Old English Poetics

B.Eng.602 / B.Eng.631 / M.EP.02b / M.EP.05b / M.EP.05d / M.Kom.05 / M.Edu.101

Revision of January 29, 2025

Term:	Winter 2024/2025	**Instructor:**	Dr P. S. Langeslag
Time:	Wednesdays 10–12	**Office:**	SEP 2.306
Room:	KWZ 0.603	**Office hours:**	(Send me an email)
Module credits:	6 (lecture + seminar)	**E-mail:**	planges@uni-goettingen.de
Prerequisites:	B.EP.204 or M.EP.02c	**Course website:**	langeslag.uni-goettingen.de/oepoetics

This syllabus comprises an Overview (p. 1), a Schedule (p. 2), and an annotated Bibliography (p. 14).

Overview

Course Description

Old English poetics is a surprisingly expansive field of study. It may start with the rules of rhythm and alliteration to which pre-Conquest poets adhered, but from there it soon balloons into the realm of language history, as the architecture of the poets' metrical feet and alliterative choices reveals what syllables they pronounced and what consonants they felt were equivalent. In other words: with the necessary caveats, poetry both lays bare the linguistic history of Old English and offers a handle on the notoriously difficult question of dating Old English poetry. It furthermore has a great deal to say about lexicology, as the *wordhord* used by poets differed markedly from the prose lexicon, with a substantial proportion of words — notably compounds, under pressure from metrical constraints — found only in the poetry. And finally, the study of poetic form concerns itself with the distinction between prose and poetry, as late Old English preachers and hagiographers incorporated, however loosely, rhythm and alliteration into their homilies and saints' lives to a point where some of Ælfric's works are conventionally printed in verse lines.

In this course, students will gain a knowledge of prominent metrical and linguistic conventions of Old English poetry; they will gain an insight into the properties used to come to a relative dating of Old English verse; they will learn to recognize the trademark rhythmical and alliterative prose of Ælfric and Wulfstan; they will give thought to the lexical properties of Old English prose, verse, and rhythmical prose, and apply digital tools to the corpus of Old English to lay bare the differences between these categories; and they will translate excerpts from a range of Old English texts, from classical to late verse and liminal categories. Online exercises will train their understanding of Old English scansion in the course of the term.

Interested students are advised to pick up a paperback or digital copy of Jun Terasawa's *Old English Metre* as early as possible and commence perusing it prior to the start of term so as to come in with a headstart.

Aims

Students will improve their knowledge of and skills in

- Old English metre and scansion;
- Old English language history;
- The dating of Old English verse;
- The corpus of Old English poetry;
- The formal differences between verse, prose, and liminal forms;
- Old English lexicology; and
- Old English reading comprehension.

Assessment

For students of B.Eng.602, a single **exam (60 minutes, 12 Feb at 10:00 sharp in KWZ 0.609)** covers the seminar material (the accompanying lecture is separately assessed by its convenor). The seminar exam will consist of questions on such matters as scansion, language history, and the lexical characteristics of Old English prose and verse, as well as a test of Old English reading comprehension and/or translation. Online quizzes made available in the course of the term will serve to prepare you for the exam.

Students of B.Eng.631, M.EP.02b, M.EP.05b, and M.EP.05d will do extra readings in the course of the term, present on these readings, and write a **term paper (due 31 March)** on any aspect of Old English poetry or poetics.

Required Texts and Resources

Our required textbook is Jun Terasawa, *Old English Metre: An Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). Please acquire it in good time. Other readings, as well as instructional videos, will be made available on Stud.IP.

Diversity

This course is run with the understanding that students bring a variety of backgrounds into the classroom in such domains as socioeconomics, appearance, culture, religion, political views, disability, gender, age, family situation, and sexual identity. With different backgrounds come different needs and sensitivities. If you feel your needs or those of a fellow student require special attention or are being compromised, please feel free to make this known to me by whatever channel seems most appropriate. (For more serious concerns, the Department and University each have their own points of contact as well.) I will treat all requests seriously and with confidentiality, and will seek to make accommodations within my abilities and reason. At the same time, you too owe it to your fellow students to treat them with respect regardless of their background and identity. Do not stand in the way of anyone's well-being.

Schedule

Please prepare the following readings, and watch the videos (also available on Stud.IP under the Medien tab), *ahead* of the corresponding session, and take notes for in-class discussion.

Session 1 (23 Oct): Principles of Prosody

Read:

- **From Abrams and Harpham's *Glossary of Literary Terms*: "Meter"** (6 pp.)
  Takeaway: A concise review of basic poetic concepts.
- **Marsden, "Beginning Poetry"** (6 pp.; from *The Cambridge Old English Reader*)
  Takeaway: A concise and gentle introduction.
  Reading notes:
  1. Erratum: for "watter" read "watter" (29).
  2. On the stress value of prefixes (32), cf. Terasawa: "[v]erbal prefixes like *ā-*, *be-*, *for-*, and *ge-* are proclitics closely bound to a stem and do not bear stress. The negative prefix *un-* may occasionally receive rhythmic stress, however" (29). Compound nonfinite verbs like *understandan*, and finite compounds in the absence of stress words, do bear stress on at least the first element.

Session 2 (30 Oct): Engaging with Old English Verse

Watch:

- **Principles of Prosody** (21m)
- **Dictionaries** (14m)

Read:

- **pp. 1–29 of Russom, "General Principles of Poetic Form"** (from chapter 1 of *The Evolution of Verse Structure*)
  Takeaway: This excerpt will refamiliarize you with basic linguistic and poetic concepts, such as the rules of syllabification and the formal definition of the Shakespearean sonnet, but its aim is to demonstrate that poetic form has its basis in linguistic principles which speakers have internalized.
  Reading notes:
  1. You may recognize Russom's linguistic tradition as generative, i.e. emphasizing linguistic principles with which all speakers of natural languages are equipped, and the dependence of any surface utterance on underlying constructs relying on such principles. Most of the points made in this chapter are invaluable regardless of whether you agree with traditional or revised Chomskyan theories, however.
  2. The vowels Russom transcribes as [e] and [o] may be more familiar to you as the diphthong transcriptions [eɪ] and British [eʊ] or North American [oʊ]; likewise his [U] corresponds to IPA [ʊ], his [y] to [j], and his [I] to [ɪ].

3. In §1.7 where Russom cites Germanic at a time "when the meter of *Beowulf* was born," the examples he gives (*slēpan : saí-slēp*, etc.) are from Gothic, because this is the language for which reduplication is best attested.
4. In §1.10, we may reasonably take issue with the assertion that word stress allocation happens on the fly — the stress patterns of words are surely learned along with the words themselves. But Russom's point that we intuitively recognize rhyme at the speed of recitation must be correct.
5. In §1.12, Russom adduces musical theory to explain dissonance. If you have no extensive musical background, you may reproduce his more straightforward examples (the alternation of the chords G7 and C, the notes F and G, and the notes F# and G) using an online chord player. The key lesson is that harmony and dissonance are determined by how well the sound waves of two or more tones fold together: harmony is achieved by playing two notes that are (e.g.) seven semitones apart, since these frequencies add up much as the numbers two and three both add up to six and twelve, so their resonant frequencies coincide, while dissonance is achieved by playing two notes that are (e.g.) half a note apart, as these lack common resonant frequencies just as the numbers nine and ten have no proximate common multiple (the nearest being 90).
6. In §1.15 where Russom asserts that in canonical iambic pentameter "an unstressed vowel immediately adjacent to another vowel may be assigned to one or two metrical positions as required," he means that the two vowels together may occupy one or two metrical positions (i.e. abstracted syllables), not that the two of them may together occupy three.

Study questions:

1. (a) What communicative functions do rhyme and alliteration serve (esp. §1.10)?
   (b) How are these communicative functions simultaneously hampered by the linguistic underpinnings of metre (§1.4)?
2. The dominant metres in Modern English are iambic.
   (a) Why is this a striking observation (p. 27)?
   (b) What arguments may be adduced for the position that iambic metres make sense for Modern English (p. 27)?

Session 3 (6 Nov): The Alliterative Long Line

Watch:

- **The Elements of Old English Verse Form** (26m)

Read:

- **Terasawa chs 1–2** (24 pp.)
  Reading notes:
  1. Where Terasawa speaks of "words" alliterating (e.g. pp. 3, 12), you may find it more helpful to think of syllables.
  2. Where Terasawa writes that Old English had two kinds of *g* (p. 13), it would be more accurate to say that there were four realizations, namely [ɡ], [j], [ɣ], and [x], but the only realizations relevant for alliteration are [ɡ] and [j], as the others do not occur in onsets.

  Study questions:
  1. §1.1: Can you rank the four lifts of an Old English verse line for the frequency with which they partake of alliteration?
  2. §2.2.3: Does Russom's model as summarized by Terasawa permit a clear ranking of the prosodic prominence of the four lifts of an Old English verse line? Proceeding from the logic of Russom's model, what do you suppose his ranking is?

Translate:

- ***Juliana* lines 1–17 (ed. Bjork)**
  Reading notes:
  1. For this text as for most of your translations, you will have to rely on general dictionaries of Old English as listed in §1 of the bibliography. Ideally, you will use the *Dictionary of Old English* for words in the range A–Le, while falling back on Bosworth, Toller, and Campbell for Li–Y. Should you wish to use a text-specific glossary, try the edition by Rosemary Woolf.

2. *Juliana* is one of four signed poems by Cynewulf. Cynewulf's works are usually dated to the late ninth or early tenth century and thus belong to the middle group in the chronology, with *Beowulf* and much of the contents of MS Junius 11 predating them, while the metrical Psalms and *Maldon* postdate them.
3. *Juliana* survives in a single copy in the Exeter Book. It is a verse saint's life on the martyr saint Juliana of Nicomedia (today İzmit, Turkey), presumably based on a lost Latin model. According to the legend, Juliana's life coincided almost exactly with the reign of Emperor Diocletian and his co-emperor Maximian (286–305), with her death dated to 304.

