COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
***Beowulf*: Reading the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Literature** *Beowulf*: Anglų-saksų herojinės literatūros skaitymai	

Lecturer	Department where the course unit (module) is delivered
Dr. Rūta Šileikytė-Zukienė	**Institute for the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic** Centre for Scandinavian Studies

Study cycle	Type of the course unit (module)
BA programme	Elective

Mode of delivery	Period when the course unit (module) is delivered	Language(s) of instruction
Seminars	Spring semester	English

Requirements for students	
Prerequisites: C1—C2 level of English	**Additional requirements (if any):** –

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

Purpose of the course unit
This course provides an in-depth reading of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, widely regarded as the finest example of Old English literature. To appreciate the poem's archaic character and composition, *Beowulf* will be read in its original Old English. The course introduces students to its elaborate poetic language, complex history and the broad socio-cultural context of the early Germanic world that produced it. We will also read and discuss selected scholarly works on *Beowulf* 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 *Beowulf*'s enduring influence on modern literature, from its profound impact on J. R. R. Tolkien's mythopoeia to the bleak philosophical world of John Gardner's novel *Grendel*. To develop their philological and interpretative skills, students will write a detailed commentary on a selected passage, focusing on its poetic diction, thematic motifs and significance within the poem's overall structure.

More broadly, the course aims to foster students' analytical, critical, and creative thinking, with a focus on academic precision and intellectual depth.

Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to: 1) **Read and analyse *Beowulf*** in the original Old English, applying appropriate philological and literary methods with attention to diction, alliteration, variation, and formulaic style.	Close reading of *Beowulf* in Old English; seminar-style discussion and student-led analysis.	Attendance and active participation. Course paper.
2) Contextualise the poem within medieval English literature and compare it with related works from other early Germanic and Celtic traditions.	Close reading of the poem in Old English, preparatory reading for in-class debate and interpretation.	Article presentation and discussion facilitation.
3) Engage critically with major scholarly debates concerning oral-formulaic composition, the interaction of pagan and Christian elements, gender roles, and the broader socio-cultural milieu of the poem.	Oral presentations, preparatory reading for in-class debate and interpretation.	Article presentation and discussion facilitation. Course paper.
4) Conduct independent research in linguistic, literary, or interdisciplinary contexts, producing a detailed commentary on a selected passage.	Individual research on the selected aspects of the poem's language, structure, and meaning.	Course paper.

Content: breakdown of the topics	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Exercises	Laboratory work	Internship/work placement	**Contact hours**	**Self-study hours**	**Tasks for individual work**
1. Introduction. Old English orthography and pronunciation.			2				**2**	**4**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
2. The historical context of *Beowulf*. History of the manuscript. Palaeographic observations. The debate over the dating of *Beowulf*.			2				**2**	**4**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
3. Old English grammar review: noun, pronoun and adjective declensions, strong and weak verb conjugations. Ways of word formation. Poetic synonymy and the use of poetic compounds in *Beowulf*.			4				**4**	**8**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
4. Germanic alliterative verse. Eduard Sievers' system of OE metrical patterns.			2				**2**	**4**	Read the assigned materials;*

Metrical theories of A. J. Bliss, B. R. Hutcheson, D. L. Hoover, and G. Russom.									prepare for seminar discussions.
5. The oral-formulaic character of the Old English poetry. Milman Parry's, Albert Bates Lord's and Francis P. Magoun's works on the oral-formulaic nature of narrative poetry.			2				**2**	**4**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
6. Early Germanic parallels and analogues to *Beowulf.* The influence of Christian learning: use of biblical language and imagery in the poem.			4				**4**	**8**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
7. The reception of *Beowulf* in modern literature: J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, John Gardner's *Grendel*.			4				**4**	**8**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
8. Close reading of the poem in the original.			12				**12**	**26**	Read the assigned materials;* prepare for seminar discussions.
9. Preparation for the presentation.								**8**	Prepare for an oral presentation on a selected text or discussion topic.
10. Writing the course paper (a detailed commentary on a chosen passage from the poem).								**24**	Engage in independent research on a selected passage from the poem.
Total: 130			**32**				**32**	**98**	

* Specific chapters and page ranges from the required reading list will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

