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Beowulf: The New Translation



BEOWULF

THE NEW TRANSLATION

GERALD J. DAVIS



Synopsis

J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, in his famous 1936 lecture, "Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics", said, "Beowulf is among my most valued sources. It is a work of genius, rare and surprising in the period, and it is worth studying. In Beowulf we have an historical story about the pagan past. Beowulf is not an actual picture of historic Denmark or Geatland or Sweden about 500 A.D. But it is, on a general view, a self-consistent picture, a construction bearing clearly the marks of design and thought. Beowulf is, indeed, the most successful old english heroic elegy." The origins, history and authorship of Beowulf are shrouded in uncertainty. This heroic epic probably began, as most do, with a wandering troubadour strumming a stringed instrument, sitting before a hearth-fire, and singing the verses to a spellbound audience arrayed before him. At some point, the words of the troubadour were inscribed in manuscript form, in order to preserve the story for posterity. The events depicted in this story take place during the late fifth to early sixth century. However, there is great dispute among scholars as to when the manuscript itself was actually transcribed. Tolkien believed it was written about the eighth century, while other serious experts assert it was written as late as the early 11th century. Beowulf is a rousing adventure story, filled with intrepid heroes, monsters and fire-breathing dragons, which can be listened to for the sheer enjoyment of the tale.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a masterful translation of a fantastic story. I last read Beowulf 15 years ago and it was a

pleasure to read it again. I appreciated Davis' notes at the back of the book as they put the poem in a true historical context and demonstrated the scholarly effort that went into the writing. It was a fun reading.

This puts to shame the Seamus Ennis translation, which of course got off on the wrong foot by rendering the epic introductory, "Hwaet!" - a trumpet-blast of an opener if there ever was one - as the laconic Irish farm laborers' "So," and took a long time to recover from that faux pas, no matter how argued in Seamus' notes. Ah well. Gerald Davis knows Old English, for a start, and follows both letter and tone in this fine work. No translation is ever perfect, by definition: "Tradditor il traddutori," necessarily (no translator has ever adequately grappled with Chaucer's "hende" - in both senses - Nicholas and "Prively he caught [Alysoun] by the queynte," in that delightfully bawdy "Miller's Tale," despite the easy "semantic slide" from the Middle English to the Modern English descendant of "quenyte," which one still may not put on the page without horrified deletion by bowdlerizers aplenty. Oh well). But, like Gerald Davis' version of Cervantes' "Don Quixote," this will stand by itself for some time to come. Parallel translations, now - there's an interesting pedagogic device, perhaps to be followed up later by Gerald Davis. I've probably missed his already.

As translated, the story is compelling and ironic. However, it also raises many more questions than it answers, which is of course, a good thing. Thank God for the Internet and Wikipedia, that's where many questions are answered. But many more are not. I wish that some of the historical, geographic, and demographic milieu of the tale could be covered in an appendix of the book.

Compared to the original version, which I never finished, this is readable-thank you Mr Davis. The story is timeless and should be required reading for our high school students.

In elegant and highly readable prose that reads like poetry, Gerald Davis's translation of this epic tale captures both the ethos of the times and the singularity of Beowulf's heroism, nobility and humanity. It is a powerful tale of good versus evil, of triumph and tragedy. I loved this rendition!

As in his previous translation of "Don Quixote" this scholarly, meticulously researched work displays Mr. Davis's talent for capturing the prose and passion of the original poem. I heartily recommend this book to readers who appreciate a thoughtful and intelligent translation of a classic.

I read Beowulf years ago in school. Reading it now made it extremely readable and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Recommend this book to teens and adults. Gerald Davis captures the story in a way that it came alive. Keep up the good work Mr. Davis.

After reading several translations of Beowulf, few are really noteworthy. This is one of the exceptions. Very nice reference notes.

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