Study questions:

1. Locate all alliterative stresses in the excerpt.
2. Can you locate the remaining lifts?

Session 4 (13 Nov): Rhythm

Watch:

- **Rhythm** (39m)
  Viewing note:
  1. My explanation of particle location and displacement in this video is incorrect; see the updated slides for the correct definitions.

Read:

- **Terasawa ch. 3** (with a focus on §§ 3.1–3.2) (22 pp.)
  Reading notes:
  1. Where Terasawa writes "[e]ither the first or the second lift falls on a resolvable sequence" (38) it would have been clearer to formulate it "[e]ither the first or the second lift *may* fall on a resolvable sequence."
  2. Where Terasawa writes "resolution is usually found in the first lift" (39), it would have been clearer to formulate it "resolution is more commonly found in the first lift than in the second."

  Study questions:
  1. §3.1: Using your own words, try to come up with the most helpful simplified definition for each of the word-classes (1) stress word, (2) proclitic, and (3) particle.
  2. §3.2: Which may be more simply defined, a long syllable or a short syllable?
- **Tolkien, *The Fall of Arthur* lines 1–220** (9 pp.)
  Reading notes:
  1. This text is one of several in which Tolkien emulates Old English poetic form using Modern English. You'll want to study his creative choices with this in mind.

  Study questions:
  1. Analyze the first 17 lines of the poem for poetic features, using Terasawa as your guide.
  2. The poem makes use of unusual word order. Can you account for this fully? You may want to keep examples of Tolkien's word-order choices at hand for in-class discussion.
  3. Would you say Tolkien makes extensive use of enjambment? How do you explain the presence or absence of enjambment in his poem?
  4. How do you account for the verb form *drave* in l. 18?
  5. What would Russom have to say about forms like *o'er* (e.g. l. 147)?
  6. What can you say about the origins (e.g. Germanic, French, Latin, Greek) of Tolkien's words? How does this compare to Shakespeare's diction? Why do you think Tolkien chose his words in this way?

Translate:

- ***Genesis A* lines 1294b–1319** (ed. Anlezark)
  Reading notes:

1. *Genesis A*, an incomplete paraphrase of part of the biblical book of Genesis, is among the oldest and longest Old English poems to survive. Although the dating of the poetry has to be relative up to a point, many hold that the earlier long poems, including *Genesis A* and *Beowulf*, date to the first quarter of the eighth century. The poem survives in a single copy among other religious verse in MS Junius 11, with significant material missing early on in the narrative; part of the gap was filled by another verse paraphrase known as *Genesis B* (see session 11).
2. The chosen excerpt corresponds to the story of Noah's ark in Genesis 6–7.

Study questions:

1. (a) In lines 1294b–1302a, can you tell apart the stress words, particles, and proclitics?
   (b) Identify four finite verbs that receive displacement stress. What can you say about their tendencies for alliteration and line position?
   (c) Identify two finite verbs occurring in their "natural," unstressed position.
2. What two poetic devices do you recognize in line 1298?
3. What literary device do you recognize in line 1303?
4. What is unusual about line 1316? Can we draw any conclusions about the way the poet spoke?

Session 5 (20 Nov): Sievers Types

Watch:

- **Sievers Types** (19m)
- **Scansion** (13m)
  Viewing note:
  1. My explanation of particle location and displacement in this video is incorrect; see the updated slides for the correct definitions.

Read:

- **Terasawa ch. 3** (with a focus on §§3.3–3.5) and **Appendix B** (24 pp.)
  Reading notes:
  1. As above (session 3).

  Study questions:
  1. §3.3: Can you rank the Sievers types by the frequency with which they occur?
  2. §3.3 and Appendix B: Can you come up with a flowchart like that in Appendix B but for identifying what Sievers type a verse represents? Use the metrical compendium of the "Electronic *Beowulf*" website to test your approach.

Translate:

- **Metrical Psalm 127** (21 lines; ed. O'Neill)
  Reading notes:
  1. The metrical Psalms (Psalms 51–150) are generally considered to have been composed in the tenth century, which puts them towards the later end of the Old English poetic tradition. Late Old English verse is generally considered less tightly metrically regulated, and many scholars consider it less worthwhile in consequence. Of the Psalms in general it should be remembered that this was the most widespread text of the Middle Ages, as Psalms were sung — in Latin — in Mass as well as in the Divine Office (i.e. in the daily cycle of eight services observed by monks, nuns, and particularly devout lay individuals). Their most notable presence in manuscripts is in Latin psalters, but several of these have a continuous Old English gloss, i.e. the translations are written between the lines of the Latin. The versifier of the metrical Psalms could draw on the extensive tradition of psalter glosses, but was faced with the challenge of turning these texts into metrical form without distorting their canonical content. Most scholars are not especially impressed with the result. These 100 Psalms survive alongside prose translations of Psalms 1–50 in the Paris Psalter.
  2. Please note that the numbering of the Psalms in the Vulgate (the predominant Latin text of the Bible at the time the Old English translation was made) differs from that in most editions and translations of the Bible today. Vulgate Psalm 127 corresponds to conventional Psalm 128.

