

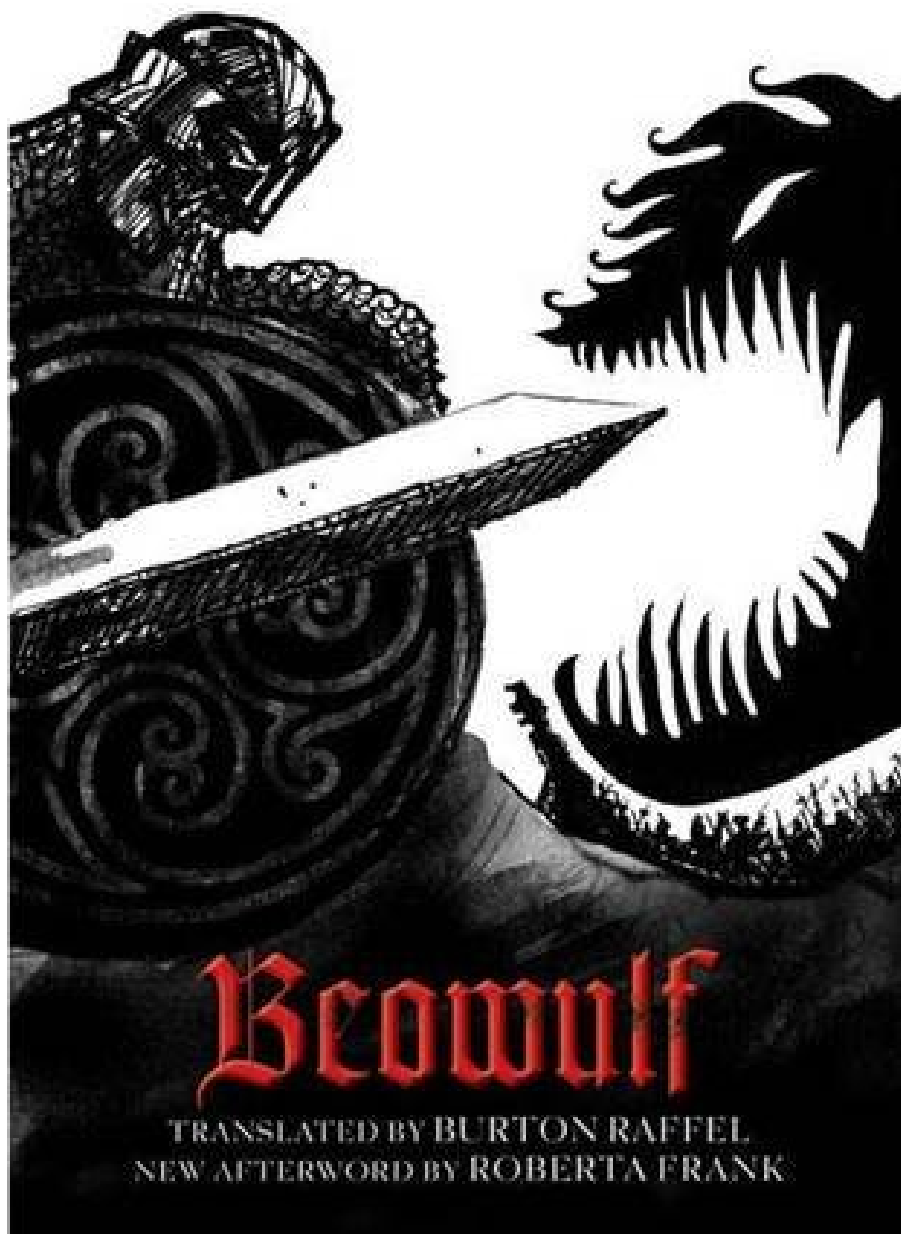
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About the Author

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From John McNamara's Introduction to *Beowulf*

