

Winter 2015
English 620: Gift Theory and Medieval Literature
M 2-5pm in 253 PLC

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Part I: Course Description and Goals

This course will use scholarly analysis of gift exchange from several disciplines (anthropology, philosophy, economics, medieval studies) to frame and illuminate exchange in a variety of early medieval texts. While gift theory is a sprawling field, the course will be divided into two units. The first focuses on theories of exchange formed in anthropology and economics and builds on insights from Marcel Mauss's seminal essay *The Gift* to examine how reciprocity functions in works like *Beowulf* and *Njal's saga*. We will consider sub-topics such as the gift and social order, the gift and violence, and the inter-identity of people and things. The second unit shifts to questions of the gift from philosophy and theology. We will read part of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of Mauss in *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money* in order to consider more explicitly the function of the non-reciprocal free gift in both modern ideology and medieval social structures. This focus will allow us to study how both modern and medieval societies value the other-oriented nature of the gift above self-interested action while teasing out the different senses of the social embeddedness of the individual within particular texts. Thus, in this unit we will read several medieval saints' lives in which the gift features prominently as well as examining how the principles of gift-theory can be applied to a text that ostensibly has little to do with gift-giving, either Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart*, or Chaucer's Clerk's Tale.

Gift theory challenges some of the basic assumptions naturalized in modern market capitalism, allowing more nuanced understandings of texts produced in other types of economies and societies. While gift theory grew out of anthropology and sociology, early medieval culture has been called the most straight-forward example of reciprocal gift giving. As this course will show, there is nothing straightforward about the gift.

Required Texts

- Beowulf*. Trans. Roy Liuzza. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000. Any of the following editions will do:
2nd edition: ISBN 978-1554810642; 2nd edition with facing-page Old English: 978-1554811137; 1st edition is fine.
- Njal's Saga*. Trans. Robert Cook. London: Penguin, 2001. ISBN 0-14-044769-5.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. ISBN 978-0226143149.
- Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*. Trans. W.D. Halls. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990. ISBN 978-0393320435. (*Do not get the older translation by Evans-Pritchard.*)

All other readings should be printed from Dropbox, or (if you prefer), you can get a hardcopy from me to photocopy. In many cases, the books from which these readings are excerpted are on reserve in the library.

Part II: Syllabus

Caveat: Things may change.

UNIT 1: RECIPROCITY

Week 1, January 5

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*.

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, January 12

Beowulf

Ine's Law Code. *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*. Ed. and trans. F.L. Attenborough. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922. 36-61.

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

Each of you should choose one of the following articles to present to the class. Skim the rest of the articles (i.e., familiarize yourself with the basic argument and the evidence on which it is based, but don't read the whole thing).

Bazelmans, Jos. "Beyond Power: Ceremonial Exchanges in *Beowulf*." *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*. Ed. Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson. Leiden: Brill, 2000. 311-375.

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.

Hill, John. "The Economy of Honour in *Beowulf*." *The Cultural World in Beowulf*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995. 85- .

Bjork, Robert E. "Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*." *Speculum* 69 (1994): 993-1022.

Week 3, January 19: No Class. MLKJr. Day

Please read ahead for next week. Our particular focus will be on the relationships between God and Satan, Satan and his followers, and God and Adam and Eve, and we'll be considering whether each telling of the story (there are five accounts of Satan's fall – Genesis contains two texts, A and B, spliced together) uses the same exchange structures. My advice: read the primary literature one week, the secondary literature the next, in whichever order seems good to you.

Week 4, January 26

Genesis A and B. Anglo-Saxon Poetry. Trans. and ed. S.A.J. Bradley. London: Everyman, 2000. ll. 1-1001 (end of fitt XVI).

Christ and Satan. Anglo-Saxon Poetry. 1982. Trans. and ed. S.A.J. Bradley. London: Everyman, 2000. ll. 1-314.

Ælfric, "De Initio Creaturae." *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. 9-19 (this is just the first part of the sermon).

Augustine. Book XII. *The City of God*. Trans. Gerald G. Walsh *et al.* Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958. Esp. ch. 6-9.

Genesis A and B will be the base text for our discussion; Christ and Satan also pictures the relationship between Satan and God as a lord/thegn relationship. Ælfric's homily gives a non-heroic perspective on the same story, and Augustine's City of God shows one traditional (and authoritative) way of understanding the fall of Lucifer that is interesting by way of contrast to the Anglo-Saxon versions.

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

Sahlins, Marshall. "The Spirit of the Gift." *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*. Ed. Alan D. Schrift. New York: Routledge, 1997. 70-99. *We're especially interested in the end section, pp. 83 on, which maps out a relationship between gift and violence.*

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.

Optional: Doane, A.N. "Satan" and "Adam and Eve." *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. 116-53. *These excerpts are from the introduction to Doane's edition of the text; they're helpful for locating it in its literary and theological context, and the first part of "Satan" discusses oaths and gifts.*

Week 5, February 2

"The Tale of Audun from the West Fjords." *Sagas of the Icelanders*. Trans. Anthony Maxwell. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. 717-22.

Gregory, C.A. "The Competing Theories" and "Gifts and Commodities: Circulations." *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press, 1982. 10-28, 41-70.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Selections from *The Logic of Practice*" and "Marginalia." *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*. Ed. Alan D. Schrift. New York: Routledge, 1997. 190-241. *Pay particular attention to Bourdieu's use of economic and market language in the way he relates the various forms of "capital" to one another. "Marginalia" was intended to clarify points in the original work that he felt his critics failed to understand.*

Optional: Miller, William Ian. "Is a Gift Forever?" *Representations* 100 (2007): 13-22.

Week 6, February 9

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

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Principle 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 7, February 16

Njal's Saga, finish (178pp).

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

UNIT 2: PURITY

Week 8, February 23

Derrida, Jacques. "The Time of the King." *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. *Focus on chs. 1 and 2 (2 gives his deconstruction of Mauss, but 1 contains the most important ideas).*

Caillé, Alain. "The Double Inconceivability of the Pure Gift." *Angelaki* 6.2 (2001): 23-39. *A critique of Derrida that might be helpful for understanding Derrida (although it's up for debate whether Caillé himself really gets Derrida).*

Caputo, John D. "The Time of Giving, the Time of Forgiving." In *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*. Ed. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. 117-47. *An application of Derrida to theology that helpfully illustrates one direction Derrida's argument can be taken.*

Week 9, March 2

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.

Angenendt, Arnold. "Donationes pro anima: Gift and Countergift in Early Medieval Liturgy." *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*. Ed. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. 143-69.

Week 10, March 9

Discussion of research projects.

Chrétien de Troyes, "The Knight of the Cart." *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*. Trans. David Staines. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.

OR Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale."