

Term Paper: Requirements and Suggested Topics

Assignment: Write a paper with at least a loose thematic connection to the seminar topic and with at least some direct engagement with Old English. In this context, direct engagement with Old English means either providing your own translations or incorporating a discussion of Old English concepts into your argument. The length of your paper depends on your module: (within ten percent of) 5,000 words for a first master course in medieval studies, 7,500 words for a follow-up course.

Some Possible Topics

The following list is intended to help you *find* a topic, but you don't have to limit yourself to the options listed. While you may absolutely copy out a topic directly from this list, it is your own responsibility to formulate a research question and develop a thesis. Remember that originality of argument (and by implication originality of research question) is a factor in the assessment of your paper (see marking grid below).

Paper topics for this course may address any aspect of transience, providence, fate, free will, or more or less related issues in any Old English literature, whether or not discussed in class. Alternatively, they may focus on any issue in the Old English *Boethius* or lyric poetry. They may also have a primary focus on relevant a Latin text, such as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, but there should be at least a strong secondary focus on Anglo-Saxon England, and some engagement with the Old English language. Some general themes:

- Fortune and misfortune in lyric poetry
- Transience in lyric poetry
- The *ubi sunt* motif
- Fortune and misfortune in religious prose
- Fate and providence in the Old English *Boethius*
- Rulership in the Old English *Boethius*
- The biographical depiction of Boethius in Old English sources
- Alfred's translation programme and role in the production of the Old English *Boethius*
- The interlocutors of the Latin and Old English *Boethius*
- Fate and providence in *Beowulf*
- Fate and providence in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
- Determinism in the saints' lives
- Determinism in wisdom literature
- Divination
- *Deor*
- *The Wife's Lament*
- *The Wanderer*
- etc.

Good texts to work with include all of the texts discussed in class, but you may also explore our theme in another (group of) medieval text(s). Remember the language requirement, however: you'll have to engage directly with Old English to some degree.

Some Possible Research Questions

You may use these questions for inspiration, but at least modify them for originality.

- What degree of control do the characters of [text xyz] have over their lives?
- What governs fortune in *Deor*?
- What purpose do the Old English elegies award the present life?
- What are the functions of seafaring imagery in Old English literature?
- What role does the Old English *Boethius*-translator leave for fate?
- Why did Anglo-Saxons like King Alfred consider *The Consolation of Philosophy* among the most important books for a general audience?
- To what degree is the Anglo-Saxon heroic concept of fate compatible with Christian cosmology?
- To what degree do elements of Stoic philosophy survive into the Old English *Boethius*?
- How does the understanding of free will in the Old English *Boethius* compare to ancient Greek discussions of the concept?

Marking Grid

The following marking grid indicates the considerations used to mark papers for this course (but not their weighting):

Aspect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Argument (quality, originality)										
Structure										
Close reading & analysis										
Structural use of primary sources										
Use of secondary sources										
Grasp of source language										
Cultural context										
Command of academic English										
Mechanics (style, referencing, formatting)										
Length										