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Bloodthirsty Fiends: An Exploration of Puppet Fabrication and *Beowulf*

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Bloodthirsty Fiends: An Exploration of Puppet Fabrication and *Beowulf*

by

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Dedication

This thesis project is dedicated to every teacher, mentor, and colleague who took the time to teach me something new. I used every skill I've ever learned while working on "Bloodthirsty Fiends," and I am forever indebted to you.

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“Bloodthirsty Fiends” would not have been possible without the amazing talent and the hard work of my collaborators on this project. Thank you to my amazing production team: Liam Dolan-Henderson, Roxy Mojica, Jacob Caire, Renee Woolley, Laura Gonzalez, Kyle Cordova, Malyssa Quiles, Jazmyn Castillo, Nick Montopoli, Karl Mitze, Zachariah Matteson and Geoff Manyin. And thank you to the cast of “Bloodthirsty Fiends”: Miles Agee, Caroline Beagles, Sahil Bhutani, Ryan Cruz, Ben Dickerson, Audrey Grimes, Shannon Homan, Nick Ivons and Katie Pavlas.

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Abstract

Bloodthirsty Fiends: An Exploration of Puppet Fabrication and *Beowulf*

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This Graduate Thesis in Costume Technology is an exploration of *Beowulf* through puppet technology. Working with a playwright and a team of composers and designers, I mounted an original play, “Bloodthirsty Fiends,” as part of the Cohen New Works Festival at the University of Texas at Austin in April 2017.

For the production of “Bloodthirsty Fiends” I designed and constructed a twenty-two inch tall marionette of Beowulf, a four foot tall puppet of Grendel and a nine foot tall walk-around puppet of Grendel’s Mother. Additionally, I created shadow puppets using a laser cutter. By combining old construction methods, such as sculpting and molding, with new techniques, such as laser cutting, this project aimed to find a better way to create large and small scale puppets.

“Bloodthirsty Fiends” reimagined the character of Beowulf by questioning the motives and heroism behind his quest for glory. This was accomplished by creating a new script with original music composed and performed by the string quartet, Invoke. This new script developed the motivation behind Grendel’s Mother’s quest for vengeance, giving her agency and character unseen in the original text of *Beowulf*. In this play, all monsters

and men were presented as bloodthirsty fiends. This new interpretation of Beowulf culminated in a scarier and more sympathetic interpretation of Grendel's Mother, as portrayed by a larger-than-life walk-around puppet.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Project Overview	1
Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Developing a Story and Script	7
Cutting the Dragon	10
Beowulf as Unreliable Narrator	12
Giving Grendel's Mother Character and Form	15
Chapter 2: Incorporating Puppetry into <i>Beowulf</i>	17
Chapter 3: Beowulf Marionette	20
Design	20
Build	23
Rehearsal	30
Chapter 4: Grendel Puppet	33
Design	33
Rendering	35
Build	36
Rehearsal	43
Chapter 5: Grendel's Mother Puppet	46
Design	46
Rendering	47
Build	49
Rehearsal	56
Chapter 6: Shadow Puppets	58
Design	58
Build	58

Rehearsal.....	60
Chapter 7: Production Process.....	61
Script.....	63
Music.....	63
Scenery.....	64
Costumes.....	66
Lighting.....	71
Sound	71
Auditions.....	72
Fundraising	73
Chapter 8: Conclusion.....	74
Reflection.....	74
Appendix A "Bloodthirsty Fiends" Script	75
Appendix B Marketing Materials	87
Bibliography	90

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1:	"Just Add Water" at the 205 Prague Quadrennial.....	3
Illustration 2:	Author with Macnas Elephant Puppet	4
Illustration 3:	Phillip Huber Demonstrates with a Marionette	21
Illustration 4:	Alex Bishop Models Armor.....	22
Illustration 5:	Marionette Armor	23
Illustration 6:	Carving Beowulf Body	24
Illustration 7:	Beowulf Body	25
Illustration 8:	Roma Plastelina Sculpt of Beowulf's Head.....	26
Illustration 9:	Beowulf Head Silicone Mold and Resin Cast.....	27
Illustration 10:	Beowulf Armor Mock-up	28
Illustration 11:	Beowulf's Shoes	29
Illustration 12:	Completed Beowulf Marionette.....	30
Illustration 13:	Puppeteer Ben Dickerson with Beowulf Marionette	31
Illustration 14:	Miles Agee and Beowulf Marionette (Marionette photo by Chian-ann Lu)	32
Illustration 15:	Queen Victoria Puppet in "Just Add Water" at 2015 PQ	34
Illustration 16:	Timon in <i>The Lion King</i>	34
Illustration 17:	Grendel Maquette.....	35
Illustration 18:	Author Creating Scale Grendel Rendering	36
Illustration 19:	Grendel Skeleton.....	37
Illustration 20:	Grendel's Body.....	38
Illustration 21:	Grendel's Hands in Process.....	39
Illustration 22:	Grendel's Feet in Process	40

Illustration 23: Grendel's Face in Process	41
Illustration 24: Grendel's Eyes in Process	42
Illustration 25: Grendel's Horns in Process	43
Illustration 26: Grendel in Rehearsal.....	44
Illustration 27: Grendel in performance (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	45
Illustration 28: Grendel's Mother Maquette	48
Illustration 29: Grendel's Mother's Backpack.....	49
Illustration 30: Grendel's Mother's Breast in Process.....	50
Illustration 31: Grendel's Mother's Skin Texture in Process	51
Illustration 32: Grendel's Mother's Completed Body (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	52
Illustration 33: Grendel's Mother's Hand (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	53
Illustration 34: Grendel's Mother's Face in Process	54
Illustration 35: Miles Agee with Grendel's Mother's Head (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	55
Illustration 36: Grendel's Mother in Rehearsal.....	56
Illustration 37: Grendel's Mother in Performance (Photo by Lawrence Peart) ...	57
Illustration 38: Laser Cutting Heorot.....	59
Illustration 39: Shadow Puppets in Rehearsal	60
Illustration 40: Groundplan	65
Illustration 41: CNC Routing Shadow Puppet Screen.....	66
Illustration 42: Miles Agee as Beowulf (Photo by Chian-ann Lu).....	67
Illustration 43: Nick Ivons as Hrothgar (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	68
Illustration 44: Katie Pavlas as Freawaru (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	69
Illustration 45: Sahil Bhutani as Aeschere (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	69

Illustration 46: Shannon Homan as Ensemble (Photo by Chian-ann Lu).....	70
Illustration 47: Invoke in Costume (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)	70
Illustration 48: Audition with Paper Bunraku Puppet	73

Project Overview

This Graduate Thesis in Costume Technology is an exploration of puppet construction through *Beowulf*. I worked with a playwright, composer, and a team of designers to create an original play, “Bloodthirsty Fiends,” which was presented in April 2017 as part of the Cohen New Works Festival at the University of Texas at Austin. This new script reimaged *Beowulf* by explaining the motivation of Grendel’s Mother’s quest for vengeance while simultaneously questioning the motives of Beowulf. “Bloodthirsty Fiends” questioned what makes a hero heroic and a monster monstrous. This new interpretation of *Beowulf* culminated in a scarier and more sympathetic interpretation of Grendel’s Mother, as portrayed by a larger-than-life walk-around puppet.

For this production, I acted as Artistic Director, Production Manager, and Puppet Designer and Fabricator. In addition to creating a nine-foot tall walk-around puppet of Grendel’s Mother, I created a twenty-two inch tall marionette of Beowulf and a four foot tall puppet of Grendel. I also created shadow puppets using a laser cutter, based on the designs of the scenic designer. By combining old construction methods, such as sculpting and molding, with new techniques, such as laser cutting, this project aimed to combine old and new technology to create a play with puppets that incorporated both large and small scale puppets.

Introduction

As a Costume Technician, I strive to create fantastic costumes for the stage. Whether a pleated chiffon evening gown, an embroidered bonnet, or a suit of armor constructed with 300 hand-dyed lamellar plates, I am ready for any challenge. When selecting a project for my MFA Thesis in Costume Technology, I looked for a challenging, ambitious project that would combine the skills I have gained from my professional experience as well as my studies at the University of Texas at Austin. I was inspired by my academic and professional experience to explore the epic poem *Beowulf* through puppetry in an original production called “Bloodthirsty Fiends.”

Puppetry has interested me since I was a kid watching *The Muppet Show* on television. Although I immediately understood the hand and rod mechanism that brought these characters to life, this did not detract from my experience. Kermit and Miss Piggy were magical, even if there was a puppeteer controlling their every move. Allowing the audience to see the strings and the rods was a subtle wink towards all the behind-the-scenes work that goes into making a production happen. And I desperately wanted to be behind the scenes. Years later, my interest in puppetry was reignited when I witnessed an enormous elephant cross the stage in *The Lion King* on Broadway. Julie Taymor’s designs brought a very adult elegance to puppetry, which has inspired my work as a theatre maker.

While I have harbored an interest in puppets since childhood, I first became interested in incorporating them into my MFA thesis at the 2015 Prague Quadrennial of

Performance Design and Space¹. While at this conference, I saw awesome feats of costume construction both in PQ galleries and on the streets of Prague. I was particularly inspired by a performance of “Just Add Water” by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. The students performed on the streets with various aquatic-themed puppets, including a four-foot-long walrus and a fifteen-foot-tall underwater diver (“Just Add Water”). Each puppet was created using different techniques to suit the movement needs of the puppet, but they still looked unified. This work inspired me to create an ensemble of puppet characters, each using a different method of puppetry, but unified by aesthetic and story.



Illustration 1: “Just Add Water” at the 2015 Prague Quadrennial

In 2016, I volunteered with Macnas, a group from Galway, Ireland, who performed in the South by Southwest Conference and Music Festival in Austin, TX. Macnas performs with enormous puppets on the street with hundreds of performers (Dineen 168). When

¹ PQ

Macnas came to Austin, I worked with them over two days, helping to costume more than one hundred volunteer performers. While a whirlwind weekend of fittings and alterations was thrilling, the truly magical moment came when I watched the large puppets come to life on Sixth Street in downtown Austin. Both the construction and coordination of these creations was awe-inspiring and a challenge I aspired to tackle in my thesis project.



Illustration 2: Author with Macnas Elephant Puppet

Gathering inspiration from these two performances, I decided to incorporate both small and large-scale puppetry into my project. Before coming to UT, I had the opportunity to work for Feld Entertainment in the softgoods department of the Hagenbeck Wallace Prop and Scenery Shop in Palmetto, FL. There, I worked on both very small projects (such

as a chameleon for *Disney on Ice's* production of *Tangled*) and very large projects (such as a 17-foot-tall fire-breathing dragon for the 142nd *Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus*). Tackling varying sized puppets would give me a chance to use the skills I developed at Feld Entertainment, as well as the skills I had learned in Graduate School. By the time I completed this project, I used techniques from my coursework in Draping, Mask Making, Armor Fabrication, Millinery and Tailoring.

Once I decided to create both small and large puppets, I went looking for a story to tell with these multi-scaled characters. I was particularly interested in the aesthetic and technical challenge of creating scary puppets, so I went looking for a classic monster myth. I eventually was drawn to *Beowulf*, particularly the character of Grendel's Mother. As a literature student at New College of Florida, I explored the character of the murderous mother in my undergraduate thesis, "Killing Pearl: When Hester Chooses Infanticide-Confronting Motherhood and the Redemptive Fantasy of *The Scarlet Letter* in Suzan-Lori Parks' *The Red Letter Plays*." There is overlap in the way I approach these two murderous mothers, Hester Prynne in *The Red Letter Plays* and Grendel's Mother in "Bloodthirsty Fiends." But while my undergraduate thesis sought to explore possible explanations for infanticide, this project explores the motives of the vengeful mother. I wanted to create a new vision of Grendel's Mother for this new version of *Beowulf*, as a scary, but sympathetic, nine-foot-tall walk-around puppet.

This project was a culmination of my professional and academic background, fused with my love of puppetry. As a Costume Technician, I created fantastic, magical puppets for the stage. As a literature scholar, I researched and looked critically at the epic poem

Beowulf. As a theatre artist, I strove to create monsters that would startle and unhinge the audience's expectations of a puppet show. This project brought together my skills and passion to create a play called "Bloodthirsty Fiends," produced as part of the 2017 Cohen New Works Festival². Using shadow puppets, a marionette, a four-foot puppet and a nine-foot walk-around, "Bloodthirsty Fiends" told a frightening story of revenge.

² NWF

Chapter 1: Developing a Story and Script

When I decided to stage a production of *Beowulf* with puppets, I knew I would need help. I recruited an incredible team of collaborators: Playwright, Director, Composers, Musicians, Set Designer, Set Design Assistant, Costume Designer, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer, and Stage Manager.³ Of these collaborators, my work with an undergraduate playwright, Liam Dolan-Henderson, proved most challenging and rewarding. This collaborative process is documented in this chapter.

Liam and I connected through a website organized by the NWF Executive Committee for students seeking collaborators. I was initially looking for a playwright who could act as an “arranger,” organizing the text of the epic poem, *Beowulf*, into a script rather than creating any new text or story. But, in Liam I found an enthusiastic collaborator with his own ideas for the project. I met with him and described my vision for a new version of *Beowulf*, presented with puppets and focusing on Grendel’s Mother as sympathetic avenger. I found that while Liam understood and agreed with this interpretation, he also brought a lot of ideas to the work that I had not considered.

