



Beowulf: The New Translation

Gerald J. Davis

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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.

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