Study questions:

1. Identify the Sievers type for each verse.
2. How would you characterize the versifier's style based on your identification of Sievers types?

- **Psalter gloss for Psalm 127 (ed. Brenner)**
  Reading notes:

  1. This is a continuous gloss, meaning the Old English translation of each word was written above the Latin word in the manuscript. The editor has emulated this form. Thus in the edition, the verses are numbered for the Latin (which is printed in italics), and each Old English word is printed above the word it translates. Each Old English sentence thus ends where the Latin below prints the next verse number. Brenner has forgotten to number verse 6 (starting "Et videas"), but O'Neill deviates from canonical numbering, splitting verse 3 in two to give the sons a verse of their own.
  2. You don't have to produce a full translation; instead, take notes on the differences (lexical, syntactical, rhythmical) between this prose gloss and its verse counterpart in O'Neill's edition.

Session 6 (27 Nov): Words and Feet

Watch:

- **Words and Feet** (23m)

Read:

- **Russom, from *Old English Meter & Linguistic Theory*: ch. 0** (7 pp.)
  Study questions:

  1. If metre is dictated by the prosody of natural language, what sets verse apart from prose?

Translate:

- ***Daniel* lines 104–133** (ed. Anlezark)
  Reading notes:

  1. *Daniel* belongs with the early poetry; it is a paraphrase of part of the biblical book of Daniel. It survives in MS Junius 11. This excerpt, corresponding to ch. 2 of the biblical book, describes how Nebuchadnezzar experiences and responds to his first dream. If you want a text-specific glossary in addition to the usual dictionaries, try Farrell, *"Daniel" and "Azarias."*

  Study questions:

  1. Identify the Sievers type for each of the verses in the excerpt.
  2. What is the poet's motive for choosing the words *wulfheort* and *wīngāl* (l. 116)?
  3. What is "wrong" with line 122?
  4. Do you recognize line 123 from another Old English text? If not, can you locate it using CLASP or the *Dictionary of Old English* Corpus? What does it mean that a line recurs almost verbatim in multiple texts? What thematic parallel do the two episodes have? Do you think this is of relevance to the connection?

Session 7 (4 Dec): Rhythmical Prose

Watch:

- **Rhythmical Prose** (27m)

Read:

- **Terasawa §§ 5.1, 7.3** (8 pp.)
  Study questions:

  1. What implicit assumptions can we suspect hides behind the category "late debased verse"?
  2. (a) Can you sum up the features that some of Ælfric's writings have in common with poetry?

   (b) What sets Ælfric's style apart from classical verse?
3. (a) What is the average syllable count per verse of last week's *Daniel* excerpt?
   (b) What is the average syllable count per verse of this week's Ælfric excerpt?
4. Which is the most classical line in the excerpt?
5. Identify the Sievers type for each of the verses in the variant text of *The Death of Edgar* (Terasawa pp. 112–113), taking notes on any verses that reject classification. Compare the resulting profile with that from last week's *Daniel* excerpt and the Psalm from session 4.

- **Masters Hollowell, "On the Two-Stress Theory of Wulfstan's Rhythm"** (9 pp.)
  Takeaway: Adduces phrasing and pointing to reject the notion that Wulfstan's homilies may be read as continuous rhythmical prose.
  Reading notes:

  1. Errata: for p. 4 "clýiað" read "clýpiað"; on p. 6 read "þæt unsælig man" as part of the block quote.

  Study questions:

  1. Critically assess both Masters Hollowell's own argument and the theory she is taking on (as summarized in her article). What are the weaknesses of each? What is your own impression, having been introduced to both views?
  2. Masters Hollowell cites the Nuclear Stress Principle, which (as per her endnote 16) asserts that "the strongest phrasal stress in Modern English falls normally on the last stressed syllable in a phrase." Can we extend this principle to Old English? Does Old English metrics have anything to say about this? How might Russom respond to this principle?

Translate:

- ***Ælfric, Life of St Oswald* lines 83–108** (eds. Clayton and Mullins)
  Reading notes:

  1. This text is from Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* collection, his only collection composed almost entirely in the style that has come to be known as rhythmical prose. The texts survive in multiple copies; most were initially composed in the mid-990s.
  2. Oswald was King of Northumbria from 634 until 641/642; his life is described at length in Bede's 731 *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

  Study questions:

  1. Identify any ornamental features, such as assonance, paranomasia, or complex alliteration.
  2. What is "wrong" with line 91?
  3. What is "wrong" with line 92?
  4. Does the anecdote about Oswald's charity remind you of any other medieval narratives?