Even more perplexing is the question of values and beliefs in the poem. The world of *Beowulf* is the world of heroic epic, with its legendary fights among larger-than-life figures, both human and monstrous, its scenes of feasting in great beer halls presided over by kings, its accounts of bloody feuds trapping men and women alike in cycles of violence, its praise of giving riches to loyal followers rather than amassing wealth for oneself, its moments of magic in stories of powers gained or lost—and over all, a sense of some larger force that shapes their destinies, both individual and collective. Readers have often looked upon this long-gone heroic world for a glimpse of a pagan past in Northern Europe before Christianity was brought by foreign missionaries, yet the poem is filled with references to the new religion and the power of its God. This tension between the ancient past and what was, in the time of the poet, a new worldview disturbed many romantic and nationalistic critics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They sought in *Beowulf* the origins of Germanic, including Scandinavian, culture—or at least clues from which that culture could be reconstructed. Yet many were for the most part frustrated, for they saw the epic of Northern antiquity “marred” by the intrusions of foreign beliefs and values, such as the Christianity imposed by missionaries from the Mediterranean South, and equally “marred” by the fantastic fights with monsters in the center of the poem, while the historical materials that most interested them were placed on the outer edges. In this view, the poem simply was not the poem that it should have been.

However, the great work of Friedrich Klaeber, and especially the influence of Tolkien, cited above, would change all that. In recent times, scholars have not only stressed the Christian element as integral to the poem as a whole, but they have spent enormous energy in ferreting out its sources and functions. All of which brings us back, not just to the question of the poet, but more importantly to the question of the audience. After all, the poet was composing the work for a community that already shared certain core values, though those values appear at times to emerge from a moment of cultural transition between the memory of the old and the power of the new. So, once again, we are faced with complexity, and attempts to reduce Beowulf to some single, or at least predominant, worldview cannot explain the creative tensions in this complexity.

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Before there was Game of Thrones, there was Beowulf...

SONG OF BATTLE AND KINGS

Beowulf is one of the earliest extant poems in a modern European language, composed in England before the Norman Conquest. As a social document this great epic poem is invaluable—reflecting a feudal world of heroes and monsters, blood and victory, life and death. As a work of art, it is unique. Beowulf rings with beauty, power, and artistry that have kept it alive for a thousand years. The noble simplicity of Beowulf's anonymous Anglo-Saxon singer is recaptured in this vivid translation by Burton Raffel.

Translated and with an Introduction by Burton Raffel
and with an Afterword by Roberta Frank

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9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

A Classic! Inspired Tolkien, Lewis, me...

By Hans Olaf

It's one thing to have to read this as a classroom assignment in high school and quite another to read it for the sheer fun of it decades later.

Beowulf took on completely new meaning when I learned how it had influenced Western myth and fairy tales--and C.S. Lewis and, more to the point, J.R.R. Tolkien. And it's nice I can get it for free on Amazon. There are of course other translations, but I don't mind the old "King James" translations of classics. They feel more mythic, even if I have to use the dictionary like a GPS to get back on track after I've been rerouted by a word that hasn't been used in a century (no problem there; I've loved dictionaries since I was a child, and looking up the origins of words we use daily without a clue of where they came from and what they really mean--or could mean).

Again, there are other versions available for free online, but Kindle is the way to go (though I use a Smartphone), because I can use the Kindle Software dictionary, and best of all, keep my devices' synchronized with Whispersync so I have the same bookmarks and notes on all of them.

Back to Beowulf--you should try it. But if you're unsure, Wikipedia will give you the gist of the book, and if you find yourself wanting more, download it. Can't beat the price--Free! (Though some books are too costly even when free, because they waste my time, which with only threescore and ten allotted me, is a much more precious commodity than money).

47 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

Not Beowulf for Dummies !

By TJam

I first read Beowulf, as did countless high schoolers over the years, in my senior English class; the experience was less than memorable, due in part to my teacher's insistence on using an Old English text. When I entered college the most vivid imagery I still had was of Grendel entering the mead hall and tearing the diners limb from limb.

Had I been able to also read the text in modern English in that senior class, I would have been well-prepared to tackle the OE with a deeper understanding of how this great work acts as a foundational text for all British literature from Chaucer to the Renaissance and beyond.

