

Spring 2014
ENG 423 - The Age of Beowulf
MWF 10-11, 105 Esslinger

Instructor: Professor Stephanie Clark
office phone: 346 3960 email: sclark11@uoregon.edu
office: 374 PLC office hours: Fridays 1pm-4pm
course website: on Blackboard

Part One - Course Description and Goals

This course explores a broad selection of texts from the three cultures inhabiting the British Isles in the early Middle Ages: the Irish, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Danes. The central text in each unit is an epic, the *Táin bo Culainge*, the *Saga of the Volsungs*, and *Beowulf*, but we will also read founding myths, religious texts, and shorter poetry. Medieval literature can be forbidding – the narrative conventions are often different from modern literature, the culture and language unfamiliar (although everything we are reading is translated). But the literature is also highly rewarding and can train students to notice and understand ways of thinking alien to that of modern society. An added bonus: this course should give you many wonderful ideas for great tattoos.

Grading Breakdown

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

Required Texts: do not buy e-books

Coursepacket (at the Duck Store)

The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge. Trans. Thomas Kinsella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969. Reissued 2002. ISBN 978-0192803733.

The Saga of the People of Laxardal and Bolli Bollason's Tale. Trans. Keneva Kunz. Ed. Bergljot S. Kristjansdottir. Penguin Classics, 2008. ISBN 978-0140447750.

Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. Trans. Jesse L. Byock. Berkeley: U California P, 1990. ISBN 9780520232853.

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. Trans. R. M. Liuzza. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2000. ISBN 978 1 55111 189 6.

Sturluson, Snorri. *The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology*. Penguin Classics, 2006. ISBN 978-0140447552.

Recommended: any writing handbook that includes a grammar section and MLA style. Any additional readings can be found on Blackboard.

Hárr segir, at hann komi eigi heill út, nema hann sé fróðari. (*The Prose Edda*)

(He said that he would not come out of there unharmed unless he became wiser.)

Part Two - Syllabus

Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due. Texts must be brought to class on the day we discuss them.

Please avail yourself of the helpful apparatus in the assigned readings: introductions, pronunciation guides, textual notes, lists of characters, genealogies, etc.

Week 1

- M Mar. 31 Introduction
W Apr. 2 “The Sayings of Flann Fína.” Coursepacket.
F Apr. 4 “The Sayings of the High One.” Coursepacket.
“Maxims I” and “Maxims II.” Coursepacket.

Unit 1: The Irish

Week 2

- M Apr. 7 “The Book of Invasions.” Coursepacket.
W Apr. 9 “The Second Battle of Mag Tured.” Coursepacket.
F Apr. 11 “The Life of St. Brigit the Virgin” by Cogitosus; “The Irish Life of Brigit,” Anonymous. Coursepacket.

Week 3

- M Apr. 14 *The Táin bo Cuailnge*, Introduction and “Before the Táin,” pp. vii-xvi and 1-50.
Bonus: Excerpt from *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Coursepacket.
W Apr. 16 *The Táin*, chs. I-V.
F Apr. 18 *The Táin*, chs. VI-IX.
Choose a text for your research project and begin finding secondary sources for it.

Week 4

- M Apr. 21 *The Táin*, chs. X-XI.
W Apr. 23 *The Táin*, chs. XII-XIV.
Article on the *Táin*. Coursepacket.
DUE: Summary of article.

Unit 2: The Vikings

- F Apr. 25 Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, Introduction, pp. ix-xxxv and pp. 1-46 (through sect. 37).

Week 5

- M Apr. 28 *The Prose Edda*, pp. 46-86 (through sect. 2).
W Apr. 30 *The Prose Edda*, 86-118.
F May 2 *The Saga of the People of Laxardal*, Introduction, pp. ix-xxxix and chs. 1-19.
DUE: Proposal (via email attachment)

Week 6

- M May 5 *Laxdaldasaga*, chs. 20-46.
W May 7 *Laxdaldasaga*, chs. 47-78.

F May 9 *The Saga of the Volsungs*, pp. 35-72 (through ch. 22).

Week 7

M May 12 *Volsunga saga*, cont., pp. 72-109 (ch. 22-end).

W May 14 *Volsunga saga*, cont.

Unit 3: The Anglo-Saxons

F May 16 Bede, excerpts from *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Introduction and bk. I, chs. 1, 14-16, 22-23, 25; bk. II, chs. 9-15; bk. IV, chs. 23-24. Coursepacket.

Bonus: Excerpts from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Coursepacket.

Week 8

M May 19 *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, multiple translations. Coursepacket.

W May 21 *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Ruin*, multiple translations. Coursepacket.

F May 23 Ælfric, "St. Swithun, Bishop." Coursepacket.

DUE: Annotated Bibliography

Week 9

M May 26 Memorial Day Holiday: NO CLASS

W May 28 *Andreas*, pp. 181-210.

Draft workshop begins (out of class)

F May 30 *Andreas*, cont.

Week 10

M June 2 *Beowulf*, Introduction, pp. 9-49, and pp. 53-103 (through fitt XXIII)

W June 4 *Beowulf*, cont., pp. 103-150.

F June 6 *Beowulf*, cont.

DUE: Research paper

Final: Wednesday, June 11 at 10:15am. Personal Essay due at time of final.

Part Three – Learning Outcomes

Main Goals: To better understand and more accurately represent the main ideas of medieval texts and to recognize the specific questions they explore and the cultural assumptions embedded within them. This class will also allow you to situate yourself more deeply within the long tradition of English literature and thought as well as to gain greater knowledge of some of the early literary traditions similar to it.

Read/Analyze. Your careful reading of the assigned texts in preparation for class should give you greater awareness of the particular characteristics of narrative-based or literary ways of knowing about the world. Your reading will also tune you in to the conventions of a variety of medieval genres and help you read more accurately. Lectures will orient you to the formal characteristics of medieval literature, as well as to issues caused by reading the texts in translation. You should gain ability in analyzing and articulating which specific features in a medieval text carry medieval cultural content. Class discussion will give you opportunity to practice.

Contextualize. The introductions to assigned texts read in preparation for class and class lectures will introduce major terminologies and methodologies necessary for the study of medieval literature. In addition, these two resources will help situate the texts read within their cultural, historical, and literary contexts. You should thus become able to recognize the cultural phenomena of the medieval world and analyze its presence in the primary texts. You should also be able to articulate continuities and breaks between the medieval and modern worlds. Both class discussion and the written assignments will give opportunity to practice and to try out your ideas.

Research. The major written assignments and the supplementary instructions posted on Blackboard are designed to familiarize you with the logic of research and to further your acquaintance with the research tools at your disposal, some of which are specific to medieval research. This will give you the tools to research your own interests in the primary texts in an effective and academic way, as governed by the disciplinary standards of English. You will practice reading academic articles accurately and efficiently, and you will present your own analyses of primary texts using secondary sources as appropriate, and giving proper acknowledgement for others' ideas and words.

Write. The written assignments are structured to train you in crafting persuasive and logical arguments from textual evidence. To gain greatest benefit, you must allow yourself adequate time for writing and revising; some of that is built into the process through the series of stepped assignments beginning with the research paper proposal and culminating with the research essay. You should therefore gain skill in writing focused analytic essays in clear grammatical prose that advance an original argument. There are various resources on campus to help you; my office hours are one of them.

