

GERMAN 580A
TTH 2:30-5pm (February/ March only)

Winter 2019
Denny Hall 359

Power and Doom: Medieval Epics

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Office Hours: scheduled individually
Denny Hall 330

Course Description

Medieval vernacular epics are full of transgression, gore and doom and yet (or maybe because of that) they have fascinated audiences into our time, inspiring fantasy stories such as R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* or J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In this class, we will study the medieval material itself, how story worlds are created, and how gender, court, emotions, and power are constructed in these medieval representatives. Exploring the specifics of medieval literature production, the Old Norse *Saga of the Völsungs*, the Middle High German *Song of the Nibelungen* and *Klage*, and the Old Yiddish *Dukus Horant* will also further our understanding of medieval (inter)textuality and storytelling. The primary literature readings will be complemented by secondary literature that help us engage with contemporary scholarly research.

Material

Available at UW bookstore:

- *The Nibelungenlied: With the Klage*. Hackett, 2018.
- *Saga of the Volsungs*. Penguin / Random House, 2000.

All other material available through Canvas.

Participation and Preparation

Please use January for reading *Nibelungenlied* (N) and *Saga of the Volsungs* (V) (and start reading *The Klage*). Reading actively and taking good notes will enable quick and easy preparations for each class. For each class: please find 2 passages (whole scenes, a few verses) in each, V and N, that relate to the posed question(s).

Assignments

- Paper: 40 %
- Theoretical Framework Presentation: 30 %
- Reception Presentation: 20 %
- Participation: 10 %

02/04 Intro Medieval Epic

Reading: Cohen: "Medieval Epic"

Questions: How do V and N adhere to the characteristics discussed in the text? Where do they differ?

02/06 Reception

Visit to Special Collections 2:30-3:30

Reception Presentations (all)

Questions: What are themes that fascinated modern audiences (based on your example). Which passages are still relatable and adaptable/ which ones are outright strange to a modern audience?

02/11 The Medieval Text / Edition / Intertextuality/ New Historicism

Reading: Heinze: "The Manuscripts of the Nibelungenlied"

(Individual Presentation: "Studying Snapshots. On Manuscript Culture.")

Questions: What are core intertextual references between V and N? How are motifs constructed differently and why do you think that is the case?

02/13 [Lauren Poyer visits]

Reading: tbd

Questions: tbd

02/18 The (De-)Construction of the Courtly Society

Reading: J. D. Müller: *Spielregeln f. d. Untergang*, "Das Verspielen der höfischen Alternative"

(Individual Presentation: "Greenblatt and New Historicism"

Questions: How is the Courtly Society constructed in N and V? Are there signs of it being deficient?

02/20 Yiddish Epic / Ruth von Bernuth visit

Readings: "Dukus Horant", Wailes: "The Romance of Kudrun"

Questions: tbd

02/25 Power and Performance /Performativity

Reading: McGillivray: "The Best Kept Secret"

(Individual Presentation: Culler: "The Fortunes of the Performative")

Questions: How is power performed? How is courtly society constructed around power and wealth? Is there a lesson to be learned from N and V?

02/27 Emotions

(class starts 3:15pm)

Readings: Starkey: "Brünhild's Smile", Rasmussen: "Emotions, Gender", *The Klage*

(Individual Presentations: Rosenwein: "Emotional Communities", Rosenwein: "Gender as a Category")

Questions: In how far does the *Klage* offer a comment and an interpretation of N? How are emotions performed? What roles does gender play?

03/03 Gender

Reading: Grimstad: "Monstrous Mates"

(Individual Presentations: Caviness: "Feminism, Gender Studies and Medieval Studies", Lees: "A Word to the Wise. Medieval Masculinities", Burgwinkle: "Queer Theory and the Middle Ages")

Questions: How is gender constructed in N and V? What role does the homosocial society play?

03/05 Religion and Fate

Readings: Frakes: "Kriemhild's Three Dreams", Näsström: "Old Norse Religion"

Questions: What role does religion and fate play in the worlds of N and V?

03/10 No class

03/12 Mini Conference