Liam and I benefited from having very different research techniques. Due to my background studying literature, I aimed to research a subject in depth, relying heavily on the text of *Beowulf* and secondary sources. Liam explored the work in breadth, looking at

³ Playwright/Director- Liam Dolan-Henderson, Composers/ Musicians- Invoke, Set Designer- Roxy Mojica, Set Design Assistant- Jacob Caire, Costume Designer- Renee Woolley, Lighting Designer- Kyle Cordova, Sound Designer- Malyssa Quiles, Stage Manager- Jazmyn Castillo

related primary sources in order to pull other ideas into our new adaptation. Liam drew particular inspiration from *The Poetic Edda*, using Norse Mythology to interpret the content and context of *Beowulf*. We found that our research styles were complimentary rather than conflicting, and we had success bringing all these ideas to the script and story for “Bloodthirsty Fiends.”

Once Liam and I had discussed our preliminary ideas and our intended research strategy, we parted ways to complete our own dramaturgy. My goal at this step was to dive into the research, reading multiple translations and as many secondary sources as I could get my hands on. I quickly discovered too much scholarship on *Beowulf* to feasibly incorporate into this project. I also found that this plethora of research was obscuring my understanding of *Beowulf* as a tale of adventure. In his introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*, Seamus Heaney described this problem, suffered by “generations of undergraduates.” He worries that “...academic study of the poem was often just a matter of construing the meaning, getting a grip on the grammar and vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon, and being able to recognize, translate, and comment upon random extracts which were presented in the examinations” (Heaney x). Like these scholars, I found myself stuck in the research, “preoccupied with fixing the exact time and place of the poem’s composition, paying minute attention to linguistic, stylistic, and scribal details” (Heaney x). I forced myself to take a step back and narrow my scope of research so I could focus on telling this story in a way that was new and insightful, but also relevant to a contemporary audience. Heaney’s insightful introduction to his translation of *Beowulf* is followed by a gritty, exciting translation of the original text. Though we considered many translations, including

J.R.R. Tolkien, Burton Raffel, Francis Gummere and John Lesslie Hall, Liam and I ultimately chose to use Heaney's translation as our primary text.

A question asked by many *Beowulf* scholars is whether the epic poem condemns or condones violence. In the article "The Hero and the Theme," George Clark sees Beowulf's journey for vengeance and glory as admirable, "The poem opens with an illustration and assertion that success is achieved only by praiseworthy deeds and closes commending the hero's pursuit of fame" (Bjork & Niles 271). In "Beowulf, Truth, and Meaning" John D. Niles describes neotraditionalist scholars who "tend to see the poem's melancholy mood as part of a meditation on a world that is by its nature subject to violence, mutability, and death" (8). Ultimately, Niles sees a balance in the way the poet looks at the "heroic past."

For the Beowulf poet, the heroic past was both a grand and a terrible world....

Those were the days when mighty kings and heroes dwelling in the exotic lands of the Northeast vied with one another for fame, lavishing hospitality on one another, pursuing feuds to the utmost, and occasionally venturing their strength and courage in combat against giants and demonic monsters, watched over by the eyes of God.

If the poet encourages the members of the audience to look upon the heroic past with awe, he also gives them reason to be thankful that they were not part of it.

(Bjork & Niles 8)

Niles believed that while the poet made this "historic past" fantastic, he did not intend to make this past enviable.

Liam and I agreed that, the poet's intention aside, a modern reader might question the role of violence and revenge in this poem. We saw the parallels between Beowulf and

Grendel's Mother's quest for vengeance and wondered what made Beowulf a hero and Grendel's Mother a monster. We chose to condemn this relentless quest of vengeance in our version of *Beowulf* by questioning the validity of Beowulf's defeat of Grendel's Mother. While Beowulf's battle with Grendel's Mother is seen as an extension of his battle with Grendel in the epic poem, we made this battle central to our story. We did this by eliminating Beowulf's fight with the dragon, questioning Beowulf's reliability as a storyteller and by giving Grendel's Mother a background story.

Cutting the Dragon

Beowulf is an epic poem that documents the titular character's battle and defeat of three monsters: Grendel, Grendel's Mother and the dragon. As a young man, Beowulf ventures across the sea to rescue Heorot from the first monster, Grendel. While celebrating the defeat, Heorot is attacked once again, but by Grendel's Mother, who Beowulf also defeats. After travelling home, many years pass and Beowulf's kingdom is attacked by the third monster, the dragon, who Beowulf fights to the death. While there are many differences between these three battles, the dragon battle is most out of place in our story. The events of that battle are separated by time and theme and exist in a different chapter of Beowulf's life. For this reason, I chose to not include the dragon in the script for "Bloodthirsty Fiends."

The tale of *Beowulf* begins with the construction of the great mead hall, Heorot (Heaney 7). While Heorot is full of festive celebrators, it is attacked by the fearsome monster, Grendel (9). Grendel's monstrosity is clear, as he is described as a "descendent

of Cain” (Bjork & Niles 286). The hall sits empty for twelve years, as King Hrothgar’s citizens live in fear of the monster (Heaney 11). Beowulf sails to the kingdom, where this “idealized champion of the right” battles the “descendent of Cain” (Bjork & Niles 286). Beowulf battles the monster heroically, refusing to bring a weapon or armor into their fight (Heaney 47). He defeats Grendel in order to protect Heorot and it “seems an instance of poetic justice, proof that God’s benevolent plan embraces mankind and stands between Grendel and his monstrous desires” (Bjork & Niles 286). Their fight is pre-ordained and the defeat is definitive.

While Hrothgar’s kingdom celebrates the defeat of Grendel, Grendel’s Mother charges the hall (Heaney 87). While Grendel’s approach is slow and described in detail, his mother approaches abruptly, catching both the reader and the residents of Heorot off-guard (Bjork & Niles 287). She kidnaps and ultimately kills Beowulf’s comrade Aeschere as revenge for her son’s murder (Heaney 91). Beowulf then follows Grendel’s Mother to her home in the mere, in order to avenge the murder of Aeschere (101). Both Beowulf and Grendel’s Mother take up arms in order to avenge a fallen comrade, and their quests can be justified.

Many years pass and a dragon attacks Beowulf’s kingdom. While Beowulf fights Grendel and Grendel’s Mother for revenge, he fights the dragon in order to protect his home. Once the dragon is defeated, Beowulf dies a heroic death and is given a hero’s burial at sea (Heaney 189). By removing this final battle with the dragon, “Bloodthirsty Fiends” robs Beowulf of his heroic death. This section of *Beowulf* is from a different chapter in Beowulf’s life. At this point in his life, Beowulf has perspective and wisdom. We wanted

to focus on Beowulf in his youth, when he would pick up arms and cross the sea in order to defeat another kingdom's foe. Through Beowulf's fights with Grendel and Grendel's mother, we can analyze what makes a monster monstrous and a hero heroic.

Beowulf as Unreliable Narrator

Beowulf is a story about storytellers. Dana Oswald's article "'Wigge under Wætere': Beowulf's Revision of the Fight with Grendel's Mother" notes that "*Beowulf* is as much a narrative about storytelling as it is about monsters. It is deeply concerned with the collective cultural knowledge, passed on by scop, kings, and heroes alike" (63). Our play is set in Heorot, where warriors gather together to tell stories of their victories. Whereas *Beowulf* is told exclusively from the perspective of the human heroes, in "Bloodthirsty Fiends", the human celebration is interrupted by Grendel's Mother, who breaks in and demands to tell her story. *Beowulf* robs Grendel's Mother of her name, voice and eventually, her head (80). Our play put Grendel's Mother's story at the forefront.

Beowulf opens with the tale of Hrothgar's ancestors and "Bloodthirsty Fiends" opened with Hrothgar retelling the tale of the founding of the world through shadow puppets. He then tells the tale of Grendel's attack on Heorot and Beowulf's arrival. At Beowulf's arrival, we shift to a story told with three dimensional puppets. Beowulf enters as a marionette, and Grendel appears as a four foot tall puppet. An actor portraying Beowulf narrates his battle as the puppets act it out in this play-within-a-play. Beowulf tells a confident, almost arrogant tale of defeat when he is interrupted by Grendel's Mother. She enters, bigger and more difficult to defeat than anyone has described. She demands to tell

her story, just as our hero has told his. Beowulf defeats her nonetheless, and in our story, he lies about it to his comrades. He lets them believe that he defeated her in a fair fight, but he really beheads her when her back is turned. Determined to cover up his cowardice, he kills his comrade Aeschere, blaming Grendel's Mother for the murder.

Questioning Beowulf's reliability is significant, because, his ability to tell stories is part of what makes him a hero. The character of Beowulf is a hero in this poem not only because he can defeat monsters, but because he is famously good at retelling these tales of victory (Oswald 70). Oswald argues that Beowulf is "as concerned with the retellings of the fights he undertakes in Denmark as with the actual fight themselves" (63). Beowulf's habit of storytelling is so pervasive, that his dialogue is consistently presentational (Bjork & Niles 276). He never speaks to the audience directly, but instead addresses the audience of the poem. "The poem teases us with the sense that its hero is a real person, though we know him almost entirely from the outside" (275). Even when he is killed by the dragon, his final words have an audience in his friend Wiglaf, and this is the only moment in which he speaks to only one person, rather than an audience of spectators (276). Beowulf's version of *Beowulf* is important and his reliability is crucial to his role as hero.

This leads Oswald to question Beowulf's trustworthiness when he describes his defeat of Grendel's Mother. "Although he leaves unaltered the major strokes of his fight with Grendel, he suppresses certain details and exaggerated others in telling about his unwitnessed battle with Grendel's mother" (Oswald 63). While Beowulf's fight with Grendel has many witnesses, his fight with Grendel's Mother happens under the mere without spectators (64). While Beowulf presents Grendel's arm as trophy and evidence of

their fight, Beowulf presents no evidence of his battle with Grendel's Mother (73). Oswald suggests that Beowulf "omits details, which he might not wish to revisit because of the strange and erotic tension he experiences in his fight with Grendel's mother" (64). Oswald further suggests that Beowulf lies about his defeat of Grendel's Mother because he wishes to conceal that he was almost bested by a woman (71).

"Bloodthirsty Fiends" questions Beowulf's reliability as narrator by changing the ending in our play. Grendel's Mother is given the chance to describe her side of the story and justify her revenge quest. Just as Beowulf has given her permission to leave, he murders her as her back is turned. Our Beowulf turns and murders his friend and comrade Aeschere, so that there can be no witnesses to his cowardice. In "Bloodthirsty Fiends," this final act forces the audience to question the way reliability with which these men tell their tales. This also robs Grendel's Mother of her story, similar to the way she is silenced in the epic poem when Beowulf beheads her.

Beowulf forecloses her ability to speak- an ability already hindered by her status as a woman and as a monster- by slicing off her head, and he silences her yet again when he leaves her head at the bottom of the mere, replaced as a sign above ground by her son's head. (Oswald 80)

While Grendel's Mother loses her voice and her head in both *Beowulf* and "Bloodthirsty Fiends," our audience hears her story before she is silenced forever.

Giving Grendel's Mother Character and Form

My interest in Grendel's Mother is an extension of my undergraduate research on Suzan-Lori Parks's *Red Letter Plays*. In my research, I found a sympathetic tale of the "murderous mother." Parks incorporated the infanticide found in *Beloved* into a new vision of Hester Prynne, a heroine of American Literature. She imagined a world in which our heroine could murder her own child, upending the narrative we apply to the murderous mother.

While the murderous mother is often portrayed as "monstrous," in *Beowulf* Grendel's Mother is a literal monster. She avenges Grendel the same way Beowulf avenges his comrades, but she isn't given enough character development to be sympathetic, as Parks does with Hester Prynne. My goal for this project was to give Grendel's Mother background and form. By giving her both a voice and a body in "Bloodthirsty Fiends," I created a developed and formidable character that Beowulf and the audience could not easily dismiss.

Grendel's Mother is underrepresented in multiple ways in *Beowulf*. One example of this is that she lacks her own name and is instead defined by her role as mother, "...she is 'Grendel's Modor'-an identity defined, first, by her connection to her more textually-developed son, and, secondly, by her gender" (Burdorff 91-92). She is also unrepresented in word count, her section being half as long as Grendel's or the dragon's (99).

Kevin Kiernan's article, "Grendel's Heroic Mother" argues that Grendel's Mother's quest for revenge is heroic, except that she "was a monster, poor stock for heroism" (Kiernan 15). Other than her inherent monstrosity, having "monstrous pedigree

and the ugly fact that she gave birth to Grendel,” she has the essential traits of a Germanic heroine (16). There is no evidence of previous attacks by Grendel’s Mother, and unlike her son, she only ventures out of her mere on a quest for vengeance (16). Like Hrothgar, she even has her own court, although it is under the mere (17). While Grendel attacks with animalistic violence, Grendel’s Mother wields the weapons of a warrior (19). When Beowulf fights her, they “fight as fellow-warriors, both scoring their best points with conventional weapons” (20). Even Grendel’s Mother’s most grotesque act, leaving Aeschere’s head for Beowulf to discover, is equivalent to Beowulf adorning Heorot with her son’s severed arm (26-27). “In heroic terms, her single attack on Heorot had the best of motives, vengeance for the death of her kinsmen Grendel...” (25).

Liam and I decided that we wanted to give Grendel’s Mother a chance to tell her side of the story, garnering her sympathy from the audience. In “Bloodthirsty Fiends,” Grendel’s Mother speaks with Beowulf, giving her quest for revenge the same weight as a human’s. But, at the same time, we wanted her to remain visibly monstrous, as realized by a nine foot tall puppet. This incites the audience to imagine a sympathetic monster in Grendel’s Mother.

