

Beowulf is England's foundational literary masterpiece, akin to Homer's epics for ancient Greece. It embodies the heroic origins of English culture, drawing upon universal motifs of heroic literature. As an oral art, Beowulf was passed down through generations of minstrels, accumulating changes and embellishments. Its tales, familiar to audiences, weave together themes of dreams, legends, monsters, divine weapons, underworld journeys, dragon battles, heroic quests, and community threats from evil forces. Composed in Old English, likely in Northumbria between 700 and 750, the epic depicts a world from the early sixth century, blending Celtic and Scandinavian folk legends. The Northumbrian setting suggests a Northumbrian poet authored the surviving version. Christian elements in the epic indicate a later addition to the earlier, likely pagan, core.