**TRANSCRIPT**

**Gina Brandolino| *Beowulf* and *Alien***

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Hi! I'm Gina Brandolino, and I teach at the University of Michigan. I don't usually have a mohawk, but I'm making this video during the pandemic, and this is my pandemic haircut. This video highlights ideas for teaching the poem *Beowulf*—and I recommend the Heaney translation, which I’ve got a picture of on the slide—with the 1979 movie *Alien* and possibly also it's 1986 sequel, *Aliens.* You'll see that the similarities among these stories reveal that *Beowulf* isn't just a hoary old stanchion of English literature, but actually a text with many modern implications, and *Alien* and *Aliens* more than lowbrow horror movies, but compelling tales of monster invasion and heroism.

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Now, before I get much further, I just want to issue a content warning. I'm going to have descriptions and images of violence in these slides. There's going to be some blood and guts, so: be advised.

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Let's start with the similarities relating to where the monsters invade in these stories. In *Beowulf,* the monster Grendel attacks Hrothgar and his people at Heorot, which is the name of their mead hall. And it’s described in this passage that I have up as a place of splendor—a place where victory and success are on display, a place where wealth is on display. It's a place of community and kinship and shared meals and jokes and fun. And this is a place where the people in *Beowulf* feel at home, right?

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Now, in *Alien,* the titular alien invades in the cafeteria of a starship called Nostromo, and the starship itself is nothing fancy; it’s a commercial hauler, a freight vessel. And the cafeteria, especially compared to Heorot, is similarly nothing opulent, but it is still a place of community and kinship and jokes and fun. And you can sort of see that bearing itself out even in the still image of the characters around the table. So, in both cases, the heart of a safe space is where the monster invades—a place where the characters feel most themselves, feel least on guard.

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Now, to move on to the monster attacks: I have up now a description of Grendel's attack, one of Grendel's attacks. And you can see that the people in Heorot are at easel when Grendel attacks, they're sleeping or they're resting on their benches; they’re not in a position to expect this extremely violent attack that Grendel perpetrates on them. In *Alien,* the monster bursts out of one of the group sitting around that table, one of the characters called Kane. Talk about taking them by surprise, right? It actually—the monster emerges from one of them in an extremely gory scene (and here are some of the guts that I promised you). Now, if this little monster bursting out of Kane doesn't look scary, rest assured: it grows fast, and it grows into this formidable creature that you see here just seconds before it kills that character in front of it, who is called Lambert.

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Now, to turn to the heroes who defeat these monsters: Beowulf was the hero of heroes in his day; he was almost superhuman. And in the passage I have up, you can see him relate his plan to fight Grendel without weapons and without armor. And there’s nothing explicit about it in the poem, but in every visual depiction of the story that I've seen—every movie or every comic version I've seen—Beowulf doesn't fight Grendel simply without armor and without weapons; he also fights him naked or wearing nothing but his underpants. And he wins every time.

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Now, our hero in *Alien* is Ellen Ripley, who, by contrast with Beowulf, isn't a warrior, is not a soldier. She is third officer on the Nostromo, but then, the Nostromo is a working-class ship; it is not a military ship. And she is not superhuman, or close to superhuman, the way Beowulf is; in *Alien* and *Aliens,* she’s terrified lots of the time and often fights with ad hoc weapons and armor. And interestingly, at the end of *Alien,* she is also put in a position like Beowulf where she fights the monster in her skivvies—that's really the last maybe ten minutes of the film. So, I think there are lots of lots of interesting angles to consider regarding heroism in gender with these stories.

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One last thing I want to cover is how interesting it is that in both cases, when the first monster is defeated, the hero is forced to face the mother of that monster, who is much more formidable than the first monster. So, as you can see in the quotation I have up, Grendel's damn is described here, right? Grendel's mother—and she is so much scarier than Grendel and Beowulf has to face her. Ripley, for her part, defeats the alien in *Alien*, only to have to face the alien queen in *Aliens*—and you see this alien queen towering over Ripley in the image that I have up. This interesting connection is something that Paul Acker discusses in his great article, and I've provided information about that below this video.

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So, there you go: *Beowulf* paired with *Alien* and maybe even *Aliens*. There are so many more parallels in these stories that I didn't have time to get into, but hopefully this gives you a start. And I don't know if you can see what it is that's over my shoulder there, but I wouldn't mess with it. Thanks for watching!