Chapter 2: Incorporating Puppetry into *Beowulf*

Puppetry has an important role in our theatrical and social culture. In the United States, one example is Bread and Puppet Theater, who have used puppetry to engage in the civil rights struggle since the 1960s (Blumenthal 177). Founder of Bread and Puppet, Peter Schumann “mingled puppets and live actors, some of them masked, and used a rough papier-mâché and tempura-on-bedsheets style that has become his signature” (177). Schumann and his company regularly mounted antiwar demonstrations with the use of puppets in Washington D.C. and New York City (177). “Using masked and unmasked actors, three-dimensional and two-dimensional puppets ranging from small to gigantic, and anthropomorphized objects, it [Bread and Puppet Theater] stages plays, parades, and circuses, focusing on issues of ecology and justice” (177-180).

Puppetry invokes a sense of magic and wonder, and *Beowulf* offered the ideal opportunity to bring puppets to life. Although I initially feared that inserting puppets into a classic work of literature would feel forced, I quickly realized that the storytelling style of *Beowulf* lent itself to well to puppetry. While a staged production of *Beowulf* would usually require costumes or projection to portray its monsters, puppetry allowed me to bring the monsters to life in three dimensions and in whatever scale I desired, big or small. John Grigsby argues that to the original readers of *Beowulf*, “the orcs and elves it mentions were no fairytale creatures but actual entities which everyone present would have both believed in and feared” (Grigsby 102). Rather than being fictional creatures, “Grendel and his mother were dim memories of ancient pagan divinities” (102). Just as these monsters would have been real to early audiences of the epic poem, they were fully realized in our

production of “Bloodthirsty Fiends.” As Seamus Heaney intended with his translation of *Beowulf*, we hoped to “avoid... the slightly cardboard effect which the word “monster” tends to introduce...” (Heaney xiii).

As stated in the first chapter, one of the goals of this project was to give the monsters form, particularly Grendel’s Mother. While Grendel’s Mother is mostly undescribed in *Beowulf*, our Grendel’s Mother was unforgettable, like a towering puppet figure in a Bread and Puppet rally. “It didn’t take long for us to realize that our highly visible images [puppets] were incredibly effective at drawing media attention to whatever use we addressed. After their first foray into the public the puppets were featured in every local paper” (Ruby 13)! While *Beowulf* invites the audience to imagine Grendel, his mother and a dragon, our production fully realized these monsters. Much like a giant puppet in a rally for social change, our monsters were unforgettable.

“Bloodthirsty Fiends” was told with multiple kinds of puppets, with different aesthetic and structural properties. The production began with Hrothgar telling the history of the world using shadow puppets. Then, Beowulf enters in marionette form to rescue Heorot from Grendel. Grendel enters as a four foot tall partial-wearable hand and rod puppet. Just as the crowd rejoices in the murder of Grendel, Grendel’s Mother enters the hall, not as a puppet representation of a monster in this play-within-a-play, but as a literal monster.

The following chapters of this paper will discuss the design and fabrication process of these puppets. Many of these techniques were borrowed from my background as a costume technician in areas of draping, mask making, armor fabrication, etc. But, much of

this was based on online tutorials from other puppet fabricators. This involved trial and error, which is a method encouraged by a number of sources including A.R. Philpott in his book *Modern Puppetry*: “Nobody begins as an expert at making anything-and how soon you become an expert at any job depends on how you tackle it” (Philpott 16). As I began constructing the puppets of “Bloodthirsty Fiends,” I knew I wasn’t an expert in puppet fabrication. By the time the puppets were ready for opening night, I learned that with a little research and a lot of trial and error, I could construct anything.

Chapter 3: Beowulf Marionette

In fall 2016, Professor James Glavan taught a course called Puppet Design and Fabrication, which was my first education in puppet-making. In this class, students learned how to construct a marionette and a Muppet-style hand and rod puppet. I used the marionette section of this class to construct a Beowulf marionette.

Although I chose to make Beowulf a marionette in order to start work on my thesis while fulfilling a course requirement, the end result worked well in “Bloodthirsty Fiends”. The marionette was very attractive, although cumbersome, which suited my interpretation of Beowulf’s character. He arrives onstage, looking aesthetically impressive, but his functionality doesn’t quite live up to the hype. The marionette was also small, measuring twenty-two inches. This made his easy defeat of Grendel both incredible and hard to believe, causing the audience to doubt Beowulf’s version of the battle.

Design

As part of the course in puppetry, marionette artist Phillip Huber was brought in as a guest lecturer and presented some of his marionettes. He was generous enough to describe his process in detail, including how to carve, assemble and operate the body. The design of Beowulf’s body is based on Huber’s style and I borrowed largely from his method for jointing and stringing a marionette.



Illustration 3: Phillip Huber Demonstrates with a Marionette

I began by rendering the marionette in full-scale front and profile. Students were provided with a standard body shape, based on the designs of Phillip Huber. The driving force of Beowulf's costume was determined by his suit of armor. In spring 2015, I created a suit of leather armor for an Armor Fabrication class. The armor fit perfectly into the time period and aesthetic of this project, so I decided to have the actor playing Beowulf wear it, with the marionette wearing a matching costume.



Illustration 4: Alex Bishop Models Armor

The first incarnation of the armor featured dyed lamellar plates and hand-tooled pauldrons decorated with appliqué cut-outs. I incorporated a scaled-down version of the appliqué on the marionette armor, but the armor was too small to feature lamellar plates. I instead selected a segmentata-style chest plate, which allowed more mobility for the marionette⁴. Based on this costume design and Phillip Huber's marionette stylings, I created a scale rendering of the marionette.

⁴ See Illustration 5.



Illustration 5: Marionette Armor

Build

Once the marionette was designed and rendered, I began creating Beowulf's body. I began by taking pattern pieces for each body part and laminating them to wood blocks with glue. Then, using this pattern as a guide, I used a band saw and a belt grinder to carve the body.⁵

⁵ See Illustration 6.



Illustration 6: Carving Beowulf Body

The body was jointed using multiple techniques. Knees and ankles were jointed using metal plates with dowels used as pivot points. The elbows were attached with a piece of elastic, imbedded in slits in the wood. Shoulders were attached with a small fish-eye swivel, with a peg holding an end in the body and an end in the arm. The torso was connected with strings, with large horizontal cut outs in the torso which allowed for movement. The head was on a dowel, suspended in a neck hole for maximum flexibility.⁶

⁶ See Illustration 7.



Illustration 7: Beowulf Body

Once the body was assembled, I began sculpting Beowulf's head face using Roma Plastelina.⁷ I started with a Styrofoam egg covered in aluminum foil, and then slowly added plastelina to build up the head shape. When I started to sculpt the face, I found myself going back to features that were too human-like and with some guidance from Professor Glavan, I found some research to bring me back to a more geometric shape which better matched the aesthetic of my overall design.

⁷ See Illustration 8.



Illustration 8: Roma Plastelina Sculpt of Beowulf's Head

Once I finished sculpting, I coated the plastelina in Krylon Crystal Clear Acrylic Coating to prepare it for creating a mold. I made a box out of wood to form a container for the mold. I then sealed it with water-based clay and inserted the plastelina clay sculpt. I used Smooth-On OOMOO 30 Silicone Rubber to pour a mold.⁸ Once the mold had cured, I used Smooth-On Smooth Cast 300 Liquid Plastic to create a “slush cast”. This was done by mixing equal parts of the 2-part resin formula, then pouring it into the mold while slowly turning the mold so that the inside was coated in an even layer. Once the resin began to cure, it changed its physical character from a liquid to a semi solid which allowed me to

⁸ See Illustration 9.

set it aside to finish curing. After a few hours, I removed the cast and sanded it in preparation for painting.



Illustration 9: Beowulf Head Silicone Mold and Resin Cast

The armor for the marionette was made out of leather. I first created a mock-up of the armor out of chipboard, with brads simulating the rivets that would eventually hold the leather armor together.⁹ I fitted the armor mock-up on the puppet, made some alterations and then proceeded to cut the armor out of leather. I then created a smaller version of the leather appliqué and sewed it onto the green pauldrons. Many of the design elements of the full-size armor had to be discarded in this scale, including a portion of the pauldrons, the

⁹ See Illustration 10.

leather tooling on the pauldrons, and the suede trim. The vambraces also needed to be simplified, so I went with a flat design, rather than woven.



Illustration 10: Beowulf Armor Mock-up

Hands and feet were created with SculptWood, a moldable epoxy putty used to patch holes in wood. For the hands, I created a wire frame and then covered it in the SculptWood. I allowed the resin to cure for about fifteen minutes so it would be rigid enough to shape onto the frame. After 24 hours, the product had cured enough for me to carve the hand details using a Dremel Rotary Tool. The shoes were hand-sewn out of suede and filled with SculptWood to create feet.



Illustration 11: Beowulf's Shoes

Once the body was assembled and clothed, I created a helmet and axe for the marionette. I created a helmet and shield from Warbla, a type of thermoplastic. For each, I sculpted a scale replica of my design using water-based clay. I then shaped the Warbla over the molds using dry heat from a heat gun. I then bound the edges of the shield and helmet in millinery wire and primed them with Jaxsan 600/601 coating, an acrylic latex coating used for waterproofing roofs. The axe handle was made with a $\frac{3}{4}$ " dowel and the axe blade was carved from a piece of wood.

Now our hero was constructed, clothed, and armed, I needed to string him and make him a marionette. A handle was created using Phillip Huber's design. It was made out of plywood, carved with a jigsaw. A rig was created to hold the handle in place while I began stringing the marionette with fishing line, starting with his head and moving on to the rest of the body. Although we were presented with a diagram of the string placement, the exact

length and points of connection of the strings was based on trial and error and I anticipated having to change them once a puppeteer began handling it in rehearsal.



Illustration 12: Completed Beowulf Marionette

Rehearsal

Our puppetry class yielded very attractive marionettes, but operating them was a whole different story. Once in rehearsal, I worked with the puppeteer, Ben Dickerson, to move, shorten, and lengthen strings so he could accomplish the needed movement.¹⁰ During this process, we decided not to use the shield, as it kept getting tangled in the

¹⁰ See Illustration 13.

marionette strings. In the text of *Beowulf* and in the script for “Bloodthirsty Fiends,” Beowulf disarms before battling Grendel. This meant the marionette needed to drop the axe while onstage. A small string was secured to the marionette’s hand between the thumb and forefinger to hold the axe in place. When the time came to drop the axe, the puppeteer lifted and dropped the marionette’s arms, shaking the axe loose.



Illustration 13: Puppeteer Ben Dickerson with Beowulf Marionette

I also needed to make cosmetic changes to the Beowulf marionette for this production. The marionette was designed and painted before casting, and we ended up casting an African-American actor to play Beowulf. In order for the puppeteer to continue working with the marionette in rehearsal, I created a second head for Beowulf and painted

it to match the actor playing Beowulf, Miles Agee. Before we went into tech, I swapped out the plastic heads.



Illustration 14: Miles Agee and Beowulf Marionette

(Marionette photo by Chian-ann Lu)

Chapter 4: Grendel Puppet

In much of the scholarship discussing the monsters of *Beowulf*, Grendel receives the most attention. In the text of *Beowulf*, Grendel is described in detail. Because I wanted to put more emphasis on Grendel's Mother in this production, Grendel's physical representation is given less presence. The Beowulf marionette and the Grendel puppet are representational puppets, created to recount the tale of the battle in the play-within-a-play.

The Grendel puppet functions as Beowulf's interpretation of the monster. The only sign of Grendel's actual appearance is suggested by his severed arm, presented at the beginning of the play as a trophy. This arm is much bigger than the Grendel puppet, suggesting the inaccuracy of the puppet representation before the audience. And while the audience knows that the puppet portrayal is inaccurate, they never learn what Grendel really looks like. This reverses the usual representation of Grendel's Mother, who is perceived as only an extension of Grendel. In our play, it is Grendel's appearance that is implied by his mother's appearance.

Design

The structure of the Grendel puppet was inspired by a featured puppet in "Just Add Water" by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.



Illustration 15: Queen Victoria Puppet in “Just Add Water” at 2015 PQ

The puppet is modeled after Queen Victoria. Even though her shape is rudimentary, this stylized version of Queen Victoria had great personality and movement. Also, I loved that the puppeteer was plainly visible, and yet this only enhanced the audience experience. Further research revealed a similar design in Timon in *The Lion King*.



Illustration 16: Timon in *The Lion King* (Amendola 93)

The Grendel puppet was mounted to the puppeteer's waist. The puppet's feet were attached to bars that extended from the puppeteer's shoes, so that the feet are operated by the puppeteer's steps. The arms were operated by rods held by the actor, connected to the puppet's elbows. The puppet's head was then connected to the actor's head via rods running from the puppet's temples to a helmet worn by the actor. This allowed the actor to move the puppet's head. This design was easily operated by a beginner puppeteer.

Rendering

While I began the Beowulf marionette by created a scale rendering, I needed to configure the proportions of the Grendel puppet around a puppeteer. So, I started by sculpting a maquette of the puppet around around a six inch figure drawing model. I began by creating a wire frame for the Grendel body and then I mounted it and the figure drawing model to a wooden board. I then built up Grendel's body with aluminum foil and plastelina.



