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Beowulf (Signet Classics)



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

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.

Raffel's translation of "Beowulf" to me seems more vivid and poetic in its language than Seamus Heaney's now more famous one. The images he provides stand out as clear and beautiful pictures, making a deep sensory impression where Heaney's poetry seems to employ at times more abstract, at times more mundane, less inventive language. This is not to say that Heaney's translation lacks poetic beauty--it certainly does not. Yet, browsing both editions, comparing various passages, I found that Raffel's rendition almost always struck a deeper chord with me, appealing to the senses and the imagination more strongly. Raffel's translation is not available in the same beautifully bound, larger-print, dual language edition as Heaney's, yet I still find that it gives me greater reading pleasure. As to accuracy, I do suspect that Raffel might be granting himself somewhat more poetic license than Heaney does, and yet, neither translation strays significantly from the original. I prefer Robert Fitzgerald's poetic, somewhat less accurate translation of the "Odyssey" to Richmond Lattimore's for similar reasons.

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 . 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).

Now that I have used both the Raffel edition and the Heaney edition, I would recommend Raffel's for the high school classroom. Raffel's edition offers a major difference that works wonders for the 9th and 10th grade psyche: short chapters. The narrative is chunked thoughtfully and facilitates reading assignments. Raffel does a great job with the syntax and though the diction is a little less interesting, the poem doesn't suffer too much there. Lastly, unless you are going to do a lot of work with the Old English available in the Heaney edition, the side-by-side format hampers class discussion, causing kids to flip more pages to find support.

I first read Beowulf in High School. Typical story of hero come to save the day but get's caught up in something greater than himself. I read it again for an Executive Officer class and came to see that when one assumes they recognize the obvious problem they may not see the underlying problem - which is often far more serious.

The author of this translation of Beowulf explained how this book was translated through the years. The author of the actual book is unknown and several people through the years have tried to come as close to a precise translation as possible. This translator referred to as many prior translations as possible in addition to the original transcript that had missing parts. His explanation of the process, and his assumptions are well thought out and help in the reading of Beowulf.

The great thing about OLD Classical Literature is that it never grows OLD. When you were assigned to read this in High School it was school work and work is not what a book like this should be. I think, now that I'm an old geezer, that life experience makes the reading of classics so much more relevant and interesting and enjoyable. Old people read for enjoyment so why not revisit some things for enjoyment now that you're old enough to enjoy.

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