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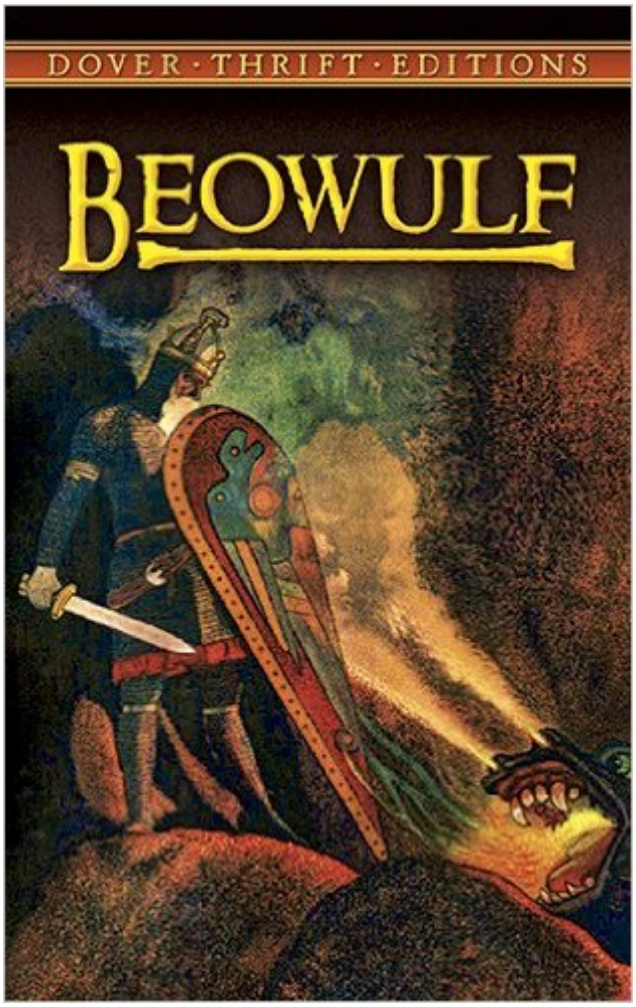

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Synopsis

One of the most universally studied of the English classics, Beowulf is considered the finest heroic poem in Old English. Written ten centuries ago, it celebrates the character and exploits of Beowulf, a young nobleman of the Geats, a people of southern Sweden.Beowulf first rescues the royal house of Denmark from two marauding monsters, then returns to rule his people for 50 years, ultimately losing life in a battle to defend the Geats from a dragon’s rampage. The poem combines mythical elements, Christian and pagan sensibilities, and actual historical figures and events in a narrative that ranges from vivid descriptions of fierce fighting and detailed portrayals of court life to earnest considerations of social and moral dilemmas. Originally written in Old English verse, it is presented here in an authoritative prose translation by R. K. Gordon.

Book Information

Series: Dover Thrift Editions

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications; 1St Edition edition (September 30, 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486272648

ISBN-13: 978-0486272641

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.2 x 8.2 inches

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Customer Reviews

I once made the joke that Grendel was the first beo-degradable monster in history...GROAN!When I gave this joke to an English professor, he used it in class, and promptly returned it to me.Okay. I’ll accept that. But, Beowulf deserves the kind of serious attention that would prompt people to want to make bad jokes about it (unimportant things are ignored; only important things are held up in jest).Beowulf is an old poem--often considered the first in English. This is technically not true, for linguistic and other reasons (where the demarcations of English beginnings fall are debatable; also there is the fact that there are older poems, just not epic poems). An epic is a long, narrative poem, a literary form undervalued today, but which was probably the equivalent of a Cecil B. DeMille

production in more ancient times. The Illiad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, Gilgamesh--all these are epic poems. Generally, they recount heroic deeds, and most often were composed and intended as oral history. Beowulf consists of 3182 existing lines.Scholars also disagree on the 'British heritage' of the poem, many believing it more likely to be an import from Anglo-Saxon European homelands than a composition original to the Britain. The tale does portray two leaders, Hrothgar, leader of the Danes, and Beowulf, leader of the Geats, a Swedish tribe. These are interconnected through generations of family intermarriages, and Beowulf because of this loyalty takes his men to help defend Hrothgar's home against the monster Grendel.The tale of Beowulf involves heroism, sacrifice, loyalty, warfare, conflict and resolution--all the elements that go into a good action feature.

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