Illustration 17: Grendel Maquette

Once I was satisfied with my sculpt, I took front and profile pictures in front of a black backdrop. I then mounted paper on a wall, marking the height of the puppeteer. I was then able to project photographs onto the paper, and trace them in full scale to create a rendering of Grendel from the front and side.



Illustration 18: Author Creating Scale Grendel Rendering

Build

Now that I had a rendering of Grendel, I began making his body. My first step was to create a skeleton out of PVC in order to form his joints- shoulder, elbow, hip, and knee. When creating this skeleton, I looked at research of animals, particularly wolves and dinosaurs when establishing the proportions of the legs and ankles. Once this skeleton was constructed, I mounted it onto a simple harness to test out its flexibility. This initial skeleton worked as I had expected, so I moved on to create a body.



Illustration 19: Grendel Skeleton

The second section of Professor Glavan’s puppetry class covered “Muppets”, or Henson-style hand and rod puppets. These puppets were created from upholstery foam and covered in fabric. I used many of these techniques when creating Grendel. I began by flat-patterning the torso, arms, legs and head out of 1” pink urethane upholstery foam and using Barge contact cement to connect all the pieces.



Illustration 20: Grendel's Body

Once I had the foam body assembled, I inserted the skeleton and tested its flexibility. I learned that the joints were now too restrictive and had limited movement. I had used a very soft foam at the elbows and knees to allow movement, but I found that even the soft foam was restrictive. I instead chose to cut these joint out, leaving these hinges open. I also discovered that the shoulders and hips of the PVC skeleton were limiting movement and making the puppet heavier. I still needed something to mount the hands and feet, so I kept the PVC structure for the wrists and elbows and for the ankles and knees.

I created hands out of papier-mâché. I began by creating a wire frame for the hand and then built it up with paper and masking tape. I then continued to build up the hands with papier-mâché and finished them with a coat of Jaxsan and wood glue.



Illustration 21: Grendel's Hands in Process

I needed the feet to be strong enough to endure the strain of being connected to the puppeteer's feet. I created a full-scale sculpt of the feet out of water based clay and then shaped Warbla over this mold. I then filled the Warbla with Smooth-On Liquid Plastic. I secured the feet to the PVC ankles with screws. To smooth the transition between the hard plastic feet and the soft foam ankles, I used quilter's batting and a layer of t-shirt painted

with Monster Maker's RD-407 Mask-Making Latex mixed with acrylic paint for color. Grendel's foot was mounted onto a metal bracket that attached to the puppeteers shoes. I created nails for the hands and feet using SculptWood.



Illustration 22: Grendel's Feet in Process

Grendel's chest muscles were built up using foam and shoulder pads. I used Barge contact cement to secure them in place and then covered them with knit fabric. I glued this fabric to the muscles and then painted over it with RD-407 mask making latex mixed with paint. At this point, I covered Grendel's body in fur.

While Grendel's body would be mostly fur, I knew I wanted him to have the scary realism of a latex face. I began sculpting the face out of plastelina. I first created a base for the face out of insulation foam sculpted at the belt grinder, and then built up the face with clay. Once I completed the face, I used texture stamps to create detail. I then used SculptWood to create teeth. I inserted the teeth, making sure they would fit in Grendel's mouth and then removed them before creating a mold out of plaster. Once the plaster mold cured, I poured mask making latex into it.¹¹ Once this cured, I used Smooth-On Flex Foam it! III Pourable Flexible Foam to fill in the nose and lips so they wouldn't be hollow once I attached the face to Grendel's foam head.¹²



Illustration 23: Grendel's Face in Process

The text of *Beowulf* refers to Grendel's glowing red eyes, which is a familial trait I wanted Grendel and his mother to share (Heaney 49). I created Grendel's eyes with vacuform plastic, painted red on the inside. I purchased LED lights with switches, which

¹¹ See Illustration 23.

¹² See Illustration 24.

were placed under his eyelids. Between the LED lights and the foam head, I glued a piece of thermoplastic painted with reflective silver paint. Once I had the lights secured to the latex face, I attached the face to Grendel's foam head using Barge contact cement. I cut slits in the foam head so the switches and batteries could be stored and accessed from inside the head. A zipper was installed in the back of Grendel's torso so I could access the inside of the head through his back.

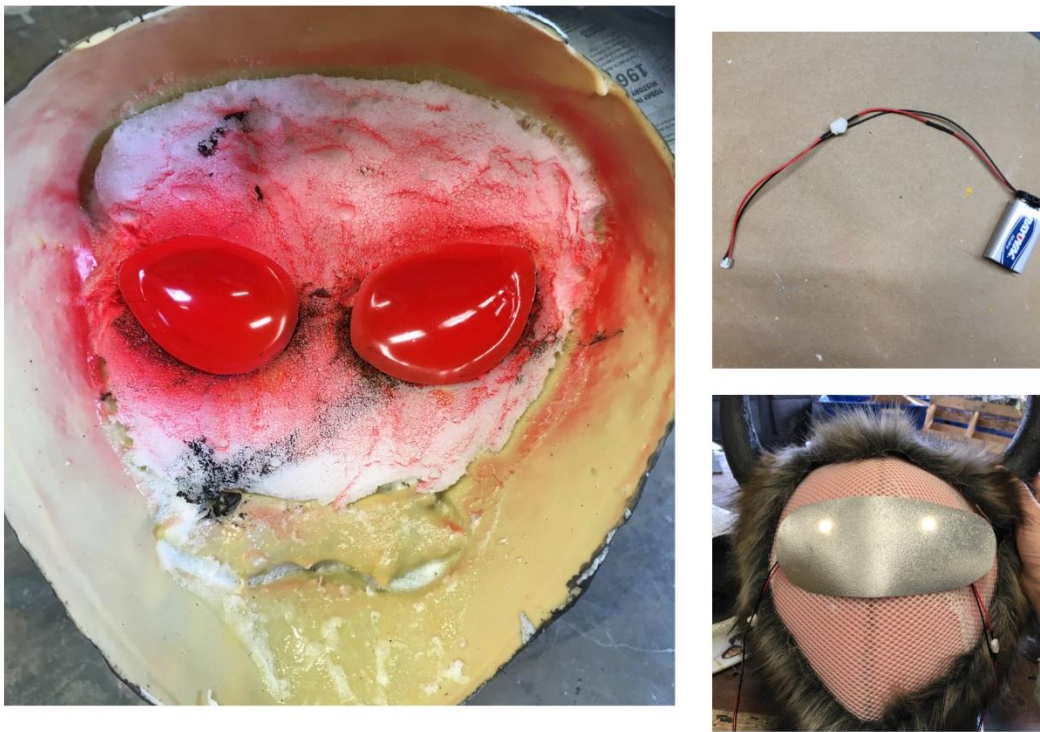


Illustration 24: Grendel's Eyes in Process

Once I covered Grendel's head in fur, I created his horns and ears. Grendel's ears were made out of felt. The felt was painted with tinted RD-407 mask making latex. Once the ears were dry, they were darted for shaping and sewn onto the head. The horns were

made from thermoplastic shaped over sheep horns. The horns were then filled with Smooth-On Foam-It #10, a rigid urethane foam, for stability. They were then painted with Jaxsan, mixed with sawdust for texture, and painted.



Illustration 25: Grendel's Horns in Process

Rehearsal

The Grendel puppet transitioned into rehearsal smoothly. The puppet connected to the puppeteer's shoes via metal plates. Grendel's head connected to a helmet worn by the puppeteer via threaded steel rods and swivel ball joints at the temples of the puppet and puppeteer. I initially cut these rods long, and gradually cut them shorter as needed in

rehearsal. Because the puppet responded to the puppeteer's natural movement, the puppeteer only needed to master moving the arms of the puppet, which were operated via PVC tubes connected at the elbow joint.



Illustration 26: Grendel in Rehearsal

Once the puppeteer had mastered the movement of Grendel's arms, we needed to rig the arm to be torn off in Grendel's battle with Beowulf. We tried different combinations of snaps, but found that the arm fell off too early. I troubleshooted the snap placement during rehearsal and eventually discovered that I needed one additional snap on top of the shoulder in order to support the weight of the arm. This had to be masked with fur and was cumbersome to attach, but it kept the arm from falling off prematurely.

Blood and gore on the arm stump was created with latex tubing, strips of painted spandex and a shoulder bone, sculpted with SculptWood. I painted the stump in a layer of

Jaxsan mixed with sawdust, covered in paint. This stump was masked with an oval of black fabric, that was connected with snaps which would separate when the arm was ripped off.

In addition to adding blood and gore to the arm stump, I distressed Grendel's body throughout the rehearsal process. I began by shaving down his fur with electric hair clippers. I looked at research images of animal fur to determine which areas would be naturally shorter, such as the arm pits and between the thighs. I then painted the fur with red paint to simulate bloody patches and acrylic medium to matte the fur. Around the mouth and chest, I painted acrylic medium to simulate drool.



Illustration 27: Grendel in performance (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

Chapter 5: Grendel's Mother Puppet

As previously stated, my goal with this thesis project was to make Grendel's Mother the focal point of "Bloodthirsty Fiends." She would be the biggest, scariest monster, and a technical feat. While many artistic interpretations suggest that Grendel's Mother is a smaller, less formidable foe than Grendel, I found evidence in the text for her to be a much more threatening challenge to Beowulf.

The text of *Beowulf* suggests that Beowulf is afraid of Grendel's Mother. This is indicated by a scene in which Beowulf makes a point of disarming before his fight with Grendel. Meanwhile, there are over twenty lines of text describing the process of him arming himself against Grendel's Mother (Burdorff 99). Why would he arm himself so carefully against a foe who is smaller and weaker than Grendel? Beowulf also struggles to defeat Grendel's Mother. Beowulf defeats Grendel with his bare hands, tearing his arm from his socket. But, when he faces Grendel's Mother in the mere, he nearly dies in the encounter (Oswald 71). This textual evidence inspired me to make Grendel's Mother large and intimidating.

Design

While Grendel is described in detail, Grendel's Mother's physical appearance is virtually unknown. This gave me the opportunity as a designer to create a monster of my own vision. I chose to make her very human and very womanly. I designed a heavysset biped with sagging breasts. Although there is no text directly describing Grendel's Mother,

the subtext of her fight with Beowulf suggests a certain sexuality. Dana Oswald describes her as “the horrifying image of a woman as archaic mother, phallic woman, castrated body and castrating parent as a single figure” (Oswald 66-67). Oswald goes on to suggest that this near-death fight with a woman is so shameful, Beowulf lies about the details of this fight to his comrades (70).

Rendering

I began the process of rendering Grendel’s Mother by creating a maquette with clay, the same way I created Grendel’s maquette. The initial design for this puppet was meant to completely conceal a puppeteer, who would wear stilts to accommodate the nine foot height of the Grendel’s Mother puppet. So, I began by building the puppet maquette on top of a six inch figure drawing model.. Like Grendel, I then used photographs of the maquette to create the nine-foot tall rendering of Grendel’s Mother.



Illustration 28: Grendel's Mother Maquette

Once I had created the rendering of Grendel's Mother, I realized the potential danger of having a performer walking on stilts while wearing a large and potentially heavy puppet. I also was concerned about the feasibility of creating good-looking legs on this scale in a restricted timeframe. I chose to reevaluate the design. The puppeteer would now walk without the aid of stilts. This meant I needed to lower the viewport for the puppeteer, which would now be between the breasts rather than through the neck. This also meant I would need to conceal the lower half of Grendel's Mother to hide the puppeteer.

Build

To achieve Grendel's Mother's height, I built the puppet on a steel frame hiking backpack. I began by adding a chest strap and padding to the frame to make it comfortable and secure. I then added a PVC frame to the backpack, to which I would later mount Grendel's Mother shoulders.



Illustration 29: Grendel's Mother Backpack

Much like Grendel, I flat-patterned Grendel's Mother's Body out of one inch upholstery foam. This time, I knew to leave her elbow and armpit joints very open for maximum movement. Her arms are held together by a nylon webbing straps that run from her hands up her arms and into her torso, attached to the frame.

In order to support her head, I created a chest and neck out of Warbla. For added stability, her neck was covered in leather. This Warbla chest was glued onto the foam torso and covered in fabric. I created Grendel's Mother's breasts out of half inch upholstery foam, filled with a plastic beads for weight and movement.¹³ The nipples were made out of felt, steamed over a carriage bolt for shaping. In order to maintain movement, the breasts were enclosed in separate knit fabric sacks that were secured only at the shoulders of the puppet. Once the breasts were created, I ran a machine screw through the sacks containing the bust, through the Warbla at the shoulders, into the foam body and secured it to the PVC frame with a wing nut. The body was only attached to the frame at these two points, in order to achieve maximum movement.



Illustration 30: Grendel's Mother Breast in Process

¹³ See Illustration 30.

In order to achieve a monstrous skin texture, Grendel's Mother was covered in an athletic knit fabric. I then glue spider-web lace fabric all over her body. Then, her body was painted with tinted RD-407 latex.¹⁴ Once coated in latex, the body was painted with acrylic paint.¹⁵



Illustration 31: Grendel's Mother's Skin Texture in Process

¹⁴ See Illustration 31.

¹⁵ See Illustration 32.



Illustration 32: Grendel's Mother's Completed Body (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

I used papier-mâché to build Grendel's Mothers hands, the same way I created Grendel's. The puppet's arms were controlled by two PVC pipes connected to her wrists, operated by two puppeteers. I created Grendel's Mother's feet out of upholstery foam covered in fabric. I flat-patterned a foot, and then scaled it up to be the appropriate size for Grendel's Mother. I attached the foam feet to rain boots, which were worn by the actor. I

was concerned that the toenails could be a tripping hazard, so I created them out of EVA foam rather than a hard product like SculptWood.

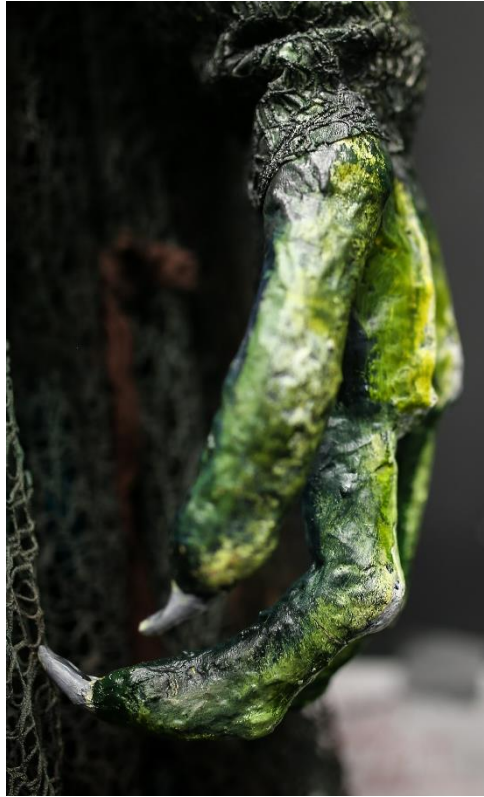


Illustration 33: Grendel's Mother's Hand (Photo by Chain-ann Lu)

I chose to make Grendel's Mother's head out of papier-mâché to keep it lightweight and strong. I started with a plaster bust of a human head, which I built up with foam and tape before covering it in water-based clay. I then sculpted the head in water-based clay. Once I was happy with the sculpt, I fit it with sculpt-wood teeth, modeled after shark teeth. I then removed the teeth before coating the sculpt in Armadillo Clay Wax Resist and a layer of Vaseline. The papier-mâché paste was created by cooking a mixture of yucca powder and water until thick. I used this paste and brown craft paper to cover the sculpt in

6 layer of papier-mâché. I sliced the head open in order to remove the head from the sculpt and sealed the seam with papier-mâché.¹⁶ I wired the neck with millinery wire and filled the nose with SculptWood for extra stability. I also coated the head in layers of Prop Maker's Extreme Hardcoat, wood glue and tinted mask-making latex. Her hair was created with a raffia hula-skirt.



Illustration 34: Grendel's Mother's Face in Process

¹⁶ See Illustration 33.

As mentioned, Grendel's Mother needed a "skirt" to hide her puppeteer. I chose to make this out of a combination of dyed cotton scrim and the same spider lace fabric used to create her skin texture. This fabric was dyed and painted to emulate her swampy lair. I added faux foliage to her skirt and hair to complete the look.



Illustration 35: Miles Agee with Grendel's Mother's Head (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

Rehearsal

I first introduced Grendel's Mother to the rehearsal room without her head or clothing. This gave the puppeteers a chance to get a feel for the puppet without being encumbered by additional weight or tripping hazards. This also gave me a chance to try out the rods connected to the wrists of the puppet. I found that this connection would be under a great deal of strain and would need to be reinforced. Based on this experience, I redesigned the way the hands would connect to the body. There was a PVC tube that ran from the elbow, through the wrist, into the hand. Halfway between the wrist and elbow, I installed a threaded t-joint in the PVC rod. This way, the puppeteer could screw their rod into the arm for performances and remove them for transport and storage.



Illustration 36: Grendel's Mother in Rehearsal

After I introduced the remaining elements of the Grendel's Mother puppet to the rehearsal room, such as her head, hair, clothes and feet, I worked with the puppeteers to trouble-shoot the removal of her head. Beowulf killed her offstage, and he needed to re-enter with her decapitated, bleeding head. This was achieved by running a threaded rod on the inside of Grendel's Mother's neck opening. I then created a rag attached to a carabiner. Each performance, this carabiner would soak in a fake blood mixture until needed, at which point the puppeteer would clip the bloody rag to the rod and hand the head off to Beowulf. The rag did not drip as much as I wanted, and this is something I would continue to troubleshoot for a future production.



Illustration 37: Grendel's Mother in Performance (Photo by Lawrence Peart)

Chapter 6: Shadow Puppets

I initially decided to include shadow puppets in “Bloodthirsty Fiends” in order to solve a logistical problem. Both the building of Heorot and Grendel’s attack on Heorot are crucial to the story of *Beowulf*, but creating a spectacle this large was outside the scope of this project. When I suggested the idea of shadow puppets to Liam, he quickly thought of Norse Mythology and myths that could now be incorporated into our play through shadow puppets. Shadow puppets allowed us to tell an economical, yet elaborate story on a very small scale.

Design

“Bloodthirsty Fiends” set designer Roxy Mojica agreed to design the shadow puppets. I sat down with Liam, Roxy, and Roxy’s assistant, Jacob Caire, to discuss the storyboard of the shadow puppets in detail. We discussed what was achievable with the puppets and what was needed to tell this story.

Build

With this storyboard in hand, Roxy hand-rendered the shadow puppets and imported them into Adobe Illustrator. From this file, I laser cut them out of chip board.

I had initially planned to cut the shadow puppets at the Foundry in the Fine Arts Library at UT, but it was not open in time for this project. Instead, I received special permission to use the laser cutter at the School of Architecture. Roxy sent me shadow puppet images in 18”x32” template files in Adobe Illustrator and I cut out the images.

Unfortunately, this arrangement proved challenging because I encountered multiple files which would fail to cut, and I had to troubleshoot the issues, which frequently included involving Roxy. For instance, a batch of files would not cut, no matter how many adjustments I made to the laser cutter. Talking to Roxy, I discovered that the lines were slightly the wrong color. For the laser cutter to work, the lines needed to be a precise RGB value, in this case R 255. The color assigned to the cut lines was slightly wrong, which is a difference undetectable to the human eye, and unreadable to the laser cutter. In a future laser cutting collaboration with a designer, I would like to import the files into Illustrator myself, so that I am able to troubleshoot the images on my own.

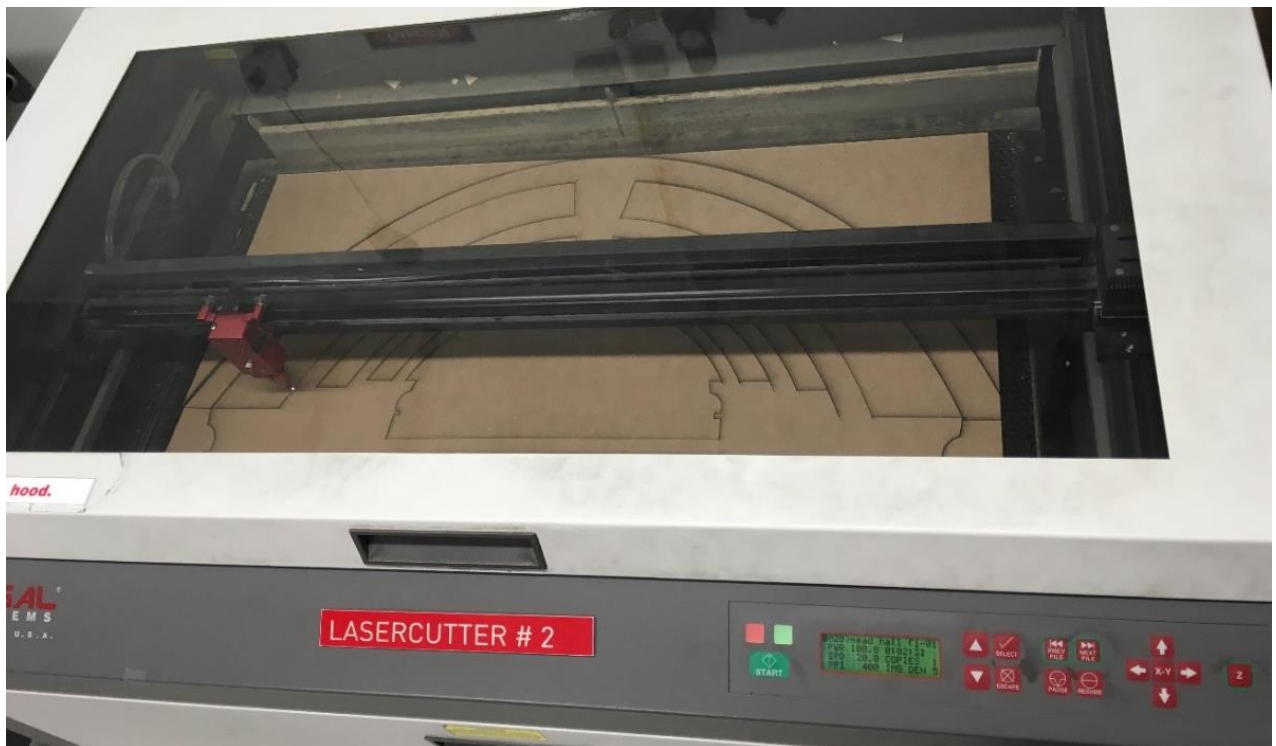


Illustration 38: Laser Cutting Heorot

Rehearsal

Once the puppets were cut, I attached wooden dowels to use as handles for the puppeteers. The shadow puppets were tricky to coordinate in rehearsal. We assigned four puppeteers to handle the puppets, and it took them several rehearsals to coordinate and memorize the blocking for these puppets. The puppets were frequently damaged during rehearsal and we needed to reinforce some of the more fragile puppets with tracing paper. In future explorations of laser cutting shadow puppets, I would explore the possibility of cutting them out of a sturdier material, such as wood.

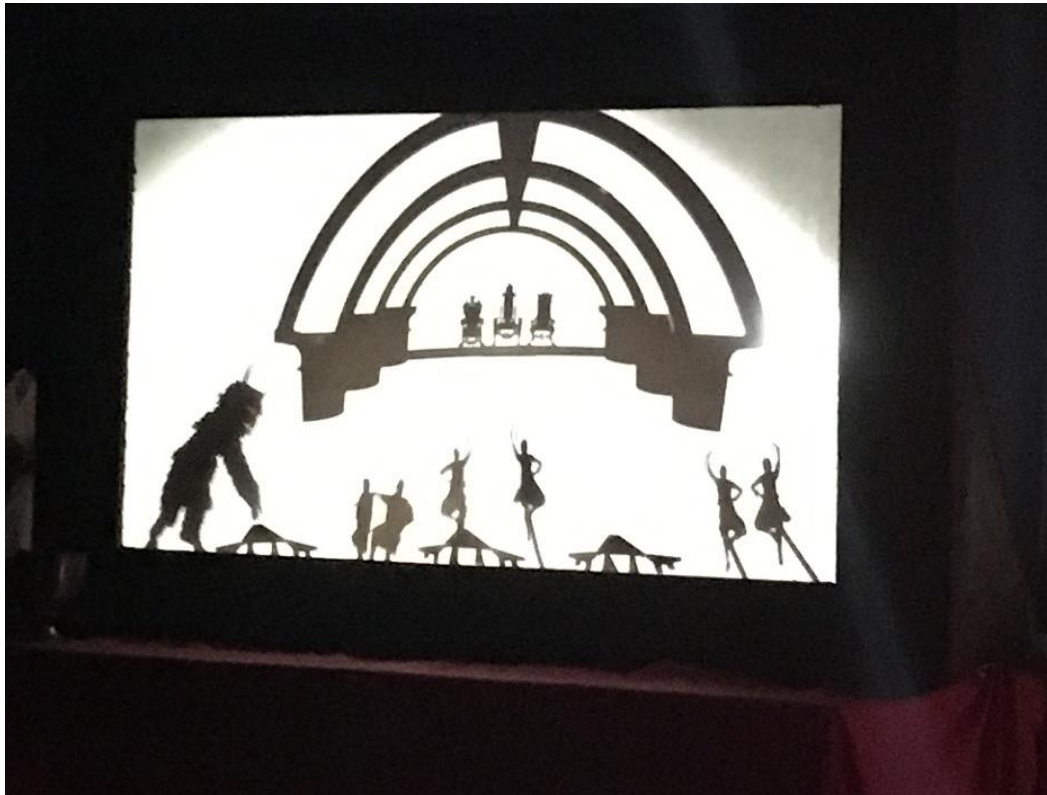


Illustration 39: Shadow Puppets in Rehearsal

Chapter 7: Production Process

As previously stated, I was fortunate to have a phenomenal team working on “Bloodthirsty Fiends.” However, these collaborators did not come on board all at once. This chapter will document the process of mounting this production, from finding initial collaborators to opening night.

The first step in mounting “Bloodthirsty Fiends” happened in fall of 2016 when I completed the application for the Cohen New Works Festival. One of the requirements of the application was to form a collaborative team. The festival provided several resources to help locate collaborators. I found a set designer, Roxy Mojica, and composers, Invoke, by responding to an advertisement on a bulletin board created by the NWF committee. I found playwright Liam Dolan-Henderson through a Reddit board also set up by the NWF committee that was dedicated to finding collaborators.

I began by meeting with each of these potential collaborators one-on-one. As previously stated, Liam was an enthusiastic Undergraduate and had many new ideas to bring to the project. Roxy was a Graduate Scenery Designer who also took Professor Glavan’s Puppetry Design and Fabrication class. My meeting with Invoke, the Young Professional String Quartet in Residence at UT Austin, was serendipitous. When I reached out to them they had actually already been discussing creating a soundtrack for *Beowulf*, and were therefore very interested in collaborating.

