



## COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
<b><i>Beowulf</i>: Reading the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Literature</b> <b><i>Beowulf</i>: Anglų-saksų herojinės literatūros skaitymai</b>	

Lecturer(s)	Department(s) where the course unit (module) is delivered
<b>Coordinating:</b> Rūta Šileikytė Zukienė <b>Other</b>	Institute for the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic, Centre for Scandinavian Studies

Study cycle	Type of the course unit
BA programme	Optional

Mode of delivery	Semester or period when it is delivered	Language of instruction
Seminars	Spring semester	English

Requisites	
<b>Prerequisites:</b> C1—C2 level of English	<b>Co-requisites (if relevant):</b> None

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5 ECTS	130 hours	32	98

Purpose of the course unit
<p>This course provides an in-depth reading of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem <i>Beowulf</i>, a key text in the European Middle Ages and widely regarded as the finest example of Old English literature. The course aims to introduce students to the embellished and elaborate language of <i>Beowulf</i>, its complex history, intricate composition, and the broad socio-cultural context of the early Germanic world that produced it.</p> <p>To appreciate the poem's archaic character and closely follow its intricate composition, the epic will be read in its original Old English. We will also read and discuss selected scholarly works on <i>Beowulf</i> that highlight contemporary debates on its form, meaning, and connections with other medieval literary traditions, such as Old Icelandic sagas, Old and Middle Irish legends and myths, and Old Saxon Christian literature. The course will additionally explore <i>Beowulf's</i> influence on modern literature, from its profound impact on J.R.R. Tolkien's mythopoeia, to the bleak world of J. Gardner's philosophical novel <i>Grendel</i>. To develop their philological analysis and research skills, the students will be asked to write a detailed commentary on a selected passage from <i>Beowulf</i>, focusing on its poetic diction, thematic motifs, and offering their interpretation on the passage's significance within the overall structure of the poem.</p> <p>More broadly, the course aims to develop students' skills in analytical, critical, and creative thinking, with a focus on maintaining accuracy and high-quality results.</p>

Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
<p>Having completed the course, the students will be able:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– to read <i>Beowulf</i> in the original Old English language and to analyse, interpret and evaluate it in the wider context of world literature, using appropriate terminology and methods, and paying special attention to its poetic diction, alliteration, variation and the formulaic character of its language;</li> <li>– to situate <i>Beowulf</i> in terms of its date, provenance, and authorship within a wider context of medieval English literature; to compare the poem with its sources and analogues in other early Germanic and Celtic cultures;</li> <li>– to discuss the main issues pertinent to the contemporary scholarly debates on the oral-formulaic composition of the poem, the interplay between pagan and Christian elements in <i>Beowulf</i>, the issues related to gender roles as well as the socio-cultural context depicted in the story (aspects of geography, history, public policy, art, mentality and self-awareness, customs and traditions, everyday communication conventions, etc.);</li> <li>– to discuss the reception of <i>Beowulf</i> in modern literature and media;</li> <li>– to conduct independently linguistic, literary and/or interdisciplinary research applying the acquired philological knowledge and skills in practice; to write a commentary on a specific passage from the poem in English, taking into account the communication intention, addressee, etc.</li> <li>– to use modern information technologies, data resources and research resources to conduct linguistic and literary analysis of the Anglo-Saxon literary text and present the results of analysis and/or interpretation to the public in order to contribute to the practical applicability of English philology studies (e-<i>Beowulf</i>, Bosworth-Toller’s Anglo-Saxon dictionary, Oxford English Dictionary, Historical thesaurus of the OED);</li> <li>– on a more general level, to perceive the Old English language, and the Anglo-Saxon poetic language in particular, as a phenomenon relevant for scientific</li> </ul>	<p>Reading and translating from Old English; oral presentations; preparatory reading for in-class discussions; individual research on chosen aspects of the language and the interpretation of the poem.</p>	<p>Cumulative evaluation:</p> <p><u>oral presentation</u>: discussion of a scholarly article (20 %);</p> <p><u>course paper</u>: a detailed commentary on a selected passage from <i>Beowulf</i> (80 %).</p>



10. Writing the course paper (a detailed commentary on a chosen passage from the poem).								24	<i>provided at the beginning of the course.</i>
<b>Total: 130</b>			<b>32</b>					<b>32</b>	<b>98</b>
									<b>3. Writing a course paper: a detailed commentary on a selected passage of the poem.</b>

Assessment strategy	Weight ,%	Deadline	Assessment criteria
<b>An oral presentation:</b> a discussion of a scholarly article.	20 %	To be agreed individually	<p><b>Requirements for the presentation:</b></p> <p><b>Duration:</b> 20–30 mins.</p> <p><b>Content:</b> 1) Introduce the main problem discussed in the article, briefly tell us about the more general context of the debate that surrounds it (who are the most important scholars in the field, what studies/books they have written);</p> <p>2) Discuss the main arguments and findings of the study, focusing on the most memorable/interesting/provoking statements and examples. Highlight the relationship of the article to other studies in the field;</p> <p>3) Express your evaluation of the material, arguments and debate under consideration. Provide a few questions to your colleagues to initiate the discussion about the material.</p> <p><b>Assessment criteria:</b> Ability to read the material critically and analytically, ability to present the flow of arguments effectively to the class, careful planning and timing, logical structuring, rapport with and involvement of the audience, correct language usage.</p>
<b>A course paper:</b> a detailed commentary on a selected passage from <i>Beowulf</i> .	80 %	Exam days	<p><b>Length:</b> 1500–2000 words (4–6 pages).</p> <p><b>Font:</b> Times New Roman, <b>font size:</b> 12, <b>spacing:</b> 1.5 lines.</p> <p><b>Form of delivery:</b> upload the work in PDF format to VMA Moodle.</p> <p><b>Extract:</b> consider choosing a passage of 20–50 lines of length.</p> <p><b>Content:</b> 1) <b>Introduction:</b> briefly state the importance of the chosen passage in the poem; 2) discuss the <b>poetic diction</b> in the passage: comment on all instances of poetic synonyms, compounds, formulas, kennings, etc. that you are able to find in the text; 3) comment on all <b>names of places, tribes and characters</b> in the text; 4) comment on all important <b>historical, social, cultural</b></p>

