

Beowulf

An adaptation

by
Gayanne Ramsden

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PUBLISHED BY

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This adaptation has kept alive the monsters and dragons that inhabited the original poem. However, it is told from the point of view of a Scop, a teller of tales, who had traveled and fought with Beowulf. The Scop is now a prisoner of the Saxons and while a prisoner tells this tale of courage to a priest who eventually agrees to preserve it by writing it down. The tale the Scop tells is substantially the same as the poem we know, however, the Christian ethic is removed and the tale is presented, as the author believes it originally was, with the gods of the Norsemen in their proper places.

Odin, Loki, and Thor are in a struggle for Beowulf's life. In a sort of Job-like wager Loki, the trickster, bets Thor, the thunder god, that Beowulf can be made into a coward. In order to do this he plays on Beowulf's fears, especially the fear of death. Thor and Beowulf emerge victorious in the end. It causes the viewer to reflect on the nature of bravery and how to overcome your fears.

This tale is action packed and full of adventure and would be a challenge to any group. High schools and colleges would find the subject matter particularly appealing. (See a synopsis of the original story at the end of the script.)

About 1 hour and 45 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(Play may be performed by ten players,
or parts may be divided and extras added.)*

ALFRIC / AESCHERE

SCOP

LOKI / GRENDEL / GRENDEL'S MOTHER / DRAGON

ODIN / HROTHGAR / REGIN

THOR / WATCHMAN / ALTI

BEOWULF

HUNDING / WIGLAF

HODBROD / UNFERTH / HALGA / HUNLAF / DRAGON

SIGRID

WEALTHTHEOW / GUNNAR / INGRID / DRAGON

EXTRAS as other Geats, Danes, Water Monsters, and the
Franks.

(See end of script for dictionary of names, places and terms.)

For rehearsal purposes the play has been divided into scenes. However, the action of the play should be continuous. 1 unit set.

The original staged reading of the play took place in the Playwrights-Directors-Actors Workshop at Brigham Young University in the spring of 1990. The first fully staged production was in February of 1991 at Spanish Fork (UT) High School.

SCENE ONE

(AT RISE: The stage is in darkness. Unseen by the audience a SCOP sits alone to the RC; he sits huddled in a coat of skins; it is winter's end and he is in prison. In back of the Scop is scaffolding with three layers. This represents the home of the gods, Valhalla and Hel. To the right and left are two ramps. There is a stairway next to the scaffolding. It is possible to climb down scaffolding by stairs and climb onto platform which is between scaffolding and ramp SL. From SR ALFRIC, a priest, enters with a candle. The stage starts to LIGHT up and both men are lighted. Alfric does not speak.)

SCOP: Am I so helpless and held in such little worth that I am sent a boy? I sang songs for kings, I fought with the best warriors in any land. *(Sitting CS.)*

ALFRIC: I am not a boy, I am a priest.

SCOP: I have no need of a priest.

ALFRIC: My name is Brother Alfric. What is yours?

SCOP: A man gives his name to his friends.

ALFRIC: You speak our language well; how is that?

SCOP: Underneath your robes, Saxon, your flesh and mine are brothers; it is not so long ago when our languages were one. Besides, I have been with the Jutes and they had a priest. I was in favor with the king and he let me keep the priest until I had mastered his language.

ALFRIC: What did you want to learn from a priest? Did he teach you of God? *(ALFRIC sits.)*

SCOP: He tried, but I wasn't interested; I have my own gods. They were once the gods of your people. *(Stands.)*

ALFRIC: There is only one true God.

SCOP: So you say.

ALFRIC: What did you want of this priest?

SCOP: I wanted wonders and knowledge. I had heard you Christians did miracles. I wanted the priest to perform for me a miracle. *(Stands SL.)*

ALFRIC: And did he?

SCOP: No, he was unable even to save himself.

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ALFRIC: What became of him?

SCOP: He died, and not as a brave man; he begged for mercy. Afterwards his skull was set in silver.

(ALFRIC backs away and starts to leave and the SCOP laughs.)

SCOP: *(Cont'd.)* I did not do the work; it was done by a ring maker. You need not be afraid.

ALFRIC: I am not afraid of you.

SCOP: You should be afraid; I could wring your neck now, and there would be no one to stop me; I am already a dead man, am I not? *(Pause.)* What is one more death?

ALFRIC: You were captured in a raiding party, in which you killed many good men, and tomorrow you will die. That is why tonight you must turn to God. Your soul can be saved.

SCOP: Is that why you are here? To save my soul? *(Stands, moves CS.)*

ALFRIC: Yes, the queen, who is a good woman, sent me. She begged the king for your immortal soul.

SCOP: Priest, I want nothing to do with your god. I will die as my people have died, believing in my gods, and faithful to my king. I am the last of the Geats.

ALFRIC: But there were many in your party that escaped.

SCOP: They were not my people; I was with the Jutes. My people are dead.

ALFRIC: How did they die? *(The SCOP does not answer.)* I would like to know.

SCOP: Would you? *(Suddenly he is intensely interested in Alfric. SCOP moves toward priest.)* Can you write, priest?

ALFRIC: Of course I can write.

SCOP: That is power, to write and give immortality to a man. Will you write of my people? Of my gods? I do not understand your god, priest, but he has given power to your people. Even now many of the Jutes, Danes, and Wylfings turn to him.

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SCOP: *(Cont'd.)* I think someday my gods will be forgotten for there is no one to speak of them, and my king will be lost to the world of men, and he was a great king.

ALFRIC: Write of pagan gods and a heathen king? No! I only write of holy things; I only write of the good deeds of men. *(Moves USR.)*

SCOP: But my king was good! And he will live on if you write of him. Last night I dreamed of my people, they cried out to me, and so they will speak to you. I have great powers, priest. I can show you my people. I can give form to my thoughts. Then you will write them and they will live forever. Look! *(FLASH of fire.)*

Walking into the world
Come the shapes of beings
Immortal and mortal
Unsubstantial, a flicker of thought
Imagination and memory
Come together into gods and men
They appear for us
See with the eyes of my power
There!

(SCOP pulls some powder from his pocket and throws it up to the top level. As it lands, SMOKE billows and three gods, ODIN, THOR, and LOKI, appear. Thor and Loki are playing at dice and Odin stands watching, drinking.)

ALFRIC: What evil have you done? This is black magic!
This is of the devil!

SCOP: No, this is the power of my people, my gods. Watch and they will speak of him.

ALFRIC: Who?

SCOP: My king, Beowulf.

ALFRIC: Who are they? *(Points to the gods.)*

SCOP: They are the gods. You shall hear them speak, they and others, and they will tell Beowulf's story. For he was a hero like no other, conquering man and monster with his strength.

End of Freeview

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