

**English 340 Medieval Seminar:
Haunted Nature: Norse Sagas and Ecocriticism
DRAFT SYLLABUS (subject to change)**

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Seminar hypothesis to ponder/argue: *Empathy articulates ecology.*

A couple definitional quotes:

Tradition as a cosmic longhouse (oikos, dwelling, the root of ecology)--

A serious house on serious earth it is/ In whose blent air all our compulsions meet/ Are recognised, and robed as destinies./ And that much never can be obsolete/ Since someone will forever be surprising/ A hunger in himself to be more serious/ And gravitating with it to this ground/ Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in/ If only that so many dead lie round.--Philip Larkin

Phenomenology--

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience....Phenomenology insists that identity and intelligibility are available in things, and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given....[involving] the explicit and sustained study of presence and absence.—Robert Sokolowski

Course summary:

In this course we are examining *Beowulf* and primary Norse sagas, together with related medieval German and modern texts, in the light of current developments in neurophenomenology and the phenomenological movement of the last century, seeking to develop a new theoretical basis for environmental literary study. We will also consider how psychoanalytic theory can help us to translate premodern phenomenology into contemporary ecocritical re-readings. The seminar will address questions of how texts act as narrative-landscapes that mediate ontologically between physical ecology and human cognition, how they do this over time in interactions between different eras of related literate storytelling, as well as current issues in the field of ecocriticism: How can literary study address the relation between human beings and the physical world in a way that is relevant to today's environmental crises?

Readings:

Contemporary theory/philosophy

--Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology (Routledge pbk)

ISBN-10: 0415183731 ISBN-13: 978-0415183734

--Excerpt from Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2007)

--Excerpt from Julia Kristeva, "Dostoevsky, Suffering and Forgiveness" (handout)

--Excerpt from John Holmes, "Dustceamung"/Old English elegy

--Peretti, "Deleuze-Guattari, Jameson, and Schizophrenia" (handout)

--Handout packet of recent articles on issues in ecocriticism and ecofeminism.

--Handout on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky

--Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge pbk) ISBN-10: 0521348730 ISBN-13: 978-0521348737

Medieval texts (in translation)

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation, trans. Seamus Heaney (W.W. Norton pbk)

ISBN-10: 0393320979 ISBN-13: 978-0393320978

Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology* (Penguin pbk)

ISBN-10: 0140447555 ISBN-13: 978-0140447552

Larrington, trans. *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford World's Classics pbk)

ISBN-10: 0192839462 ISBN-13: 978-0192839466

The Sagas of Icelanders (Penguin pbk)

ISBN 0-14-100003-1

Erbyggja Saga, trans. Palsson and Edwards (Penguin pbk)

ISBN-10: 0140445307 ISBN-13: 978-0140445305

Njall's Saga, trans. Robert Cook (Penguin pbk)

ISBN-10: 0140447695 ISBN-13: 978-0140447699

Volsungasaga, trans. Jesse Byock (Penguin pbk)

ISBN-10: 0140447385 ISBN-13: 978-0140447385

Das Niebelungenlied, trans. Burton Raffel (Yale U Press, hdbk)

ISBN-10: 030011320X ISBN-13: 978-0300113204

Modern reflections on saga

Sigrid Undset, *Kristin Lavransdatter I: The Wreath*, trans.

ISBN-10: 0141180412 ISBN-13: 978-0141180410

Lonrot and Bosley, *Kalevala* (Oxford World's Classics pbk)

ISBN-10: 019283570X ISBN-13: 978-0192835703

O.E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (Harper Perennial pbk)

ISBN-10: 0060931930 ISBN-13: 978-0060931933

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Houghton Mifflin pbk)

ISBN-10: 0618574956 ISBN-13: 978-0618574957

Timeframe:

R 8/23 1. *Beowulf*, "Landscapes of Conversion" article. [Class background handouts: Norse elves selection, Kristeva selection, Holmes "Dustceawung" article]

R 8/30 2. *Introduction to Phenomenology*/(Heidegger and Levinas, 192-247, 323-353; packet of ecocriticism articles; first two sections of Peretti article; Thompson handout

R 9/6 3. *Poetic and Prose Edda* selections.

Presentations: Aesir, Vanir, Yggrdrasil, Ragnarok, early Scandinavian Christianity, Elves and Dwarves.

R 9/13 4. *Laexdala Saga*, ecofeminism readings.

Presentations: Early Icelandic society, landscape and ecology of Iceland, Viking women, Vikings as settlers.

R 9/20 5. *Vinland Sagas*, 354-474. *Introduction to Phenomenology*: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida.

Presentations: Vikings in the British Isles, Vikings in Eastern Europe, Paul Bauschatz and Stebbin-Kamenskij.

R 9/27 6. *Erbyggja Saga*

R 10/4 7. *Egils Saga*.

First final project assignment due (prospectus and bibliography).

R 10/11 8. *Njalls Saga*.

R 10/11 9. *Volsungsgaga*.

R 10/25 10. *Nibelungelied*.

R 11/1 11. *Kristin Lavransdatter* (first two sections of *The Wreath*), Kierkegaard essay, *Kalevala* selections.

Final presentations.

Draft final project due.

R 11/8 12. *Giants in the Earth* (selections—first and last books), *Kalevala* selections.

Final presentations.

R 11/15 13, Naess (selections), *Kalevala* selections.

Final presentations.

R 11/29 14. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (selections).

Final presentations.

Exam Date: Final version of final project due.

Writing assignments:

2-3 page responses (min. 650 words) to readings posted on the class Facebook group each week before the start of class, except for the two weeks when you are giving presentations. We'll be meeting weekly for brief tutorials on weeks when you are doing a reading response, both to discuss the reading and also to talk about your final project, a 20-25 page essay related to your two formal presentations.

First third of semester: Formal presentation on an aspect of theoretical/philosophical readings related to a selected topic; produce a 4-5 page prospectus for your final project, with additionally a critical bibliography.

Second third of semester: Produce a first draft of the final project for feedback, 15-20 pages.

Last third of semester: Formal presentation on your final project work. Final version of project due on exam date.