

Fall 2013

ENG 410/510: The Gift in Medieval Literature

M 6-9pm in 202 Chapman

Instructor: Professor Stephanie Clark
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office hours: Wednesday 3-5, Friday 3-4
course website: on Blackboard

Part One: Course Description and Goals

In Anglo-Saxon England theft was a capital crime while murder was not. Why might this be? In the 12th century there was a lively debate on whether it was appropriate to love one's spouse. Who would debate this and why? This class will consider questions like this as we read from a broad selection of early medieval literature. To frame the medieval literature, we will read several modern works that consider how and why objects circulate as gifts, how gifts gain meaning, and how gift-giving works as a form of symbolic communication to say things that often can't be said outright. We will focus on several over-arching questions: What social functions and meanings does the gift have and how can these meanings be manipulated? Which is better (and why, and to whom): the gift that expects reciprocation, or the gift freely given with no expectation of return? How can we tell when a giver's intentions in gift-giving are pure (and why does this matter)? In what ways is a gift a test, what does it test, and can it ever be a trap? As the opening questions show, pursuing this topic will lead us in some surprising directions through a variety of medieval genres, such as heroic epic, sermons, and romance. While gift-giving was much more central to pre-modern societies than it is today, thinking about early practices of gift-giving can help us see ourselves more clearly and imagine alternative ways of organizing society and exchanging things.

Grading Breakdown:

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|-------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| <u>Research Project</u> | 50% | Reading Notes: | 25% |
| Essay Proposal | 5% | Participation: | 10% |
| Annotated Bibliography | 20% | Personal Essay: | 15% |
| Research Essay Draft | 10% | | |
| Research Essay | 65% | | |

Required Texts: Do not buy e-books.

Beowulf. Trans. Roy Liuzza. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000. ISBN 978-1-55111-189-6

Njal's Saga. Trans. Robert Cook. London: Penguin, 2001. ISBN 0-14-044769-5

Additional readings on Blackboard. These must be printed out full-sized and brought to class.

Optional:

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*. Trans. W.D. Halls. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, chapters 1 and 2.

ISBN 978-0-393-32043-5

Recommended:

Hacker, Diana. *Rules for Writers*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010. (If you already own a stylebook, you may use the one you have. If you do not currently own a style book, you should buy this. Earlier editions won't have the latest word on citing electronic sources, but they'll do for most things.)

Part Two: Syllabus

In lieu of coursepacket, all course readings besides Beowulf and Njal's Saga will be posted on Blackboard. These must be printed out and brought to class.

UNIT I: RECIPROCITY

Week 1

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*, chapters 1 and 2.

Tacitus, *Germania*, selections.

Gurevich, Aaron. "Wealth and Gift-bestowal in Scandinavia." *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*. Ed. Jana Howlett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 177-89.

Week 2

Beowulf.

Week 3

Ine's Law Code

Hill, John. "Beowulf and Danish Succession: Gift-giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture." *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 11 (1982): 177-97.

Donahue, Charles. "Potlatch and Charity: Notes on the Heroic in *Beowulf*." *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*. Ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975. 23-40.

Baker, Peter. "Loot and the Economy of Honour." *Honour, Exchange, and Violence in Beowulf*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013. 35-76.

Week 4

Genesis A and B. Anglo-Saxon Poetry. Trans. and ed. S.A.J. Bradley. London: Everyman, 2000. ll. 1-1054.

Simmel, Georg. "Faithfulness and Gratitude." *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Ed. Aafke E. Komter. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996. 39-48.

Godelier, Maurice. "Some Things You Give, Some Things You Sell, but Some Things You Must Keep for Yourselves: What Mauss Did Not Say about Sacred Objects." *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*. Ed. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. 19-37.

PROPOSAL DUE in hard copy any time before Friday.

Week 5

Njal's Saga, chs. 1-78 (126pp).

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Principles of Reciprocity," "The Principles of Kinship." *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Ed. and trans. Robert Needham. Trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer. Rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. 52-68, 478-97.

Week 6

Njal's Saga, finish (178pp).

Miller, William Ian. "Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid." *Speculum* 61.1 (1986): 18-50.

UNIT 2: PURITY

Week 7

Derrida, Jacques. "The Time of the King." *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 1-33.

Week 8

Ælfric, "The Passion of the Blessed Martyr Lawrence." *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*. Ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe. London: The Ælfric Society, 1844. 416-37.

Ælfric, "The Passion of St. Bartholomew the Apostle." *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*. Ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe. London: The Ælfric Society, 1844. 454-77.

Clark, Stephanie. "Room for Grace: The Free Gift in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies I.29 and 31*."

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE in hard copy any time before Friday.

Week 9

Andreas Capellanus. *On Love*. Trans. P.G. Walsh. London: Duckworth, 1993. Excerpts.

DRAFT WORKSHOP (out of class; this can be done through email). Complete before Friday.

Week 10

Godbout, Jacques T. and Alain Caillé. "Introduction," "Gift, Market, Disinterestedness." *The World of the Gift*. Trans. Donald Winkler. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998. 1-20, 171-95.

Caillé, Alain. "The Double Inconceivability of the Pure Gift." *Angelaki* 6.2 (2001): 23-39.

RESEARCH ESSAY DUE **in class**.

Personal Essay Due by Friday, March 21 at noon.