Session 8 (11 Dec): Poetic Diction

Watch:

- **Poetic Diction** (36m)

Read:

- **From Griffith, "Poetic Language and the Paris Psalter," at least pp. 167–178** (12 pp.)
  Takeaway: The tenth-century Old English metrical Psalms show evidence in their decreased but conscious and systematic reliance on poetic diction of the decline of the poetic form. Fewer heroic nouns are used, and they are heavily concentrated in the first stress of the b-verse, showing the unravelling of the traditional distribution of poetic words across the three potentially alliterative positions. This in turn means that the text does not make use of conventional poetic formulae.
  Reading notes:

  1. This article studies the diction of the metrical Psalms, on which see the notes under session 4 above.
  2. Italic *þ* looks a little more like *p* in the Cambridge typeface than it does in others; do not get them confused.

3. When Griffith refers to *rank*, he means alliterative rank, i.e. the frequency, relative to its synonyms, with which a given word partakes of alliteration either within a given text or within the poetic corpus as a whole, with implications for its distribution across the three possible alliterative positions as well as the fourth stressed, non-alliterative position. The concept is discussed in detail in Cronan, "Alliterative Rank in Old English Poetry" and explained in the video on poetic diction, so at least watch that before you read this article.
4. When Griffith says that "[p]oetic words appear [in the metrical Psalms] much less frequently in positions of secondary stress" (177), he is thinking of Sievers Types A2, D, and E, which require secondary stress as normally found in the second element of a regular compound or tertiary stress as found in certain grammatical suffixes and specific types of compound (see the videos on Rhythm and Scansion).

Study questions:

1. A word that survives only in the poetry need not therefore be a poetic term. Why not, and how does Griffith ensure his list covers poetic terms only (pp. 167–168 and implicit)?
2. What information is conspicuously absent where Griffith observes that "*Beowulf* uses 268 [poetic words], *Andreas* 221 and *Genesis A* 177" (p. 168)?
3. What possible explanations can you think of for the fact that "the rarest [poetic terms for 'lord' or 'noble man'] appear only in *Beowulf*" and not in either *Genesis A* or the metrical Psalms (p. 169; and the same is true of all poetic weak nouns, pp. 169–171)?
4. (a) Leaving aside the influence of the psalter gloss tradition, can you think of a straightforward explanation why the translator of the metrical Psalms reliably translates *homo* ("man") as "mann" and *vir* ("man") as "wer," but does not shy away from introducing other words for "man" when expanding on the Latin (p. 173)?
   (b) And now taking into account the existence of a tradition of psalter glosses, what is the natural conclusion that Griffith does not explicitly address?
5. How does Griffith explain the fact that the poet appears consciously to make use of some poetic conventions, but shuns heroic nouns (pp. 173–175 and 179–180)?
6. What is the relevance of the system of rank (as explained in the reading notes above) for a text's reliance on prose or poetic words (p. 175–177)?

Do:

- **Poetic diction assignment**: use CLASP, the *Dictionary of Old English* (*DOE*) and/or the *Dictionary of Old English* Corpus (*DOEC*) to determine the distribution of a poetic term of your choice in the corpus (watch the Poetic Diction video for instructions on how to use these tools). Take notes on your findings and come prepared to present them orally during class.

Translate:

- ***Exodus* lines 447–463** (ed. Anlezark)
  Reading notes:

  1. *Exodus* belongs with the early poetry and survives in MS Junius 11. The excerpt describes the drowning of the Egyptian army (Exodus 14). For a text-specific glossary, try the edition by Peter Lucas.

  Study questions:

  1. This passage is arguably the most dramatic of the poem as it survives. Can you identify any stylistic choices that help convey its heightened action?
  2. What becomes clear almost as soon as you start scanning the passage? What does that mean?
  3. With the help of the *Dictionary of Old English*, can you identify any simplex (i.e. non-compound) poetic words in the excerpt?

Session 9 (18 Dec): Performance

Watch:

- **Benjamin Bagby's *Beowulf*** (lines 1–1062) (YouTube link); watch at least 15 minutes with the below questions in mind.
  Study questions:

  1. What function does the lyre have in Bagby's performance? Why do you think he chose to use it?

2. Do stressed syllables stand out clearly, and are particles and proclitics deemphasized in Bagby's performance?
3. What place is there for syntactical phrasing in Bagby's performance? Does he rather emphasize the integrity of the verse and line, or does he encourage "enjambment" and emphasize the unit of the sentence?
4. What can you say about Bagby's pacing?
5. Formulate your own opinion on the historical realism of Bagby's performance. (How) would you change his approach?

- **Christopher Page's *Beowulf*** (YouTube link)
  Study questions:

  1. What strikes you about this performance?
  2. Formulate your own opinion on the historical realism of Page's performance. (How) would you change his approach?

- **From the 2007 movie *Beowulf*, the recital in the opening scene** (YouTube link; start at 3m33s). If you have access to the full movie, also watch the scene that starts at 1h23m40s (will be shown in class).
  Study questions:

  1. What text-external elements does the film add to the performance?
  2. Formulate your own opinion on the historical realism of these performances. (How) would you change their approach?

