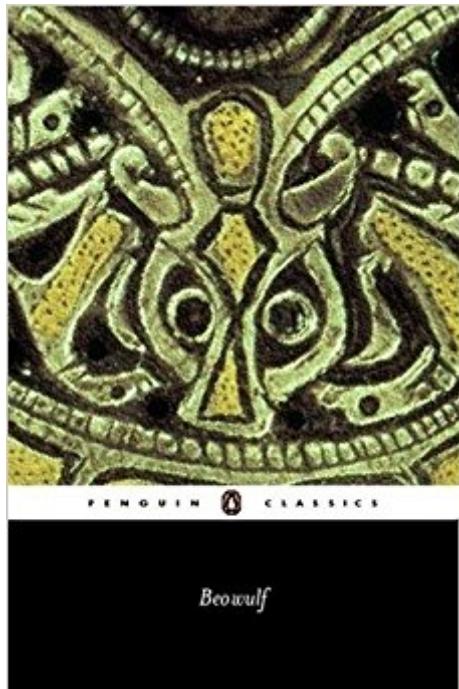


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Beowulf: A Verse Translation (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

"Alexander's translation is marked by a conviction that it is possible to be both ambitious and faithful [and] ...communicates the poem with a care which goes beyond fidelity-to-meaning and reaches fidelity of implication. May it go on ... to another half-million copies." - Tom Shippey, Bulletin of the International Association of University Professors of English

Beowulf is the greatest surviving work of literature in Old English, unparalleled in its epic grandeur and scope. It tells the story of the heroic Beowulf and of his battles, first with the monster Grendel, who has laid waste to the great hall of the Danish king Hrothgar, then with Grendel's avenging mother, and finally with a dragon that threatens to devastate his homeland. Through its blend of myth and history, Beowulf vividly evokes a twilight world in which men and supernatural forces live side by side. And it celebrates the endurance of the human spirit in a transient world.

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Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reissue edition (April 29, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140449310

ISBN-13: 978-0140449310

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #83,785 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European > Norse & Icelandic Sagas #98 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles > Epic #105 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Ancient, Classical & Medieval > Ancient & Classical

Customer Reviews

Look, I am not going to dispute the greatness of Seamus Heaney, or his awesome, magical

rendering of Beowulf. Part of its magic lies in how modern he made the poem. The thing is though that it is translation or a paraphrase. Alexander's poem is more of a modernization, rather than a translation. You are basically reading the original Beowulf, with the words updated in their spelling, or replaced when necessary with more modern words where the old ones are no longer comprehensible. He of course preserves the alliteration as much as possible, and the lines remain short. To me this method leaves the poem as it was, and merely transforms its dialect from that of 11th Century Wessex to modern international English. To be sure, this method demands more of the reader than a paraphrase does, since you have to figure out what the swan's road or the whale's way, and kennings (riddle-names) like these are. So, if you are really intrigued by this poem, which must have been intended to be the monument of its civilization, especially when you think of the number of sheep they had to kill and the expenses involved in preparing their skins, and the fact this story concerns what was supposed to be the greatest hero in the most heroic age of man, then you will want to read Alexander's rendition. As for why you would want to read Beowulf in whatever edition, the main thing is that it is the great poem of the English language. No one will dispute that Shakespeare is our language's greatest playwright, and few would dispute that the prosody of the King James Bible overwhelms that of any other prose work, or maybe even that the Lord of the Rings may be our greatest novel, but for epic poetry, ORIGINAL epic poetry, is there anything like Beowulf in English?

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