Now that I had acquired my first collaborators, I completed the application process for the NWF. My next task was to persuade the NWF selection committee that my *Beowulf*-inspired production was a new work. This involved emphasizing the originality of using puppets and the innovation of Invoke's original music. This also involved renaming the project, "Bloodthirsty Fiends." This title was initially intended to demonstrate that this play was about the monsters, rather than the titular hero. By the time we started rehearsals, this title had taken on a new meaning, indicating that all the people and monsters of this play were "Bloodthirsty Fiends" on a quest for revenge. The application was submitted to the NWF selection committee and after a long day of deliberation, "Bloodthirsty Fiends" was accepted into the festival.

We began with a research meeting on December 10th before parting ways for Winter Break. There, we shared ideas for story and scenery and I presented the maquettes of Grendel and Grendel's Mother as well as a completed Beowulf marionette. After Winter Break, we shared our preliminary designs on January 20th. After this meeting, Liam and I secured a Lighting Designer, Sound Designer, and a Stage Manager. Liam developed a character list, and once we realized we would need an ensemble of actors and puppeteers, we decided we would need a costume designer to pull and purchase costumes for the nine person ensemble and string quartet. These later additions to the team met with me and Liam one-on-one. We then held a final design meeting in February with the entire production team. At this meeting, we read through a draft of the script.

Script

At the first design meeting, I shared my storyboard for “Bloodthirsty Fiends” with the designers and composers. Based on that storyboard, Liam developed his own storyboard which he presented at the second design meeting. Liam’s draft of the storyboard included Beowulf murdering Grendel’s Mother as her back was turned. In this draft, this scene took place in Grendel’s Mother’s mere. After some discussion, Liam and I agreed that this scene should take place in Heorot. This draft also gave Grendel’s Mother a name, which I felt was unsupported by my research. While giving Grendel’s Mother a name would give her more agency and character, we decided that the tragic fact that Grendel’s Mother does not have a name was too important to gloss over.

At the final design meeting, Liam shared a draft of the script, which we read aloud. Liam continued to make small revisions throughout the rehearsal process. In the last week of rehearsal, he chose to revise the final standoff between Beowulf and Aeschere. This final draft had Aeschere threaten to tarnish Beowulf’s reputation by telling Hrothgar that Beowulf slayed Grendel’s Mother while her back was turned. The earlier draft left Beowulf’s motives for killing Aeschere less clear, whereas this version clearly demonstrated the lack of honesty between these two supposed “heroes.”

Music

During our research meetings, Liam and I would share our general ideas for the music with the show’s composers, Invoke. They would in turn send us their research ideas and styles of music that they wanted to incorporate into the soundscape of the production.

At the final design meeting, they shared a “suite” version of the music they were working on.

This “Beowulf Suite” began with an ominous overture that suggested both the approaching monsters and the evil lurking in men. This music played under Freawauru’s opening monologue. The music then shifted to the theme of Heorot, which underscored the mead hall celebration and Beowulf’s entrance. Dissonant sounds from the strings signaled a shift to battle, transitioning the music to a cinematic story-telling style to underscore the shadow puppet scenes. In the fight with Beowulf and Grendel, the music was upbeat and action-oriented, suggesting an epic, but not life-threatening battle.

The music underscoring Beowulf’s encounter with Grendel’s Mother was melancholy and more contemporary, interspersed with “Grendel’s Mother’s Lullaby,” a melody based on Norwegian lullabies. This melody incorporated light vocal sounds from the quartet. The music became increasingly tense and dissonant until the murder of Aeschere. The play resolved with the same ominous intro music over Freawaru’s closing monologue, incorporating “Grendel’s Mother’s Lullaby” once more.

Scenery

The scenery for “Bloodthirsty Fiends” needed to establish the essence of the great mead hall, Heorot. The audience would be seated on either side of a central “alley” arrangement. It was important to leave space for a shadow puppet screen and room for the musicians and the royal court upstage. During our early conversations we discussed the idea of having the audience sit at tables as if they were also occupants of Heorot,

surrounded by the ensemble. While this would have helped us create a more immersive experience for the audience, we decided that our ensemble was too small to do this idea justice.

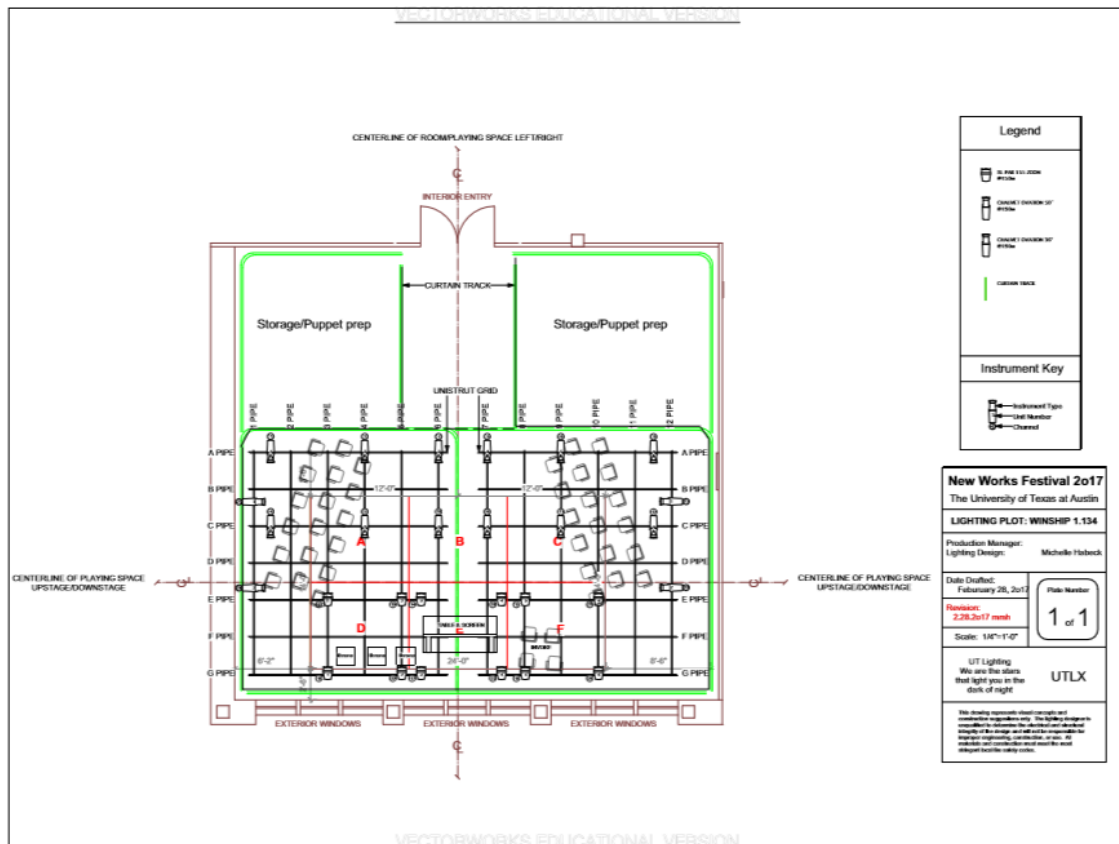


Illustration 40: Groundplan

The audience was instead seated in alley arrangement. The shadow puppet screen was placed on a table upstage for shadow puppet scenes. The screen was made with muslin fabric stretched over a wooden frame. A proscenium was created out of foam, which was carved with a CNC router using an Adobe Illustrator file, designed by Roxy Mojica.

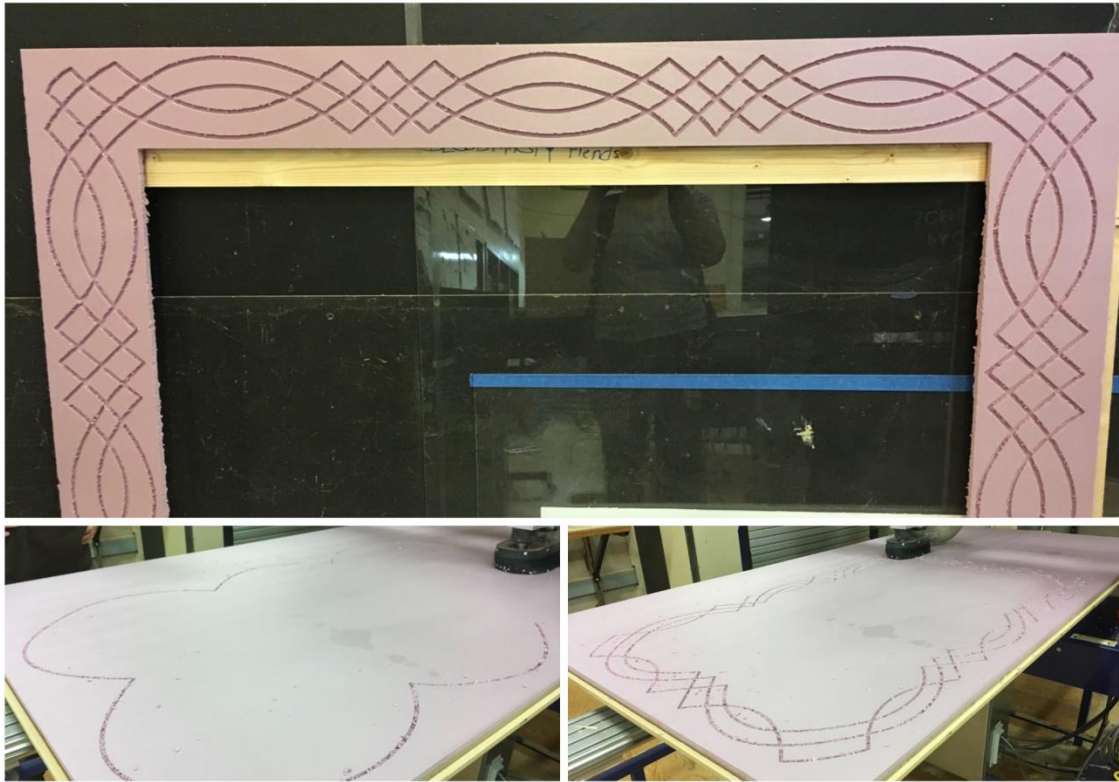


Illustration 41: CNC Routing Shadow Puppet Screen

Costumes

Costume Designer Renee Woolley was presented with a difficult task. When she came on board, the puppets were in progress and Beowulf was already costumed in very detailed leather armor.



Illustration 42: Miles Agee as Beowulf (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

Renee had the difficult task of costuming the rest of the cast in a similar quality, but with a small budget. She began by presenting the production team with a color palette and renderings for Hrothgar, Freawaru and Aeschere. She noted that the design of Beowulf's armor and Grendel's Mother featured the color green prominently, so she wanted to avoid this color when designing costumes for the rest of the cast. Renee planned to have Hrothgar and Aeschere in red to demonstrate their elevated social status. She wanted Freawaru in a blue or purple dress to separate her as a neutral narrator. She intended to costume the ensemble women in dresses with aprons and the ensemble men and Invoke in belted tunics with trousers and leg wraps.

With these ideas in mind, Renee searched UT's stock for suitable costumes. She was very successful in finding a red robe for Hrothgar¹⁷ and a blue dress for Freawaru.¹⁸ She initially found a red cape for Aeschere, but it limited his movement during fight choreography. Instead, she suggested Aeschere's elevated status with a gold necklace.¹⁹ While Renee found dresses for the ensemble women in stock, she was not able to find appropriate aprons, so we agreed that I would construct them.²⁰ She was also unable to find enough tunics for the ensemble men and Invoke, so she purchased cotton t-shirts. By dyeing and altering the necklines of the t-shirts, Renee created tunics.²¹ With a small budget and few builds, Renee accomplished a unified, period look for all cast members.



Illustration 43: Nick Ivons as Hrothgar (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

¹⁷ See Illustration 43.

¹⁸ See Illustration 44.

¹⁹ See Illustration 45.

²⁰ See Illustration 46.

²¹ See Illustration 47.



Illustration 44: Katie Pavlas as Freawaru (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)



Illustration 45: Sahil Bhutani as Aeschere (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)



Illustration 46: Shannon Homan as Ensemble (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)



Illustration 47: Invoke in Costume (Photo by Chian-ann Lu)

Lighting

Undergraduate Lighting Designer Kyle Cordova used lighting to create two distinctly different atmospheres: the cheery mead hall where stories of valor are told, as well as the scary atmosphere of Heorot during Grendel's Mother's attack. The cheery atmosphere was accomplished with amber light to simulate the light of a bonfire by focusing the lights to be strong in the center and weaker in the periphery.

Kyle was also responsible for setting the scary mood for scenes with Grendel's Mother. Because we were in Winship 1.134, a space with low ceilings, the lighting instruments were very close to Grendel's Mother's head. Kyle and I agreed that the best way to light Grendel's Mother was with very low light. This way, she was almost completely enveloped in shadow until she crossed a lighting instrument, which would startlingly light up her face for a moment.

Sound

Undergraduate Sound designer Malysa Quiles was initially brought in to create the voice of Grendel's Mother. As the speaking role for Grendel's Mother expanded, so did Malysa's role as our sound designer. The idea she pitched was to create a layered voice. She accomplished this by recording three different actresses speaking these lines. She then layered them together to create one, terrifying voice. As the scene with Grendel's Mother proceeded, her voice became gradually less modified and more human. This helped sell the idea of the sympathetic monster.

Auditions

In January 2017, Liam and I attended general auditions arranged by the NWF committee, where we cast our project. We were specifically looking for people who could handle speaking in verse and working with puppets. After watching all auditioners perform monologues, we called back a group of actors and actresses to read selections from a translation of *Beowulf*.

In order to test out their puppet instincts, I put the actors in groups of three and had them rehearse a short scene using a paper Bunraku puppet. When they presented the scene, we looked for a willingness to work as a team and an attention to detail and life when operating the puppet. Since I was in a room full of young, eager actors, I found everyone to be a willing team player. While this technique was not useful in eliminating any auditioners, it helped participants to become excited for the idea of working with puppets.



Illustration 48: Audition with Paper Bunraku Puppet

Fundraising

When I first started working with Invoke, they wished to pursue funding for their time and work on the project. They contacted the Butler School of Music development team, who suggested they apply for HornRaiser. We were accepted into HornRaiser, which allowed us to use this UT fundraising platform to crowdfund our project. We advertised the “Bloodthirsty Fiends” fundraiser through Facebook, email, radio (KMFA 89.5), television (TSTV- Texas Student Television) and the Daily Texan. Through the generous support of our donors, we raised \$5000 for materials and honorarium.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Due in part to the publicity of our HornRaiser campaign, “Bloodthirsty Fiends” sold out within minutes. We had a long line of walk-ups for each performance and even added an additional performance due to high demand.

At the time of this publication, I have discussed the possibility of future productions of “Bloodthirsty Fiends” with Invoke and Liam. As we met with our NWF-assigned guest respondents Joseph Heckler and Kristin Marting, we asked for feedback for a possible remount. We learned that the themes we were exploring were effective. The audience perceived Grendel’s Mother to be both sympathetic and scary. Beowulf’s questionable heroism was also clear. Our respondents said they enjoyed the score, but thought that it needed more emphasis in the play. In a future production, we would like to incorporate a musical sequence of dancing and/or singing to emphasize the role of music in “Bloodthirsty Fiends.”

Reflection

I came to the University of Texas at Austin with a little production management and directing experience, and I used every skill I had to coordinate my team of collaborators. I believe I got the very best work possible out of them. This process was exhausting, mentally draining, and amazing. “Bloodthirsty Fiends” reignited my passion for making incredible spectacles for the stage. This experience will launch me into my future career as an artist and as a theatre professional.

Appendix A: “Bloodthirsty Fiends” Script

Bloodthirsty Fiends

By Liam Dolan-Henderson

(Lights fade. Music starts up with intensity. FREAWARU steps out from the shadows)

FREAWARU: Hark! Come and beckon to my voice,
And hear the tales of the kings of old,
The wind-loving folk’s great triumphs
And its great crushing defeats
And murmurs of the truth that shines through
these myths that I conjure before you today.

Old King Hrothgar, in his Golden Hall of Heorot, sits.
A good king, oh a good king was he!
Great were his victories, and firm were his bonds of kinship
And so beloved by his people!
In his home he erected a great Hall to be his
And His children’s seat of glory forever more.
But not all delight in such splendor,
And there are those who hate the long shadows cast
by such mighty men.

And so, in hate, Grendel came and pillaged,
Many fell beneath his hand
And the great House sat empty for many years
Until one man, Beowulf, came from across the shores
And relying on strength of sinew and strength of faith
Slew the bloodthirsty fiend.

Beowulf now is lifted up,
Beloved of the Danes, the wind-loving folk,
Only the radiant Hrothgar, noble king and my father, is more beloved than he,
And so, a great feast was held to celebrate and to remember
what great feats delivered them from their distress
And brought them to this, tonight, this glorious present...

(Lights come up quickly. The ENSEMBLE comes rushing out from Backstage, drunk with joy and mead. They are followed by HROTHGAR, AESCHERE, and BEOWULF. HROTHGAR takes his seat upon his throne; AESCHERE sits to his right and BEOWULF sits to his left. FREAWARU sits lower than the men, but still in a position of respect)

(Insert a scene of merriment and music playing)

(Eventually, HROTHGAR raises his voice and speaks, and the crowd falls silent)

HROTHGAR: Welcome, my kith and kin, to this day of joy.
For out of a dark winter we have been delivered.
By the grace of the All-father and by the strength of
Beowulf (*hail!*) we have found ourselves rid of our troubles.

(HROTHGAR raises his drinking horn)

HROTHGAR: To you, Beowulf, thane of Hygelac, king of the Geats,
Your great courage and power have given us second life.
In You I have found another son, worthy of my love and
Deserving of all honor bestowed upon you.
Hail Beowulf, my spiritual son!

ALL: HAIL!

(ALL drink)

BEOWULF: I am ever your loyal friend and kin,
Hrothgar, and I thank you for your gifts and praise.
However, I fear that I fell short of the glory that you attest.
I desired to crush the foe utterly, and to present his head to you,
But alas, the cruel creature had the will to flee my sight,
And, as becoming of such cowardly things, died in some forsaken hole,
Denying me my total victory.

AESCHERE: Had you let others join you in the fray
and allowed them to aid you in the burden of besting the beast,
You might be holding his head aloft,
And taking his horns home to your Hygelac's Hall.
But instead you went in alone,
Risking not only your life, but any chance at finally
Finishing the fiend off.
That was far too hasty for such a hero of your stature.

BEOWULF: Do not think that I am not aware of my faults, Aeschere.
But Hrothgar and the All-father appointed this task to me alone,
And would not have any one else stand in the way of my purpose.

HROTHGAR: Enough! Aeschere, hold your tongue,
For indeed Beowulf was singled out to be our champion.
And Beowulf, you demean yourself needlessly.
You have served us well, and brought to us great relief.

But enough of this! Come, bards, attend to your instruments and weave for us the threads
of the past, so that, like the Norns, we may understand the present and anticipate the
future.

*(Musicians begin to play. What follows is a shadow puppet scene, performed by
ensemble, and narrated by HROTHGAR and BEOWULF)*

HROTHGAR: Before the All-father set the chariots to roam the sky; there were only
lands of fire and ice, and a great void between them.

The Fire burned and the ice stung, and battled against each other, each claiming, but not
overtaking the void.

Within the maelstrom, He, the father of all giants, the monstrous Ymir was born.

An unnatural creature of opposing forces, He birthed the giants from his sweat. He knew
nothing of the natural order by which we men abide.

Then, out of the ice, came the All-father, and his faithful thanes. Desiring peace, they
lived in harmony with the giants.

But Ymir, being the first being of all, could not stand any thing living apart from his
control.

So, he waged war against the All-father and his people.

The war was long, and the death toll was high.

But, eventually, the All-father prevailed, and cast down Ymir and the giants.

The All-father and his people then fashioned Midgard, our world, out of the remains of
the great giant, putting his now hollow body to great purpose.

Out of all this, came the first men. Beloved of the All-father, he set the world before them, and commanded them to be fruitful and prosper.

To the tribes of the humans he gave many gifts, but to his most beloved, the Wind-loving people.... us, the Danes, gave us the power to harness the seas and winds.

And so, under our first king, the great Scyld Scyfin, we set out to find new lands to settle.

And we came upon this, our fair land, which we claimed as our own.

However, we found that we were not alone.

The last of Ymir's children, those horrid giants, were found to be hiding in the hinterland of our promised home; who, now, through unnatural passions, as befitting the Great Giant's children, were grotesque and deformed.

Seeking our peace, Scyld waged war, and, living up to his beloved predecessor, struck down the foul beasts.

And so, peace was had.

Many years past, and the Wind-loving folk grew and prospered.

Into this, peace, I, Hrothgar, was born.

Blessed by the All-father, I attained great glory for our people.

I conquered new land, won battles, and gained allies.

In Celebration of the grandeur of our people, I built this Golden Hall, Heorot, to be the dwelling of my house forever more.

As remembered, this hall was full of light and merriment, and for many winters we lived and thrived.

However...this was not to last.

A child of the giants, Grendel, saw our merriment, heard our joyous calls, and desired that we be silenced.

He could not withstand the sight of good, for he could not attain any for himself.

So, he attacked, and slew many of my kindred.

We tried to drive him back, but no weapon could pierce his hide.

So, we abandoned Heorot, much to our shame.

Only in the day could we dwell under its beams, for at night, it became Grendel's lair.

For ten long years, we mourned in grief.

BEOWULF: Until I, Beowulf answered the call.

From across the waves, I heard the news of this distress and that you, your majesty, was suffering. Seeking to right wrongs as I always have, I sought leave from my Noble king Hygelac, and, with his leave, assembled twelve brave warriors, to venture over the seas with me, and to relieve noble Hrothgar of this heavy burden.

We set sail, and prayed to the All-father to see us through. For days and nights we battled the seas and the wind, and were beset on all sides by mighty serpents. They sought to undo us, but we prevailed, with no lives lost on our side.

We landed, safe on these shores, and presented ourselves to you, mighty Hrothgar, and offered you our services in slaying this mighty beast.

(Switch to 3d puppets)

We set up in Heorot, and waited for the sun to dip below the hills and for the foul Grendel to arrive.

Knowing that no blade could pierce his hide, I set aside my weapons, trusting my hands and sinews, and the guide of the ever-watchful All-father to see me to victory.

The sun dipped below the hills. Night fell. We lay there, with baited breath, listening closely for the sound of faint footsteps.

For hours, all was quiet.

Then, we heard him. Heavy footsteps, and ragged breath, prowling around the hall.

We waited to spring the attack.

Unfortunately, he sprung first.

The doors we barred, hopes of delaying his entrance, were ripped off his hinges, and he came roaring in, seizing one of my men and tearing him to shreds, not out of hunger, but pure hatred.

He then faced me, his maw twisted into a toothy grin, the blood of my companion dripping from his mouth.

He uttered a great cry, and came bounding after me.

I leapt out of the way, regained my footing, and then charged.

He failed around, trying to strike me but to no avail.

Eventually, I saw my opening.

With a mighty charge, I leaped and caught the arm of the foul fiend, and, with prayers to the All-father on my lips, I ripped his arm completely off!

Howling in great pain, too weak to continue and too cowardly to fight to the end, he fled the Hall.

His blood poured freely from his wound, and it could be seen that he had little life left.

Now, as the day has passed, surely he has passed into the clutches of Hel, to join with his foul kin!

AESCHERE: And so, hear all, the triumph of Beowulf!

ALL: BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF!

(VOICE FROM OUTSIDE): BEOWULF!

(The ENSEMBLE falls silent)

(There is stillness, then a great cracking sound. GRENDEL'S MOTHER bursts through the "doors" of Heorot)

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: Where is the man who murdered my child! All within these walls shall perish if he is not given up!

HROTHGAR: I will not be ordered around by your kind!

(HROTHGAR stands, but age has weakened him, and his arm shakes as he pulls out his sword)

(GRENDEL'S MOTHER wails, and the humans stagger back)

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: You foul wind-forsaken Dane! I shall have you and your entire household if you do not yield Beowulf.

BEOWULF: Go, my lord, I shall face this foul creature and strike it down myself.

AESCHERE: You are too proud, Beowulf. I shall stand with you. I will not flee when my king is in danger.

HROTHGAR: Stand strong, my kin! And may the All-father protect you.

(GRENDEL'S MOTHER wails at the name of the All-father)

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: Bring him forth now!

(HROTHGAR, FREAWARU exit, and ENSEMBLE flee. AESCHERE and BEOWULF stand and face GM)

AESCHERE: FOR HROTHGAR!

(AESCHERE charges forward, but a cry from GRENDEL'S MOTHER knocks him to his feet. He then grabs at his throat, as if he is being choked)

BEOWULF: Aeschere!

(BEOWULF also charges forward, but a hand gesture from GRENDEL'S MOTHER flings the sword from his hand. He then stands upright, paralyzed)

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: You think that I will be struck down so easily? Now, speak! Who is the man who murdered my son!

BEOWULF: It was I! I am Beowulf. I, who bested your offspring! Now, release me, so that we may fight!

(GRENDEL'S MOTHER laughs)

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: DOES YOUR THIRST FOR BLOOD EVER CEASE? AND DO YOU THINK THAT I WOULD RELEASE YOU AND RISK MY OWN LIFE? I COULD FELL YOU WITH THE BLINK OF MY EYE.

BEOWULF: Then why do you not do so?

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER (*Laughs again*): Because you are not deserving of a noble death at my hands. I will not cease the singing of the story of Beowulf. Not while you still have use.

BEOWULF: What?

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: You shall listen to me, and then you shall decide if death at my hands is what you desire.

BEOWULF: Very well. Say what you have to say.

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Have you heard of the story of the fall of the giants, and the casting down of Ymir?

BEOWULF: How could I have not? It is our history and our faith!

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Did you ever wonder why the All-father decided that the giants had to die?

BEOWULF: The giants were brutal creatures, and would not allow the All-father and his people to live in peace!

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: (*laughs*) truly, your kind is blind...or willingly deaf. Did you ever find it odd that your world is fashioned out of the corpse of my great father?

BEOWULF: No, I did not.

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Then I will tell you this: it did not need to. But in my father was the spark of creation, true mastery of substance and form. This is what the All-father desired, the ability to hold the power of the cosmos itself.

BEOWULF: What need did he have of it?

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER (*laughs*): What need? What need does Hrothgar have that urges them to expand their realms? What need to you have to slay monsters?

BEOWULF: To protect my people!

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: You say that, but I see your mind. Tell me,thane, why do you seek out monsters to destroy?

BEOWULF: I do not know what this is that you speak of...

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: TELL ME, OR I WILL REND YOUR SHIELD-BROTHER IN TWAIN!

(GRENDDEL'S MOTHER motions to AESCHERE, previously slumped on the floor. He begins to writhe in agony at her words)

BEOWULF: ...Because my heart desires the glory that it brings.

(GRENDDEL'S MOTHER releases AESCHERE, who lies prone on his back)

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: So, why did the All-father strike down my father? Why did he slaughter my family and leave my children and me to waste away in these hills?

BEOWULF: So that he may have complete power over all else...

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Now you see, Beowulf, the truth of your legends.

BEOWULF: You said children, giant. Was Grendel not your only one? Are there more to be found, ready to prey on the innocent?

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Grendel was my last child. All the others were wiped out by mighty Hrothgar.

BEOWULF: Hrothgar? But he could not best even one of your children!

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: Hrothgar withholds the truth from you. He slew many of my children, to obtain the blessing of the All-father.

But he could not best my greatest son. My last son. Hrothgar feared that the All-father would strike him down if he failed to slay my son. Then you came.

BEOWULF: So I was used.... I am no more than a puppet.

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: that may be so, Beowulf. But you can become a free man once more.

BEOWULF: How?

GM: Simply tell the truth! Convey what I have told you to your people. Keep the hope of justice alive!

(BEOWULF thinks seriously for a while)

BEOWULF: Very well. But I can only do that if you release me.

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: Indeed I shall.

(With a gesture, BEOWULF is unfrozen. AESCHERE begins to stagger to his feet)

BEOWULF: What will you do, O mighty Giant?

GRENDEL'S MOTHER: I shall leave these lands. I am tired of continuing this fight. I will not let it destroy me any further.

Farewell, Beowulf. Your honesty and reflection have proved to me that there is more to your kind than I thought. Go with truth, and may the dreams of Ymir guide you.

(GRENDEL'S MOTHER leaves)

AESCHERE: What are you doing? Are you letting her go?

BEOWULF: I have no quarrel with her.

AESCHERE: What, has the foul creature won you over? You believed the spells she wove? You are a fool, Beowulf.

BEOWULF: Quiet, Aeschere, I will have no more of this.

AESCHERE: Do you think your people will believe you? Do you think Hrothgar will keep you as his spiritual son? You think that the All-father will not see this transgression?

BEOWULF: Then what would you have me do! She has spoken truth! I will not strike down a truth-teller.

AESCHERE: You are forsaken Beowulf, unless you cast off her enchantments. Take up your sword. Call upon the All-father to guide you. Uphold your glory and honor!

(BEOWULF pauses. He begins to slowly make his way to the "doors" of the hall. He stops. Then, he takes a deep breath, and runs out. A great cry is heard. Then, GRENDEL'S MOTHER'S head comes flying in. BEOWULF follows, clearly shocked, dragging GRENDEL'S MOTHER'S head with him)

AESCHERE: You have done it! Beowulf, you have conquered!

BEOWULF: I stabbed her while her back was turned, as she made her way toward home.

AESCHERE: A fitting end for such a horrid creature!

BEOWULF: I am not so sure.

AESCHERE: What, Beowulf, do you still find yourself enchanted? You are weaker than I thought. What shall Hrothgar think when he hears of this moment of doubt?

BEOWULF: I trust that you will keep this between us, Aeschere.

AESCHERE: You think that this deserves sealed lips? The truth of the matter must be known. Beowulf the fool, Beowulf the bewitched!

BEOWULF: There is no reason for this to go beyond us!

AESCHERE: Then, hear this: Hand me the head of the foul fiend. Tell Hrothgar that you were the one knocked senseless and that I was the one who bested her. You are undeserving in your lack of resolve!

BEOWULF: I have been robbed of my integrity; I will not have you rob me of my glory!

AESCHERE: That is for me to decide! Give me the head!

(AESCHERE charges BEOWULF. They grapple. AESCHERE manages to throw BEOWULF to the floor he begins to choke BEOWULF. BEOWULF reaches for the sword on the ground takes it, then stabs AESCHERE.)

(The horns of the king are heard. Beowulf sheathes his sword, and then crouches over AESCHERE, as if he is mourning. HROTHGAR, FREAKWARU, and the ENSEMBLE enter. FREAKWARU enters in a slightly different place than the others.)

HROTHGAR: Beowulf, is the deed done? Has she been felled?

BEOWULF: Yes, mighty king. But not before she impaled Aeschere with her mighty claw.

HROTHGAR *(silent)*: . . . farewell, Aeschere. You served me well. Subjects, carry Aeschere outside and rest him on the mound. We shall build a pyre later, and let his soul be claimed by the Valkyries, to dwell in the All-father's hall forever more.

BEOWULF: . . . I cannot think of anything more deserving.

(ENSEMBLE members carry AESCHERE'S body outside the hall, then return)

HROTHGAR: And as for you, Beowulf... I see that you, through great strife, have overcome the foe. You are truly deserving of all good things bestowed upon you!
BARDS! A song for Beowulf!

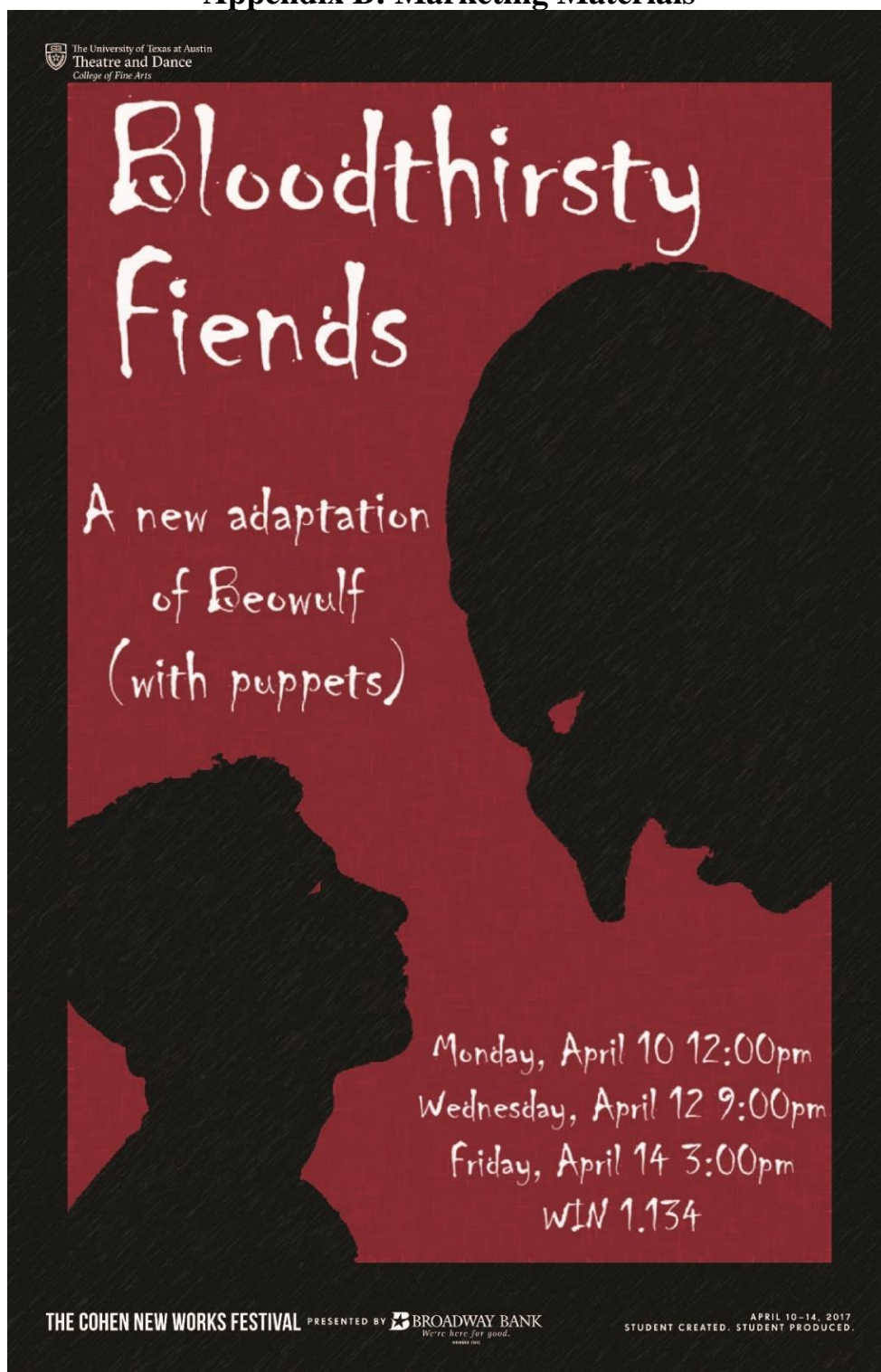
(BEOWULF retrieves GM's head, and makes his way to the front of the hall. He is surrounded by the ENSEMBLE and received by HROTHGAR. A SONG FOR BEOWULF occurs. The entire cast freezes into a tableau. The scene darkens. FREAWARU steps forward)

FREAWARU: And so, the tale has come to a close.
The bloodthirsty fiends, secure in their triumph,
Have set a feast before themselves.
The tumultuous waters of doubt have ceased their churn,
The kinks in the armor have been hammered out.
History progresses as was meant to be.
And in the midst of it, amongst all the roar of legend,
The truth seems lost to time.
And yet, there is still hope.
I implore you, to not forget or keep silent
What you have seen here today.
Though our lips may be bound by tradition,
And our manners governed by expectation,
Our hearts and minds remain our own.
Steel yourselves in truth, o listeners,
Come together in in the fight,
And tomorrow the light of justice,
Shall shine over all the lands.

(Lights fade to music.)

END

Appendix B: Marketing Materials



Poster

Production Team:

Project Lead & Puppet Design/Fabrication- Alison Reid

Director & Playwright- Liam Dolan-Henderson

Scenic Designer- Roxy Mojica

Scenic Design Assistant- Jacob Caire

Costume Designer- Renee Woolley

Costume Design Mentor- Laura Gonzalez

Lighting Designer- Kyle Cordova

Sound Designer- Malyssa Quiles

Stage Manager- Jazmyn Castillo

Music Composed and Performed by- Invoke (Nick Montopoli, Karl Mitze, Zachariah Matteson & Geoff Manyin)

Cast:

Beowulf- Miles Agee

Grendel's Mother- Caroline Beagles

Aeschere- Sahil Bhutani

Grendel Puppeteer- Ryan Cruz

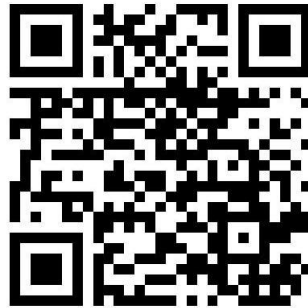
Beowulf Puppeteer- Ben Dickerson

Grendel's Mother Puppeteer- Audrey Grimes

Grendel's Mother Puppeteer- Shannon Homan

Hrothgar- Nick Ivons

Learn more about the making of Bloodthirsty Fiends:

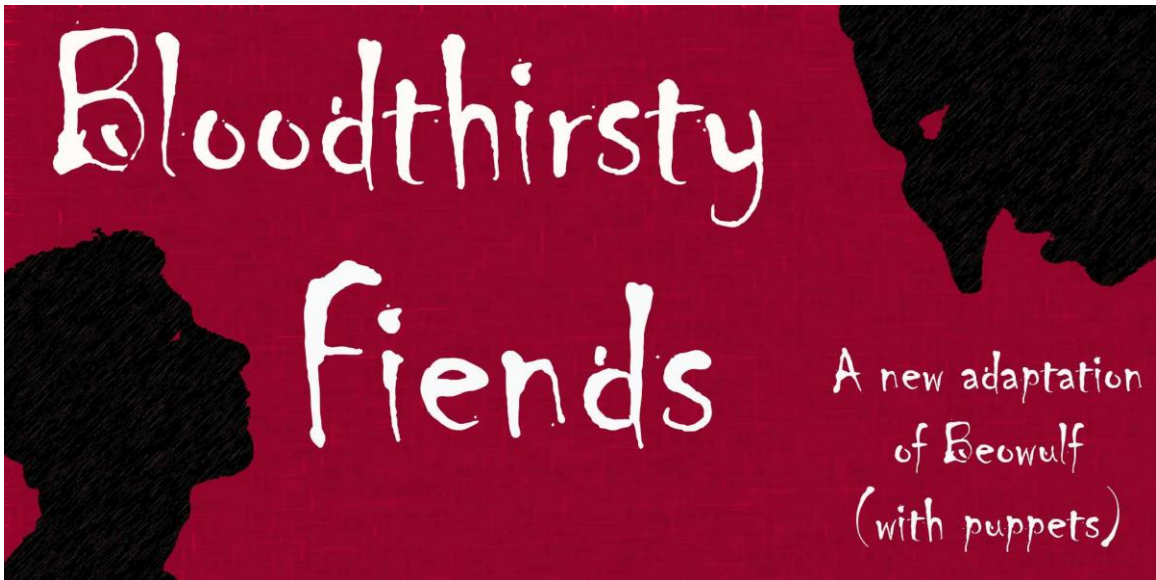


alisonjoreid.com/bloodthirsty-fiends/

Program



Eventbrite Banner



Facebook Event Banner

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