

Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

Full Name: *Beowulf*

Short Name: *Beowulf*

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Alice Jorgensen jorgena@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: MT

Year JF/SF/JS/SS: SS

Module Content:

Beowulf is the most famous and arguably the greatest monument of Old English poetry, though it is in some ways a curious text – an English national epic starring Scandinavians; a Christian poem about pagans; a serious examination of political and moral themes that revolves around three fights with monsters. Since the nineteenth century it has been translated repeatedly, into both poetry and prose, and the great variety of modern responses has illustrated the many ways it can be read, debated, appropriated, and resisted. In this module we will read through the poem section by section, translating parts from the original, evaluating the approaches of some contemporary translators, and commenting in detail on themes and technique. Matters for discussion will include: the place of *Beowulf* in a manuscript that also includes *The Wonders of the East* and the OE *Judith*; the date of the poem (a controversial topic); the representation of pagans and paganism; the poem's approach to history and the past; the role of women; parallels in archaeology; and modern translations such as those of Seamus Heaney and Maria Dahvana Headley.

You do NOT need to have previously studied Old English in order to take this module. However, you DO need to be prepared to learn something about the language, and to puzzle out parts of the poem using on-page glossing, comparison with published translations, and the lecturer's help. You will be required to submit weekly short translation passages and will receive 10/10 if all translations are completed.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module students should be able to

- translate passages of Old English poetry using the resources of a modern edition
- comment in detail on the language and poetic form of *Beowulf*
- discuss the *Beowulf* manuscript
- show knowledge of critical debates relating to *Beowulf*
- analyse the thematic content of the poem, relating it to appropriate historical and literary contexts

Learning Aims:

- read *Beowulf*, building on students' different levels of previous experience to work as far as possible with the original text
- develop skills in analyzing Old English poetry
- explore *Beowulf* from a variety of critical and contextual perspectives
- examine critical approaches to key questions such as the interpretation of the monsters
- explore Early Medieval culture, in particular the representation of a heroic age

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 2
- 10% weekly translations – participation mark (10/10 if all translations completed on time)
- 90% two-hour examination

Preliminary Reading List:

Baker, Peter S., *Honour, Exchange and Violence in 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013)

Bjork, Robert E. and John D. Niles (eds.), *A 'Beowulf' Handbook* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997)

Fulk, R.D., Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, with a foreword by Helen Damico, 4th edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008)

Garmonsway, G.N., and Jacqueline Simpson (trans.), *Beowulf and its Analogues* (London: Dent, 1968)

Headley, Maria Dahvana, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (New York: FSG, 2020)

Heaney, Seamus, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999)

Jack, George (ed.), *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994)

Leneghan, Francis, *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020)

Neidorf, Leonard, *The Art and Thought of the 'Beowulf'-Poet* (

Nicholson, Lewis E. (ed.), *An Anthology of 'Beowulf' Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971)

Niles, John D., *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. P., 1983)

Orchard, Andy, *A Critical Companion to 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge: D. A. Brewer, 2003)

Swanton, Michael (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf*, rev. edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

Please note:

- **Curricular information is subject to change.**
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**