

Winter 2016
ENG 423 - THE AGE OF BEOWULF
MWF 10-10.50 in 252 Straub

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course documents: in Canvas

Part One - Course Description and Goals

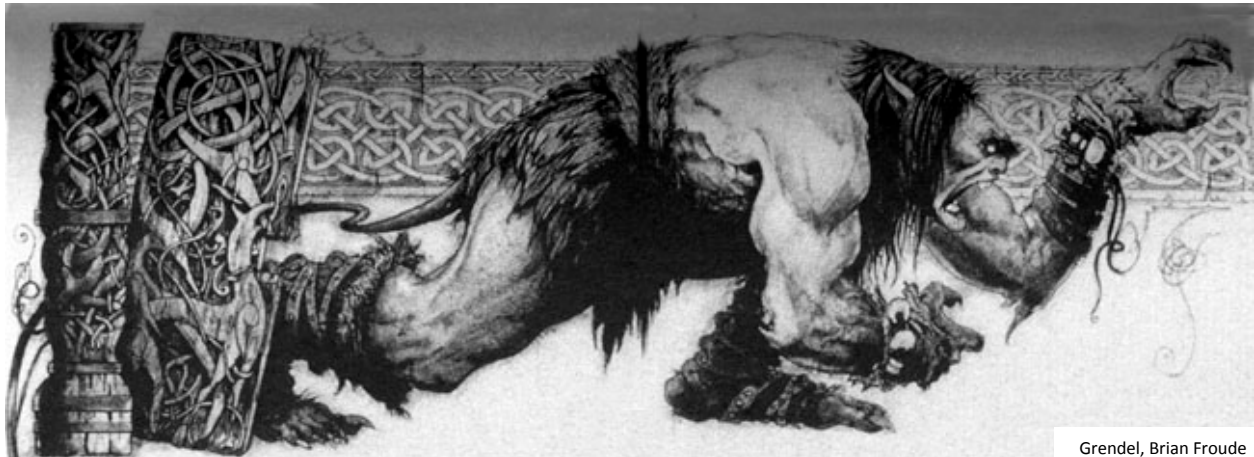
This course explores a broad selection of texts from the three cultures inhabiting the British Isles in the early Middle Ages: the Irish, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Danes. The central text in each unit is an epic, the *Táin bo Culainge*, the *Saga of the Volsungs*, and *Beowulf*, but we will also read founding myths, religious texts, and shorter poetry.

Medieval literature presents interesting challenges for the modern reader. For instance, the narrative conventions are often different from what we expect: why does Beowulf talk so much if he's an action hero? Why do characters who die in one chapter show up alive in a later chapter, as though nothing has happened? Why does the *Táin* begin and end with a bulls fighting when the main story is about a war between two Irish clans? And why does the *Saga of the People of Laxardal* spend so much time telling who is related to whom? Medieval texts are often composite, meaning they have no particular author. How do we read a story like that? Furthermore, while the morals of the stories often seem simple enough, it's easy to miss the significant questions they ask and the way they challenge modern ways of thinking about the world: Do hero stories glorify masculinity, or do they devalue men? Are the heroes of *The Saga of the Volsungs* really monsters? Are violent women the same thing as strong women? Were medieval religious conversions sincere? What is wisdom, and is it the same thing as knowledge?

Finally, because all of the texts we're reading are translated from their original languages, we'll spend some time at the end of the term thinking about the types of choices translators have to make and how that influences our readings of the texts. Medieval literature is deeply strange and highly rewarding. It 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.

Hárr segir, at hann komi eigi heill út, nema hann sé fróðari.

He said that he would not come out of there unharmed unless he became wiser. – *The Prose Edda*



Grendel, Brian Froude

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.

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

Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. Trans. Jesse L. Byock. Berkeley: U California P. Rev. 2012 ed. ISBN: 9780520272996. The earlier edition from 1990 is fine: ISBN 9780520232853.

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.

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. 2nd ed. Trans. R. M. Liuzza. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2013 ISBN: 9781554810642. The first edition from 2000 is fine, ISBN 978 1 55111 189 6. There's also an edition with Old English and the translation side-by-side if you prefer that: from 2012, ISBN 978-1554811137.

Recommended: any writing handbook that includes a grammar section and MLA style.

Any additional readings can be found online.

Grading Breakdown

<u>Research Project</u>	60%	Participation	15%
Essay Proposal	5%	Essay Summary	5%
Annotated Bibliography	20%	Personal Essay	20%
Research Essay Draft	10%		
Research Essay	65%		

Learning Outcomes

Main Goals: To better understand and more accurately represent the main ideas of medieval texts, 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. 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 these skills.

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 online 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.

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.

Additional readings assigned can be found online in Canvas.

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

Week 1

- M Jan. 4 Introduction
 W Jan. 6 “The Sayings of Flann Fína.” Coursepacket.
 F Jan. 8 “The Sayings of the High One.” Coursepacket.
 “Maxims I” and “Maxims II.” Coursepacket.

Unit 1: The Irish**Week 2**

- M Jan. 11 “The Book of Invasions.” Coursepacket.
 W Jan. 13 “The Second Battle of Mag Tured.” Coursepacket.
 F Jan. 15 “The Life of St. Brigit the Virgin” by Cogitosus; “The Irish Life of Brigit,”
 Anonymous. Coursepacket.

Week 3

- M Jan. 18 NO CLASS: MLKJr. Day
 W Jan. 20 *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.
 F Jan. 22 *The Táin*, chs. I-V.
 Choose a text for your research project and begin finding secondary sources for it.

Week 4

- M Jan. 25 *The Táin*, chs. VI-IX.
 W Jan. 27 *The Táin*, chs. X-XI.
 F Jan. 29 *The Táin*, chs. XII-XIV.
 Article on the *Táin*. Coursepacket.
 DUE: Summary of article.

Unit 2: The Vikings**Week 5**

- M Feb. 1 Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, Introduction, pp. ix-xxxv and pp. 1-46
 (through sect. 37).
 W Feb. 3 *The Prose Edda*, pp. 46-86 (through sect. 2).
 F Feb. 5 *The Prose Edda*, 86-118.
 DUE: Proposal (via email attachment)

Week 6

- M Feb. 8 *The Saga of the Volsungs*, pp. 35-72 (through ch. 22).

- W Feb. 10 *Volsunga saga*, cont., pp. 72-109 (ch. 22-end).
 F Feb. 12 *Volsunga saga*, cont.
 MIDTERM: Wisdom Contest

Week 7

- M Feb. 15 *The Saga of the People of Laxardal*, Introduction, pp. ix-xxxix and chs. 1-19.
 W Feb. 17 *Laxdælasaga*, chs. 20-46.
 F Feb. 19 *Laxdælasaga*, chs. 47-78.

Unit 3: The Anglo-Saxons

Week 8

- M Feb. 22 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.
 W Feb. 24 *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, multiple translations. Coursepacket.
 F Feb. 26 *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Ruin*, multiple translations. Coursepacket.
 DUE: Annotated Bibliography

Week 9

- M Feb. 29 Ælfric, “St. Swithun, Bishop.” Coursepacket.
 W Mar. 2 *Andreas*, pp. 181-210.
 DUE: Draft workshop begins (out of class)
 F Mar. 4 *Andreas*, cont.

Week 10

- M Mar. 7 *Beowulf*, Introduction, pp. 9-49, and pp. 53-103 (through fitt XXIII)
 W Mar. 9 *Beowulf*, cont., pp. 103-150.
 F Mar. 11 *Beowulf*, cont.
 DUE: Research paper

Final: Personal Essay due Thursday, Mar. 17 at 10.15am.