

Reflective Essay

My research question arose from a long-running (and, often, slow-growing) love of *Beowulf* and interest in Anglo-Saxon culture. Throughout high school and college, many classes required me to read the epic, but my real interest in the poem did not arise until I took a Medieval and Renaissance literature class. This course spanned from *Beowulf* to King Arthur. Most students would not see a striking contrast between Medieval and Renaissance literature, but I immediately noticed the different notions and expectations of a hero in the literature of the two periods. This contrast sparked my curiosity and I proposed to Dr. Crane a study of the heroic complex between *Beowulf* and Arthurian myth.

My selected topic evolved as I began to read the primary texts and perform my preliminary research. I noticed that the king and hero had very different expectations in both *Beowulf* and Arthurian myth. I decided that these distinctions would be the focus of my research. In addition, I also accepted the fact that my research would have to be more focused in order to result in a well-crafted and complete paper at the end of the semester. As a result, I narrowed my topic to *Beowulf* specifically.

In attempting to define the hero and king roles in *Beowulf*, I was continuously drawn to Anglo-Saxon word usage within the poem, and realized that analyzing the language in the original text of *Beowulf* would greatly further my argument. At that point, my project gained a new level of complexity, as I am certainly not a scholar of the Anglo-Saxon language. However, I embraced the challenge, with the aid of several *Beowulf* translations and Anglo-Saxon dictionaries.

I spent much of my early research in the stacks of McKeldin Library in the *Beowulf* and King Arthur sections. I skimmed the literary essays and scholarly articles in the books, checking out a few to reference as I developed my argument. As I spent time familiarizing myself with the source texts, I found that the observations I was making were echoed in some of the *Beowulf* essays I later consulted.

As my argument became more refined, I began to use the library Research Port to find articles and works that aligned with the specific topic I was discussing. Other times, I searched directly through EBSCO or JSTOR, as I found these two databases to be well-stocked with relevant articles and essays. Additionally, I began to consult the bibliographies at the end of particularly helpful essays or book chapters. These citations sometimes led to other useful works. From these methods, I developed a network of arguments that I consulted to help shape, inform, and justify my own claims.

Ultimately, I wanted my final paper and research to be academically rigorous. With this in mind, I strove to use only legitimate, scholarly sources. I looked for articles from scholarly journals as well as books published by experts in the field. Even when a source adhered to these guidelines, I was still critical when reading through the author's arguments. I became frustrated with one source wherein the author did not back up his controversial claims with citations from other authors. Although his arguments aligned with some of the points I tried to make in the essay, I chose not to use those quotes, as they did not seem sufficiently cited or justified. I found that, even with peer-reviewed and scholarly writings, some critical thinking is still required in source evaluation.

Outside of the library, Dr. Crane proved to be an invaluable resource in my research process. With his familiarity in the field of medieval literature, he was able to direct me to well-known authors and works. He also critiqued my arguments themselves, acknowledged when I was heading in a promising direction, and pointed out potential problems with my reasoning or future research obstacles. When difficulties came up and I struggled with my argument and its implications, he offered a new way to approach the question. Overall, Dr. Crane's input and guidance aided in informing my argument and helping it over the research hurdles I encountered.

The independent study experience taught me more about the academic research process, in addition to honing my research skills. In such a specific, focused topic, I found that not all research could be done over internet databases and Google searches. Almost all of my sources were print sources that I had to make the effort to find in the stacks or periodicals of the library. Even in the world of academia where so many resources are becoming digitized, the ability to navigate library stacks has not become entirely extraneous. I also appreciated even simple features of the library, such as having all related books on the same shelf. I would often come to the *Beowulf* shelf for one book and leave with others that fit my topic better.

Beyond simply acquiring research skills, I also developed confidence in my own writing. When I was in disagreement with a source or an author, Dr. Crane encouraged me to pursue my own counter-argument, and attempt to justify my claims in a scholarly way. Of course, this led to more research into other sources that held my same view, or at least supported it. In the end, I felt that I had a well-supported argument that expressed and justified my personal interpretation, even if that interpretation differed from other *Beowulf* scholars. It was exciting to me that I could bring a new argument and reading into the world of *Beowulf* scholarship, legitimized with the research and studies I pursued, with the help of the University Libraries. I hope to continue contributing to academic scholarship in further research as well.