			<p><b>elements</b> mentioned or described in the text; 5)  <b>Bibliography</b> (please follow the style sheet provided).</p> <p><b>Assessment criteria:</b> Ability to collect topic-relevant material and discuss it effectively and coherently. Ability to synthesize and critically evaluate different sources. Ability to follow the requirements for the content, length and format of the essay. Ability to follow academic requirements for source referencing and bibliography. Correct language usage.</p> <p><b>Academic integrity: any form of plagiarism (verbatim, patchwriting, etc.) detected in the paper will result in 0 (zero) grade for the whole course.</b></p>
<p><b>Values of the ten-point grading scale</b></p> <p><b>10 (Excellent)</b> Excellent, exceptional knowledge and skills. The level of evaluation. 95–100 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>9 (Very good)</b> Sound, good knowledge and skills. The level of synthesis. 85–94 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>8 (Good)</b> Better than average knowledge and skills. The level of analysis. 75–84 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>7 (Average)</b> Average knowledge and skills, there are minor mistakes. The level of knowledge application. 65–74 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>6 (Satisfactory)</b> Knowledge and skills are worse than average. The level of knowledge and comprehension. 55–64 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>5 (Weak)</b> Knowledge and skills meet the minimum requirements. The level of knowledge and comprehension. 51–54 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>4 (Insufficient)</b> The minimum requirements are not met. 39–50 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>3 (Insufficient)</b> The minimum requirements are not met. 26–38 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>2 (Insufficient)</b> The minimum requirements are not met. 13–25 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>1 (Insufficient)</b> The minimum requirements are not met. 1–12 % of the set study goals have been achieved.</p> <p><b>Attendance:</b> Students are required to attend all seminars. Those who miss more than 35% of the seminars (11 out of 32) without a valid reason (e.g., illness documented by a doctor’s note) will not be allowed to take the final exam.</p>			

### Course literature

Author (-s)	Publishing year	Title	Issue of a periodical or volume of a publication	Publishing house or web link
<b>Required reading</b>				
Fulk, R. D.; Bjork, Robert E.; Niles, John D., eds.	2008	<i>Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg.</i> Foreword by Helen Damico.		Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: Toronto UP

<b>Secondary literature</b>				
Bjork, Robert E. and John D. Niles, eds.	1997	<i>A Beowulf Handbook</i>		Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
Donoghue, Daniel	2004	<i>Old English Literature: A Short Introduction</i>		Malden (Mass.): Blackwell
Fry, Donald K., ed.	1968	<i>The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays</i>		Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
Godden, Malcolm and Michael Lapidge, eds.	2013	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature</i>		Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Heaney, Seamus, tr.	2000	<i>Beowulf</i>		London: Faber and Faber
Magoun, Francis P.	1968	“Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry” in <i>The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays</i> , edited by Donald K. Fry, pp. 83–113		Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
Neidorf, Leonard	2017	“Unferth’s Ambiguity and the Trivialization of Germanic Legend”	<i>Neophilologus</i> (2017) 101, pp. 439–454. DOI 10.1007/s11061-017-9523-y	
O’Brien O’Keeffe, Katherine	2017	“Diction, Variation, the Formula” in <i>A Beowulf Handbook</i> , edited by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, pp. 85–104		Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
O’Donoghue, Heather, ed.	1999	<i>Beowulf: the fight at Finnsburh</i> / translated by Kevin Crossley-Holland		Oxford: Oxford University Press
Orchard, Andy	2013	“Beowulf” in <i>The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature</i> , edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, pp. 137–158		Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Robinson, Orrin W.	1992	<i>Old English and Its Closest Relatives: A Survey of the Earliest Germanic Languages</i>		Stanford: Stanford University Press
Russom, Geoffrey	1987	<i>Old English Meter and Linguistic Theory</i>		Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press
Scowcroft, Mark R.	1999	“The Irish Analogues to <i>Beowulf</i> ”	<i>Speculum</i> , Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 22–64.	
Tolkien, John R.R.	1968	“ <i>Beowulf</i> : The Monsters and the Critics” in <i>The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays</i> , edited		Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

		by Donald K. Fry, pp. 8–56.	
<b>Recommended reading</b>			
Kiernan, Kevin, ed.		<i>Electronic Beowulf 4.0</i>	ebeowulf.uky.edu
Kiernan, Kevin		<i>Beowulf Bibliography, 1990–2012</i>	www.uky.edu/~kiernan/Bib10/
		<i>Bosworth-Toller's Anglo-Saxon dictionary</i>	https://bosworthtoller.com/
		<i>OED</i>	Electronic resource at VU library.
		<i>Historical Thesaurus of the OED</i>	Electronic resource at VU library.

Last updated: 11 November, 2024.