Translate:

- **Brussels Cross inscription** (5 lines; ed. Clayton)
  Reading notes:

  1. After the Vercelli Book and the Ruthwell Cross, the Brussels Cross is the third carrier of material seemingly from *The Dream of the Rood*.

  Study questions:

  1. Who is speaking in the first prose line?
  2. Can you explain the roles of the four named individuals in the creation of the cross and its inscription?
  3. Compare the text with that in *The Dream of the Rood*. How would you describe the relationship between these two texts?

- ***The Battle of Maldon* lines 25–61** (eds. Mitchell and Robinson)
  Reading notes:

  1. This poem describes a battle fought on 11 August 991 at Maldon (Essex) between Scandinavian raiders and a local defence force led by Ealdorman Byrhtnoth. The local army was defeated, and the English Crown was made to pay a substantial tribute to Danish invaders for the first time, to be repeated and increased several times over the decade and a half that followed. The poet's report is not objective: it shows bias against the Vikings, but it also distinguishes between those on the side of the English who fought to the death, whom it praises, and those who fled, whom it names and shames.
  2. The excerpt picks up with the East Saxon host standing by the shore of the river Pante (today's Blackwater) ready for battle, and the Scandinavians landed, and indeed stranded, on the tidal island of Northey at high tide, with the causeway separating the two armies submerged. The supposed exchange that follows takes place across a substantial arm of the river. Scout out the site of the battle yourself at https://goo.gl/maps/WbkP2UM5uRsmkUem7.
  3. Should you wish to use a text-specific glossary, try Scragg; or perhaps you have Mitchell and Robinson's *Guide to Old English* or Baker's *Introduction to Old English* already in your possession.

  Study questions:

  1. What are the implications of the Viking messenger and the leader of the English being able to communicate, perhaps in Old English?
  2. Outside our excerpt, the poem has no shortage of battle action, but it also has speeches like the ones in the excerpt. Some of the speakers make time for their speeches in the midst of the battle, while the speeches in our excerpt take place over a distance that is 100 metres today and would have been at least 50 metres in 991. Why do you think the poet incorporated these speeches, which to a considerable degree must be fantasy? What would a poem on a lost battle have been without them?

3. How would you sum up the metrical qualities of the poem?
4. Can we tell from this excerpt whether the poet considered velar *g* [g] and palatal *ġ* [j] to be the same sound? What kinds of evidence do we have?
5. What ornamental devices can you find?
6. Identify six poetic words in the excerpt.

Session 10 (8 Jan): Riddling

Watch:

- **Riddling** (24m)

Do:

- The interactive video at https://www.doubleelephant.org.uk/projects/riddle-57
  Study questions:
  1. What strikes you about the differences in style between the three translations?
  2. Which seems to you the more literal translation?
  3. Which do you like best as a text in its own right? Why is that?
  4. Which solution do you find the most plausible?

Read:

- **Harleman Stewart, "Kenning and Riddle in Old English"** (22 pp.)
  Takeaway: Contrary to the popular understanding and their outward presentation, Old English kennings and riddles alike were not meant for puzzling over.
  Reading note:
  1. Errata: On p. 116 for "*dryten*" read "*dryhten*"; on p. 117 for "spears (limiting word" read "spears (limiting word)"; on p. 118 for "the only member that is declined" read "the only member whose declension is determined by the verb."

  Study questions:
  1. What three requirements does a phrase have to meet in order to qualify as a kenning in the established narrow definition?
  2. How does Harleman Stewart's definition of the kenning differ from the established narrow definition?
  3. In Harleman Stewart's understanding, what purpose does an Old English riddle serve?

Translate:

- **Exeter Book Riddles 68–69 (read as one riddle?), 45, 51** (15 lines in all; eds. Krapp and Dobbie).
  Reading notes:
  1. Riddles 68 and 69 have traditionally been edited as separate riddles because they are separated in the manuscript by punctuation, while riddle 69 opens with a large initial. There are, however, considerations that speak for them having been intended as a single riddle, and more recent editions, such as Muir's, print them as one.

  Study questions:
  1. What suggests riddles 68 and 69 may have to be understood as a single text?
  2. Can you work out the solutions to these riddles?

Session 11 (15 Jan): Dating Old English Verse

Watch:

- **Dating** (18m)

Read:

- **Terasawa §§7.1–7.2; revise 7.3** (5 new pp., 6 pp. revision)
- **Fulk, "*Beowulf* and Language History"** (17 pp.)
  Takeaway: Sums up the linguistic and metrical case for an early date of "Beowulf." NB: for balance and spectacular academic writing, I recommend that you also read Frank, "A Scandal in Toronto" if you have the time and interest.
  Reading notes:

