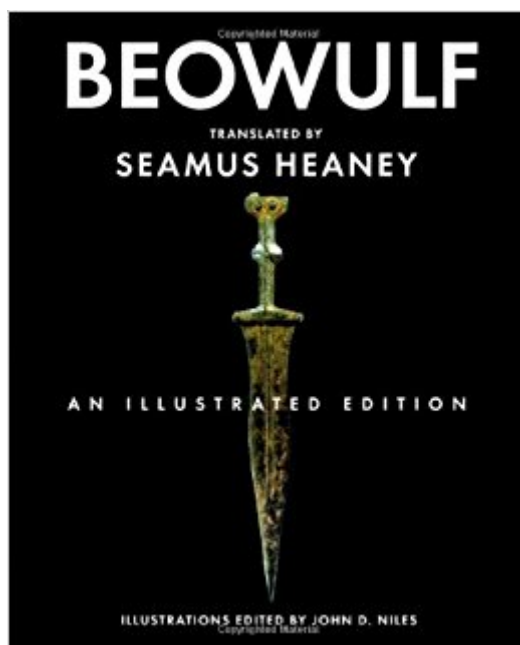


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# Beowulf: An Illustrated Edition



## Synopsis

Seamus Heaney's best-selling *Beowulf* is now wedded to more than one hundred glorious images. Composed toward the end of the first millennium, *Beowulf* is the elegiac narrative of the Scandinavian hero who saves the Danes from the seemingly invincible monster Grendel and, later, from Grendel's mother. Drawn to what he has called the "four-squareness of the utterance" in *Beowulf* and its immense emotional credibility Seamus Heaney gives the great epic convincing reality. But how to visualize the poet's story has always been a challenge for modern-day readers. In *Beowulf: An Illustrated Edition*, John D. Niles, a specialist in Old English literature, provides visual counterparts to Heaney's remarkable translation. More than one hundred full-page illustrations—Viking warships, chain mail, lyres, spearheads, even a reconstruction of the Great Hall—make visible *Beowulf*'s world and the elemental themes of his story: death, divine power, horror, heroism, disgrace, devotion, and fame. This mysterious world is now transformed into one of material splendor as readers view its elegant goblets, dragon images, and finely crafted gold jewelry against the backdrop of the Danish landscape of its origins. 80 color and 41 black-and-white illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This version of *Beowulf* has a great deal to offer to the reader in terms of its sound, content, and visuals. I started by reading the section of the introduction entitled "The Poem." It gives the historical background of the *Beowulf* manuscript, and more importantly it helps the reader know what to look

for in the structure of the text. For example, I looked for the "three archetypal sites of fear" described by Heaney: the "barricaded night-house," the "infested underwater current," and the "reptile-haunted rocks of a wilderness" when I read the poetry about Beowulf's heroic deeds fighting Grendel, Grendel's Mother, and the dragon. In the next section "About This Translation," Heaney describes his patterns for the alliteration that give the poem its distinctive sound. I am a museum lover, so I enjoyed the pictures of swords and the wonderful artifacts found at the burial sites and in the bogs. I found myself showing some of them to others. My dentist admired the picture of a metal boar meant to illustrate decorations on war gear. I also found myself showing off some of the pictures of gold pendants and necklaces to various people to explain how a gold hoard was an important sign of civilization and prosperity in the culture of the Danes and the Geats. At the end of the book, in an "Afterword," Professor Niles writes about visualizing the narrative and explains his rationale for choosing the various types of illustrations. For example, the outdoor photos that illustrate concepts such as "night-shapes" at sunset are meant to establish a scene in the poem or to create an analogue to it according to Niles. When I came upon an instance of two textual pages together without an illustration or a photo, I missed seeing one there. To me that proves that the visuals did illuminate the text.

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