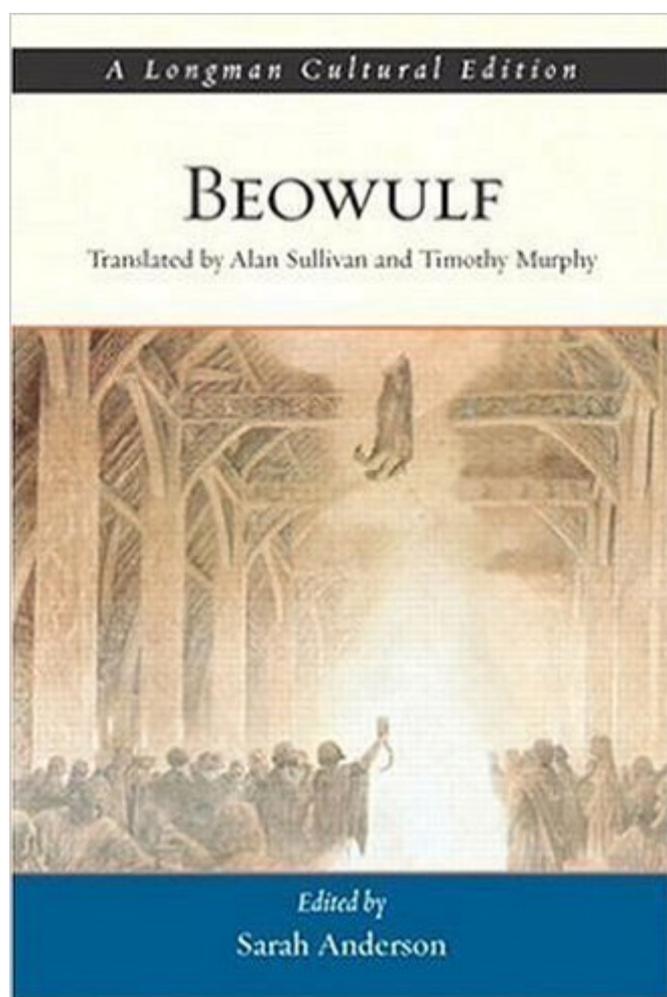


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Beowulf, A Longman Cultural Edition



Synopsis

From Longman's new Cultural Editions Series, *Beowulf*, edited by Sarah Anderson and translated by Alan Sullivan and Timothy Murphy, includes the complete work and contextual materials on the early medieval age. ^ ^

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alan Sullivan and Tim Murphy's new translation of *Beowulf* is by far the best of the four translations I've read. (The others are the versions by Heaney, Rebsamen and Gummere, as well as selections from various others over the years.) If you're a general reader who's only likely to read one *Beowulf*, this is the one. And if you're a teacher who's deciding which translation to assign, I urge you to compare several passages at random from Sullivan and Murphy's version with the same passages from other versions. I'm confident you'll choose Sullivan and Murphy as well. (The wealth of literary and historical background material compiled by Sarah Anderson of Princeton is another reason why this edition is perfect for classroom use, but I'll focus here on the poem itself.) There are several reasons why Sullivan and Murphy succeed so well. First, although the Old English of *Beowulf* is vastly different from modern English, Sullivan and Murphy have done a good job of approximating the sound of the original for the modern ear. They use a four-stress line (with a pause, or "caesura," between the second and third stresses) like the original. They also use strong alliteration like the original. (Typically in Old English verse, the third stressed syllable in a line begins with the same sound as one or both of the first two stressed syllables in that line. Sullivan and Murphy relax that

pattern a bit, to avoid the stilted word choices that characterize some translations. But the strong alliteration can clearly be heard throughout their translation.) By contrast, though Heaney also uses a four-stress line, he greatly mutes the alliteration and the mid-line pause so that they often are scarcely noticeable.

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