Burton Raffel's clear translation allows the reader to establish a connection to the allegorical and mythological constructs without having to resort to a "Beowulf for Dummies," just to get a passing grade. I am using this book in a graduate class in Horror Text and Theory, and though I am now able to read the OE with more fluency, the accessibility of this translation situates the text in a more viable position for discussion and critical analysis in an arena populated with 20th and 21st century horror. I would recommend Raffel's Beowulf to anyone as their entree into Old English Lit.; to be read along side the original text. It takes the "horror" out of ready Horror.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Classic

By Pax Romana

"Men-at-arms, remain here on the barrow, safe in your armor, to see which one of us is better in the end at bearing wounds in a deadly fray. This fight is not yours, nor is it up to any man except me to measure his strength against the monster or to prove his worth. I shall win the gold by my courage, or else mortal combat, doom of battle, will bear your lord away"

PROs:

- * Good story
- * Likeable characters
- * Perfect length
- * Amazing language
- * Influential

CONs:

- * Names of all the tribes and people can get confusing
- * Insertion of monotheistic religion into a polytheistic culture takes away immersion

"There was singing and excitement: an old reciter, a carrier of stories, recalled the early days. At times some hero made the timbered harp tremble with sweetness, or related true and tragic happenings; at times the king gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale; or a battle-scarred veteran, bowed with age, would begin to remember the martial deeds of his youth and prime and be overcome as the past welled up in his wintry heart."

Beowulf is a great Epic Poem, the first of the English language (Anglo Saxon, to be exact). It is a quintessential quest: we have a hero who sets off to a foreign land on a journey to battle supernatural foes. On his way he faces difficulty and strife, but is able to overcome and achieve everlasting glory.

The translation of Beowulf is very important; I personally read 3 different translations. I started with an older translation, struggled to understand it, moved on to a more contemporary one, and my experience was improved. About half way through the second translation, I started the relatively new Seamus Heaney translation, and Beowulf became one of my favorite works of literature ever. I am now unable to read the other two translations that I started with after reading Heaney's.

That is one of the things that makes Beowulf so great - the language. It is so over the top and unique; I can't help but to be drawn to it. I will provide one simple example out of numerous possibilities. Instead of simply saying "morning came", Beowulf reads: "The hall towered, gold-shingled and gabled, and the guest slept in it until the black raven with raucous glee announced heaven's joy, and a hurry of brightness overran the shadows."

I can't help but to be captivated by such language, and it is found all throughout Beowulf. The imagery is so realistic and detailed that it paints a thorough picture in my head of what it would be like to live in around 7th century Scandinavia, complete with lute players, mead halls, and wintry landscapes.

Beowulf is set in three parts, each of which, in my opinion, improve upon the next. Beowulf's struggle continually increases, and the stakes are continually raised. This adds a certain amount of tension that improves the quality of the poem. The third part of the poem, to me, is simply a masterpiece with its numerous allusions to bygone times... I can truly feel the sadness of the old king who lost his eldest son which Beowulf speaks of.

While reading, I couldn't help but to be amazed at how much Beowulf influenced another of my favorite

authors - J.R.R. Tolkien. This shouldn't come as a surprise, since Tolkien created his own Beowulf translation. You can find very similar themes in Beowulf and in Tolkien's works - weapons having names, people introducing themselves by naming their ancestors, lofty language, similar names (he even got the name Eomer from Beowulf) and armor/weapon types, etc. In fact, the third part of Beowulf is almost identical to the story of The Hobbit.

One of the few complaints I about Beowulf is that it can be difficult and confusing to follow all of the different tribes and the kings/soldiers of all the tribes. At first, I tried to keep them all in order, but eventually had to give up; many of the names are similar but the people are completely different and even from different time periods. Footnotes certainly help, but it still took away some enjoyment for me. My biggest complaint is the insertion of monotheistic religion (Christianity) into the Norse polytheistic culture of the time. It almost completely destroys the immersion of the story that the great language creates. There are actually entire lines devoted to praising the Christian god and bashing paganism. The characters often credit the Christian god to their victories or struggles, even though he would have been practically unknown to them at the time. It is a bit like watching a movie about ancient Greece and seeing people driving cars in the background of scenes.

Overall, Beowulf is well deserving of its placement in the Western Canon. 5/5

"You are the last of us, the only one left of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us away, sent my whole brave highborn clan to their final doom. Now I must follow them."

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