Assessment strategy	Weight, %	Deadline	Assessment criteria
Article presentation and discussion facilitation	30 %	Agreed individually	**Duration:** 40–45 minutes **Content:** 1. **Introduction of the topic and context:** Introduce the central problem discussed in the article and briefly outline the broader scholarly debate surrounding it. Identify key scholars in the field and their major contributions (e.g., important studies or books). 2. **Analysis of arguments and findings:** Present the article's main arguments and conclusions, emphasizing its most thought-provoking, memorable, or controversial claims and examples. Discuss how the article relates to other research in the field. 3. **Critical engagement and discussion:** Offer your own evaluation of the study's arguments, methodology, and significance. Raise key questions and encourage your colleagues to engage with the material critically. 4. **Facilitating group work and discussion:** Design small-group activities or discussion tasks that help your peers explore the article's themes and problems more deeply. Guide and encourage participation,

			ensuring an interactive and reflective seminar discussion. **Assessment criteria:** • Ability to read the material critically and analytically • Effectiveness in presenting the article's argument structure and flow • Thoughtful planning, timing, and logical structuring of the session • Ability to engage the class through discussion and group activities • Clear and precise language usage
Course paper	60 %	Exam days in June	**Course paper: detailed commentary on a selected passage from *Beowulf*** **Length and format** • **Word count:** 1,500–2,000 words (approximately 4–6 pages) • **Font:** Times New Roman, size 12 • **Spacing:** 1.5 lines • **Submission:** Upload the final paper in **PDF format** to VMA Moodle **Passage selection** • Choose a passage of **20–50 lines** from *Beowulf* for detailed analysis. **Content requirements** 1. **Introduction** – Briefly explain the significance of the selected passage within the poem. 2. **Poetic diction** – Analyse the language and stylistic features of the passage, including poetic synonyms, compounds, formulas, kennings, and other key elements. 3. **Names and references** – Comment on the names of places, tribes, and characters appearing in the passage. 4. **Historical, social, and cultural context** – Discuss important historical, social, or cultural aspects referenced or described in the passage. 5. **Bibliography** – Follow the provided *style sheet* for source citation and formatting. **Assessment criteria** • Ability to gather and effectively discuss **topic-relevant material** • Ability to **synthesize and critically evaluate** different sources • Adherence to the **content, length, and format** requirements • Correct application of **academic referencing and bibliography standards**

			• Clarity, coherence, and **correct language usage** **Academic integrity** • **Plagiarism in any form** (verbatim copying, patchwriting, etc.) will result in a **zero (0) grade for the entire course.**
Attendance and participation	10 %	During the course	**Requirements** • Attendance and **active participation** in seminars are mandatory. • Students who **miss more than 5 seminars** (over 30% of the total) without a valid reason (e.g., illness documented by a doctor's note) **will receive a 'No Pass' for the course.** **Evaluation** • **Attendance and participation** constitute **10% of the final grade.** • Active engagement in **seminar discussions and activities** will be assessed. .

Course requirements for passing

To receive a passing grade for the course, students must complete **all three components**:

1. **Attendance and participation**
2. **Article presentation and discussion facilitation**
3. **Course paper**

Failure to complete **any of these components** (e.g., missing the article presentation) will result in a **'No Pass'** for the entire course, regardless of performance in other areas.

Use of AI tools

Generative AI may be used to explore ideas, clarify concepts and support learning in this course. AI can produce inaccurate information, misleading explanations and invented references. **Always verify** its suggestions against course materials and reliable academic sources, especially when working with linguistic examples, etymologies and historical language developments.

Submitted work must demonstrate **your own understanding, analysis and critical thinking**. Any use of generative AI in preparing assessed work must be clearly declared, specifying the tool and its purpose. You remain responsible for the accuracy of all information and references submitted and must be able to explain your arguments and examples.

Undeclared AI use or presenting AI-generated work as your own may constitute **academic misconduct**. Suspected breaches, together with supporting evidence, will be reported to the Faculty Dean and Academic Ethics Committee for consideration under Vilnius University procedures.

Course literature

Author	Year of publication	Title	Publishing place and house or web link
Required reading **Note**: Specific chapters and page ranges from the required reading list will be provided at the beginning of the semester.			
Fulk, R. D.; Bjork, Robert E.; Niles, John D., eds.	2008	*Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th ed. Foreword by Helen Damico.	Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: Toronto UP

Godden, Malcolm, and Michael Lapidge, eds.	2013	*The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature.* 2nd ed.	Cambridge University Press
Liuzza, R. M., trans.	2013	*Beowulf.* 2nd ed.	Broadview Press.
North, Richard, and Joe Allard, eds.	2012	*Beowulf & Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures.* 2nd ed.	Pearson.
Recommended reading			
Bjork, Robert E. and John D. Niles, eds.	1997	*A Beowulf Handbook*	Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
Donoghue, Daniel	2004	*Old English Literature: A Short Introduction*	Malden (Mass.): Blackwell
Heaney, Seamus, tr.	2000	*Beowulf*	London: Faber and Faber
Leneghan, Francis	2020	*The Dynastic Drama of Beowulf*	D. S. Brewer
Neidorf, Leonard, ed.	2014	*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*	Cambridge: D. S. Brewer
O'Brien O'Keeffe, Katherine	2017	"Diction, Variation, the Formula" in *A Beowulf Handbook*, edited by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, pp. 85–104	Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
Orchard, Andy	2003	*A Critical Companion to Beowulf*	D. S. Brewer
Tolkien, John R.R.	1968	"*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" in *The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Donald K. Fry, pp. 8–56.	Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

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