  1. The question of the dating of *Beowulf* has been a contentious one especially since the publication of the 1981 volume *The Dating of "Beowulf"*, which for the first time levelled an array of sceptical takes at the traditional position that *Beowulf* is a product of the Merovingian era. The 2014 volume *The Dating of "Beowulf": A Reassessment* may be understood as a counterwave returning to an early date for the poem, but it has to be kept in mind that the latter volume is critically flawed by its editor's confirmation bias, as only essays that date the poem early were invited for submission. Fulk has produced the most sophisticated linguistic studies on the dating of verse to date, but of course his decades-long record of dating *Beowulf* early may run the risk of making him impervious to new insights. In short, whenever the date of *Beowulf* is on the table, it is important to read critically.
  2. This essay is really a summary of Fulk's work on the subject to date, and it lacks a great deal of the argumentative substance of his more extensive treatments. For instance, though Fulk here repeatedly claims *Beowulf* probably originated south of the Humber, he offers no explanation for this view in this essay but treats this likelihood as a given.
  3. Where Fulk asserts that "no hypothesis can be proved conclusively" (24; cf. 23), he means within an inductive paradigm such as philology.

  Study questions:

  1. As you read, keep an eye on Fulk's rhetoric and tone. Are you satisfied that his essay is sufficiently objective and open-minded? Note down any concerns you run into.
  2. Are you persuaded
     (a) that *Beowulf* is early relative to other Old English poetry?
     (b) That *Beowulf* dates to the first half of the eighth century?
     What informs your position?
  3. Is there any one line of evidence you find either particularly compelling or the least compelling?

Translate:

- ***Beowulf* lines 1753–1784** (eds. Fulk, Bjork, and Niles)
  Reading notes:

  1. In addition to the usual dictionaries, you might benefit from using an edition with a glossary in the back; I recommend Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, but there are many such editions that will do fine.
  2. This excerpt concludes one of the so-called digressions in *Beowulf*, known as "Hrothgar's sermon." After his successful mission against Grendel's mother, Beowulf salvages an ancient sword from her lair, inscribed with antediluvian lore, and brings it to King Hrothgar. After examining the sword and its inscription, Hrothgar offers Beowulf an exemplum on pride, observing that Beowulf's rise to prominence is reminiscent that of a certain Heremod, but Heremod gave in to pride and turned out a cruel king. It is after this that Hrothgar reminds Beowulf of the inevitability of death; our excerpt picks up some way into that reflection.

  Study questions:

  1. (a) What does the manuscript have for verse 1759a?
     (b) Why did the editors emend this reading?
     (c) What solutions have other editors come up with?
     (d) What is the relevant linguistic phenomenon?
  2. What analogues do we have in Old English literature for the rhetorical style of lines 1761b–1767a?
  3. What Sievers type is verse 1782b if we treat *symbel* as a monosyllable? What type is it if we treat it as a dissyllable?
  4. What does the gist of this passage suggest about its relationship to other genres?

Session 12 (22 Jan): CANCELLED

Session 13 (29 Jan): Adjacent Traditions

Watch:

- **Adjacent Traditions** (30m)

Read:

- **Clunies Ross, "The Anglo-Saxon and Norse *Rune Poems*"** (16 pp.)
  Takeaway: The divergence between the three "Rune Poems" speaks to cultural developments in each of the three traditions.
  Reading notes:

  1. The *Rune Poems* are three texts, from medieval England, Norway, and Iceland, cataloguing the runes in verse form. As only a few brief prose examples of direct translation from Old English into Old Norse survive, what modest overlap exists between these poems is remarkable.
  2. Rather than pursue a single argument, the article discusses striking characteristics of each poem in turn and makes some comparative observations. As a reader, then, you will want to look not for the unifying thread but for isolated nuggets of knowledge. Do not be put off by the Icelandic terminology; but if you're struggling, here's a glossary of terms.

  Study questions:

  1. How does the first stanza (the one on wealth) differ between the traditions (pp. 29–31)? How do you explain this fact?
  2. In praise poetry, the practice of *hjástælt* sometimes served to juxtapose the deeds of kings with those of gods, implying a divine sheen for their mortal subjects. What might the point of *hjástælt* have been in a *þulr* or catalogue poem the likes of the *Rune Poems*? (e.g. pp. 34–35)

Translate:

- ***Genesis B* lines 791–817a alongside the Old Low German *Genesis* lines 1–26a** as printed in Doane, *The Saxon Genesis* pp. 55–64 (ch. 4: "Where the Texts Meet").
  Reading notes:

