

**MODULE CODE:** CSEN7028  
**TITLE:** *Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Heroic*  
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**LEVEL:** 7  
**CREDITS:** 20

**TEACHING METHODS:** Seminars 10%  
Directed Learning 90%

**JACS CODE:** Q320

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### AIM(S)

- To provide students with a detailed knowledge and understanding of the ‘heroic’ in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, underpinned by a range of theoretical approaches.
- To critically examine ‘Old English’ vernacular writing.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding of a variety of literary and artistic works from Anglo-Saxon England;
- demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the values and preoccupation of Anglo-Saxon culture in England;
- show a high level of awareness of the ways in which this culture and its literature, and art more broadly, relate wider socio-political contexts and particularly to the nature of Anglo-Saxon Christianity;
- demonstrate theoretically informed awareness of the nature of the ‘heroic’ within Anglo-Saxon culture in England;
- demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding of the ways in which Anglo-Saxon history and culture have had a marked influence on modern perceptions of Englishness and Britishness.

### CONTENT

- This module will explore the nature of the ‘heroic’ within a wide range of Anglo-Saxon texts, setting those texts within their broader social-political and religious context. Contexts to be explored will include:
  - the Anglo-Saxon migration and settlement;
  - conversion to Christianity;
  - the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic, including manuscript illumination and stone sculpture.
- The ‘heroic’ is a central theme of the literature of Anglo-Saxon England. It is used in the literature of warfare such as *The Battle of Maldon*, and also has an important place

in religious and meditative writing such as *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Wanderer* where the pagan heroic ethic is debated and redefined. The text in which the heroic comes under most scrutiny is *Beowulf*, which is used as the focal point for this module.

- All the texts studied were written in the vernacular of Anglo-Saxon England, known to modern scholars as ‘Old English’, and the module aims to give students knowledge of the original texts. However, the essential texts are made available in Modern English translations, with the original Old English texts in parallel, and these parallel text editions form the basis for much of the reading for the course.
- The module will also consider the impact of, and critical responses to, the ways in which Anglo-Saxon history and culture have had a marked influence on modern perceptions of Englishness and Britishness.

## ASSESSMENT

### Course work (100%)

One Assignment 5000 words (100%)

The topic of the assignment is chosen by the student in consultation with the module tutor but must be related to the content of the module.

[Sample assignment: ‘Consider the view that Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry presents "a complex vision of reality whereby conflicting desires and codes of conduct meet"’ (John Niles).]

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Essential

Swanton, M. ed. and trans. *Beowulf*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Welch, M. *Anglo-Saxon England*, English Heritage, London: Batsford, 1994.

Other primary texts to be studied include, *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Wanderer*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and selections from Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*. These and other texts are provided in the Module Reader, supplied at the beginning of term.

### Recommended

Backhouse, J. Turner, D.H. and Webster, L. eds, *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966 1066*, London: The British Museum, 1984.

Baker, P. S. *Introduction to Old English*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Brown, M. *Manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon Age*, London: The British Library, 2007.

Calder, D.G and Allen, M.B. J. eds. *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976.

Campbell, J. John, E. and Wormald, P. *The Anglo-Saxons*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1982.

Damico, H. and Hennessey Olsen, A. eds, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Dodwell, C. *Anglo-Saxon Art: a new perspective*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.

Godden, M. and Lapidge, M. eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Greenfield, S.B and Calder, D.G. *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, London: New York University Press, 1986.

- Henderson, G. *From Durrow to Kells: the insular gospel books 650–800*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1987.
- Higham, N. *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*, London: Seaby, 1992.
- Magennis, H. *The Cambridge Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Mitchell, B. *An Invitation to Old English and Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Mitchell, B. and Robinson, F.C. *A Guide to Old English*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- Nicholson, L.E. and Warwick Frese, D. eds. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: essays in appreciation*, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- O'Brien O'Keefe, K. ed., *Reading Old English Texts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Pearsall, D. *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, London: Routledge, 1977.
- Shippey, T.A. *Old English Verse*, London: Hutchinson, 1972.
- Stenton, F. *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Webster, L. and Backhouse, J. eds. *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600–800*, London: The British Museum, 1991.
- Wilson, D.M. *Anglo-Saxon Art: from the seventh century to the Norman Conquest*, London: The Overlook Press, 1986.
- Wrenn, C. L. *A Study of Old English Literature*, London: Harrap, 1967.



Beowulf, heroic poem, the highest achievement of Old English literature and the earliest European vernacular epic. It deals with events of the early 6th century and is believed to have been composed between 700 and 750. Although originally untitled, it was later named after the Scandinavian hero Beowulf, whose exploits and character provide its connecting theme. There is no evidence of a historical Beowulf, but some characters, sites, and events in the poem can be historically verified. The poem did not appear in print until 1815. It is preserved in a single manuscript that dates to circa 1000 Anglo-Saxon anthroponymy and heroic legend 555. Anglo-Saxon child was given a dithematic name that alliterated with the name of one or both of its parents and consisted of name-themes derived from one or both. 20 For a lucid discussion of probabilism and the necessity of its application in Old English studies, see R. D. Fulk, "On Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of Beowulf," *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), 1-26. The influence of Fulk's exposition upon the methodology and terminology of the present essay is pervasive and profound.

Anglo-Saxons and Beowulf. 1. Unit 1: British Legends • Unit 1 will cover from Beowulf to Arthurian Legends. • Unit 1 will end in an easy research paper. 12. Anglo-Saxon Civilization • Common language • Shared a heroic ideal; set of traditional heroes • Admired men of outstanding courage • Loyalty to leader and tribe • Fierce personal valor. • Mistakes in translations • Misunderstanding out-of-date slang • Anglo-Saxon England was being Christianized, so many texts show a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs. • We often see an invocation of God as the "Almighty Lord" followed closely by mention of pagan gods and monsters. • This code was derived from the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic roots, and called for strength, courage, and loyalty in warriors.