all* will eventually meet their fate, so a true hero will not fear being killed, but will fear not being remembered.

How did you find the film on Kanopy (by title search, subject search, casual browsing, etc.)?

I found the documentary/lecture by searching for *Beowulf*, since I could not find *La Chanson de Roland*.

Did the plot (for fictional movie) or presentation of information (for documentary) keep you interested?

Yes, since Doctor Shippey had an entertaining, lively, *and* serious tone, which kept me interested. Also, the information he presented was very intriguing.

Was the pace of the film too fast, too slow, or just right?

I think it was just right, since the topic itself is normally serious and slow-paced, but Shippey managed to keep it “moving forward.”

What grade level(s) is this film appropriate for?

I believe that anyone interested in medieval literature will find this fascinating, but it is certainly geared towards older students—perhaps 9/10th grade and above.

5 stars: I’m really glad I watched this film; it was awesome!

I loved the fun, semi-theatrical summary with the occasional O.E. phrases. I was grateful for the historical information he presented, especially the context and manuscripts that were mentioned.