  1. Taking a cue from developments in German-spoken scholarship, I will be using the term *Old Low German* (*OLG*) where Doane uses *Old Saxon* (*OS*). Either term refers to the language spoken around present-day Lower Saxony and some way to its east prior to c. 1200.
  2. The Old English verse *Genesis* contains such jarring breaks in language and metrical form between lines 234 and 235 as well as 851 and 852 that Eduard Sievers in 1875 concluded that the passage in between, which he referred to as B to set it apart from the remainder of the text, had to derive from an Old Low German original. His hypothesis was proved correct in 1894 when fragments of the lost original were found in the Vatican Library. Doane's position is that the Old English text, now generally referred to as *Genesis B*, represents less of a translation of the Old Low German *Genesis* into Old English but rather is the result of an incremental series of copies by speakers of Old English, each of which made the text more familiar to English eyes and ears. The Old Low German *Genesis* is thought to have been composed in the mid-ninth century; the final manuscript form of *Genesis B* was recorded c. 1000.
  3. In this chapter, Doane refers liberally to the *Heliand*; this is the longest Old Low German poem, a synthesis of the four gospels primarily based on a Latin translation of a gospel harmony of this kind originally produced in Syriac by Tatian.
  4. Where Doane speaks of parataxis and quasi-hypotaxis (p. 56), he means that clauses in the Old Low German text tend not to be subordinated one to another, whereas *Genesis B* adds conjunctions that suggest subordination (hypotaxis).
  5. Doane uses Bliss's rather complex verse taxonomy. Bliss modelled the hypermetric verse as a regular verse with another regular verse overlaid onto its last few syllables; in his notation, the "overlaid" verse type is indicated in parentheses. Thus type *a1e*(*2A1a*) is a verse of Sievers type A3 (a light verse, *a* in Bliss's notation) with a verse of type A1 overlaid onto its only lift.

6. The passage consists in a temper tantrum on the part of Adam following the first couple's expulsion from Eden. His addressee is Eve, whom he holds responsible. The material should be understood against the background of Genesis 3.
7. Translate the Old English, then compare the OLG text. If you need an OLG dictionary, try http://koeblergerhard.de/aswbhinw.html.

Study questions:

1. Identify a few striking lexical or grammatical innovations on the part of the Old English poet. Feel free to take your cues from Doane's notes in this chapter.
2. Does the OLG *Genesis* contain any evidence of influence *from* the Old English poetic tradition?

Session 14 (5 Feb): Tools for Analysis

Read:

- **Porck, "Onomasiological Profiles of Old English Texts"** (21 pp.)
  Takeaway: Describes research undertaken on the vocabulary of "Beowulf" in comparison with that of the verse "Andreas" and the prose "Martyrology" using the thesaurus structure of "A Thesaurus of Old English" and the Evoke application.
  Reading notes:

  1. Please be extremely cautious whenever confronted with the Sapir–Worf position cited in §2 that a culture's understanding of the world is shaped by their language.
  2. §3 mostly covers challenges in the conversion process. Please read its first paragraph (up to and including Figure 1), but feel free to skim or skip the remainder of the section so you can focus your energies on §4.

  Study questions:

  1. Does the richness of the Old English semantic field for "warrior" (exclusively) "[reflect] the preoccupation with warfare of a sizeable portion of the Anglo-Saxon literary record" (362), or can you think of additional explanations of this statistic?
  2. Porck (and similarly Stolk in the same volume, pp. 319–320) single out "polysemy (the number of senses per entry), degree of synonymy (the number of synonyms available per sense) and degree of specificity (how far down the semantic hierarchy senses are found)" as criteria by which language corpora may be compared (369, and the remainder of §4). Formulate your own thoughts on the value of and objections to these measures.
  3. Porck remarks on the finding that the *Martyrology*, a collection of brief accounts of how various saints died violent deaths, appears to make more reference to food and drink than either *Andreas*, a saints' life largely set in cannibal country, or *Beowulf*. Do you have any theories on why that might be?

Explore:

- Both ***A Thesaurus of Old English*** and the corresponding data set in **Evoke**
  Reading notes:

  1. *A Thesaurus of Old English* is an established resource linking Old English concepts with their hypernyms, hyponyms, and synonyms. *Evoke* can function as a modern wrapper around the same data set, but more properly enables users (registered with a given server instance) to create their own thesauri.

  Study questions:

  1. Please take notes on the hierarchy of concepts you encounter. Do you find it intuitive? Does anything strike you as unexpected?
  2. What research applications can you think of for this database?

- **CLASP's database**
  Takeaway: CLASP was a five-year project indexing Old English and Anglo-Latin verse for metrical structure. Its database allows for the corpus to be queried along a range of paths.
  Reading notes:

  1. Since this resource lacks a manual (!), you will have to explore it for yourself to discover its functionality.

Study questions:

1. Experiment with the resource until you have either discovered at least one practical application for the study of Old English verse or are forced to give up in frustration. Take notes on the steps taken, and come prepared to give instructions on your approach in class.

Translate:

- ***Soul and Body* (*"I"*) lines 103–127** (ed. Jones; NB CLASP lines 103–126 because it lacks line 113!)
  Reading notes:

  1. Part of a widespread medieval dialogue tradition, *Soul and Body* is a one-sided address of the soul to its post-mortem body reproaching it for having ensured their eternal damnation, followed by a gruesome description of bodily decay from which the following excerpt stems. The text survives with some significant variation in both the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book, with the latter containing a second monologue by a blessed soul to its body. The differences between the two have led to their being referred to as *Soul and Body I* (Vercelli) and *II* (Exeter), but they are more properly regarded as witnesses to the same text.

  Study questions:

  1. Do you have any observations on the poem's poetic form and possible date?

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