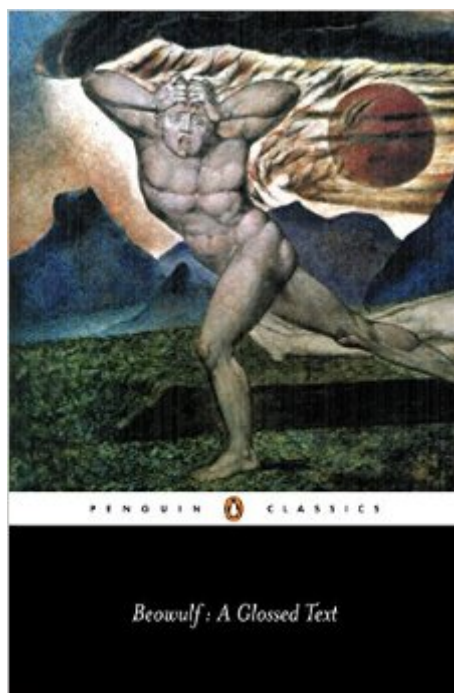


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# Beowulf: Old English Edition (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

The classic tale of monster-hunting, dragon-fighting Beowulf, here in its original Old 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 celebrates the endurance of the human spirit in a transient world. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

has linked, as equivalent editions, and for reviews, two entirely distinct products. One is a recording of David Rintoul reading a translation of "Beowulf" into modern English -- presumably Michael Alexander's "Beowulf: A Verse Translation" in the Penguin Classics series. It has been linked to a

separate volume in the Penguin Classics series, Michael Alexander's \*edition\* of the Old English (Anglo-Saxon) \*text\* of the early medieval poem. (I won't be more specific; pick a date after about 750 and before about 1020, you'll find a backer.) Since Old English is a language about as different from Modern English as the latter is from, say, German, you are going to have to be careful to figure out exactly which item the reviewers are talking about -- if they get that specific. Detailed appreciations of "Beowulf" do not constitute, to my mind, a review of any particular edition, translation, or recorded reading. (Even when I agree with them; a great poem.) Michael Alexander's text edition offers something unusual, in both the Penguin Classics series and among "Beowulf editions." It is conservatively edited -- that is, it uses consensus readings from recent critical and student editions, with no original departures in the way of conjectural emendations, etc. But instead of either a dictionary-style glossary OR a facing translation, he offers word by word glosses to each line on the page facing the Old English text. The words there are not given in the inflected or conjugated forms in which they appear in the text, but as a dictionary-style head-words. For example, in line 1590, the word "becearf" is identified by the infinitive, "beceorfan," meaning "cut off." This is actually quite convenient for a student working with a basic textbook, more so than a conventional glossary or dictionary; instead of remembering sound-laws to find the base form, \*before\* looking it up, you can check your recollection against a grammatical table, or, for the some of the odder "strong" verbs, look it up to identify the type, and then work out the details. (If you haven't studied Old English, or German, trust me; that would mean a lot to you.) Additionally, for fairly long stretches, it is possible to make out a good deal of sense with just the raw vocabulary -- although hardly enough to get a real sense of the poem. For some passages, Alexander offers footnoted translations of sentences; usually giving his solution to recognized difficulties, where the syntax is exceptionally tangled, or the train of thought depends on ideas obscure to modern readers. Although the main text does not offer information on how Alexander arrived at his readings, or suggest alternatives, there is an eleven-page list of "Manuscript Readings" indicating where unintelligible, broken, or missing words have been emended or supplemented. This is not a substitute for a fuller introductory edition, like George Jack's "Beowulf: A Student Edition" (1994; one of Alexander's sources, with similar glosses, in this case supplementing a formal glossary). And it certainly doesn't compare to Robinson and Mitchell's more comprehensive "Beowulf: An Edition With Relevant Shorter Texts" (1998), the successive revisions of Wrenn's text by Michael Bolton (fifth edition, 1997 ) or Friedrich Klaeber's venerable but invaluable "Beowulf: and The Fight at Finnsburg" (third edition, 1936; with supplements 1941, 1950). But it is not intended to be. In conjunction with a good textbook on the language, it would make a fine entry into the poem, in place

of the very limited excerpts from the 3182-line poem usually given in a "Grammar and Reader." And for those who have studied the poem in the original, it is a pleasant, and easily-handled refresher, without the constant presence of an "authoritative" voice, as in the bilingual editions of Seamus Heaney's celebrated recent translation (itself rather too literary for this purpose, actually), or Chickering's older "Beowulf: A Dual Language Edition."

This is an excellent book for those who wish to study the original language, and Anglo-Saxon verse. The editor does not include a lot of distracting material, nor are there deep discussions of the theological, allegorical, sociological, etc etc, implications of the poem. Instead, what you have is a book which has the original text on the left pages, and glosses on right pages. Not 100% of the words are glossed, such as "and". The glosses are all standardized as nom. singular nouns and inf. verbs. This means that the reader should know, or perhaps will learn from reading, the grammar of the language. A lot of people seem to know about Beowulf, but have no clue what it is. A lot of people also consider Old English to be some quaint "high mode" of English, spoken by Knights in Shining Armor. Some are "forced" to study the poem, in school. And there are those who want to study the poem, for whatever reason. This book should be useful to all who are interested, or need to be interested.

Indeed, this is an indispensable volume to any scholar of Anglo-Saxon studies, language, and verse; this is an especially needed book for the aspiring Anglo-Saxon Translator like myself, and one can literally read the original Beowulf easily (with at least a prior familiarity with Old English in general obviously helping) with the aid of vocabulary glossed on the facing page; this experience takes intelligence, and the glosses are given in their Nominative forms, so you will have to rule in what the inflection entails, though this is not hard for any with poetic intuition or experience in medieval-linguistics/medieval-philology. Like I said, with a prior knowledge of Old English, this book is a MUST HAVE and wondrous addition to my studies, and I know it will graciously aid my verse translations of Beowulf, which will appear in my debut book.... Get this book medievalists and Scholars of Anglo-Saxon! You will be delighted to do so Thorrin Jonsson

I am a teacher of English, and I've found this tape invaluable for helping students appreciate and understand Beowulf. David Rintoul, the narrator, has a beautiful and clear voice, and makes the epic come to life for modern readers.

Beowulf is the longest and oldest Germanic Epic that has survived. Our vision of the Ancient Germanic world is coloured by the Icelandic prose writers of the 13th and 14th Centuries: at a time when Old Germanic culture was dissolving into the Feudal Era. With a composition date of around 800 A.D. this national poem of the Saxons takes us back much further than the sagas do; other than a few stuck-on references to God, the whole thing is entirely pagan Germanic. It is a real miracle that this epic has survived for us! We too can enter the word-world of the old Saxon warriors. The best way to do this is of course to read the real thing: i.e. the epic poem in Anglo-Saxon. This heavily glossed edition allows you to do just that! You will need to know a few other things though, such as declensions and conjugations, but they are easily learnt: '-a' is genitive plural, and '-um' is dative plural; '-on' is the past plural ending (so, 'writ-on' means 'they wrote'). The rest of the grammar is more or less like that of Shakespeare. About 67% of the words in the epic are still used in modern English, so you'll be able to de-modernize your language very quickly! Pick up your 'bill and byrnum' and go to battle standing beside your ancient ancestors!

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