

ENG 9142B: Motifs and Tales from *Beowulf* to Ishiguro

Instructor: Michael Fox
Meetings: M 12:30-3:30 STVH 1140
Office: Lawson 3270F
Office Hours: M 9-12; by appointment
E-Mail: mfox52@uwo.ca

Course Description:

Man Booker short-listed author Patrick DeWitt's latest novel, *Undermajordomo Minor* (2015), has been called "a folktale of sorts," "a folktale for adults," and a "reimagining of the folktale." Kazuo Ishiguro recently released *The Buried Giant* (2015), a tale set in a world half Arthurian and half Anglo-Saxon, a world inhabited by folktale characters like ogres and dragons. *The Guardian's* review of Ishiguro's novel likened this world to modern fantasy, suggesting that novelists of the kind who win the Booker prize tend not to touch Tolkien's legacy "with a barge-pole." What, though, is Tolkien's legacy, how might it be deployed, and why has folktale seemingly become current again?

In this course, we will explore the folktale through the particular tale which lies at the heart of *Beowulf*, AT 301 (a folktale type also known as "The Three Stolen Princesses"). We will read *Beowulf* (in translation), several Old Norse/Icelandic adaptations of the same basic tale, such as *Grettis saga* and *Örvar-Odds saga* (in translation), *The Hobbit*, DeWitt, and Ishiguro. We will understand how tales are reworked (everything from *Beowulf* to *The Hobbit* is a retelling of AT 301) and motifs exploited (DeWitt and Ishiguro may be working at the level of motif instead of tale), and this understanding will be informed by such theorists as Lévi-Strauss, Propp, Jameson, and Genette. Structuralism and critiques of structuralism will lend us vocabulary and offer insight into the ultimate meanings of some of these "tales," but in the end, this is a course about how stories are told.

Required Texts:

Liuzza, R.M., trans. *Beowulf* (with facing page OE), 2nd edition (Peterborough: Broadview, 2013)
Byock, Jesse, trans. *Grettir's Saga* (Oxford: OUP, 2009)
Pálsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Seven Viking Romances* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)
Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* (London: HarperCollins, 2006)
DeWitt, Patrick, *Undermajordomo Minor* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2016)
Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Buried Giant* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2016)

Course Requirements:

Oral presentation (30%):

Your seminar should address the week's readings, both primary and secondary. Though you are free to take us in most any direction, please consult with me before beginning to prepare your presentation. The presentation should be approximately 30 minutes and should offer direction for discussion. Within a week of the presentation, you must submit a written version.

Final paper (5,000 words; 50%; **DUE: April 10**):

Write a paper on a topic of your choice relevant to the course material (including secondary material). The paper may be a development of your presentation. Please consult with me if you wish to explore a creative option for the final paper.

Participation (20%):

I expect you to come to each class prepared (having read and thought about most of the assigned texts for the week) and to demonstrate evidence of that preparation in contributions to our discussion. From week to week, I will ask specific people to read specific things for the next class: you might think of this as a summary/analysis of a text assignment, the evaluation of which will be rolled into the participation grade. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the participation grade.

Statement on Academic Offences:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.”

Schedule of Classes (subject to adjustment):

January 9: Introduction to motif and folktale

January 16: Propp; Campbell; Lévi-Strauss; Jameson; Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories”

January 23: *Beowulf*; Lapidge (Genette); Niles; Howlett; Leyerle; Parks; Sharma

January 30: *Beowulf*; Tolkien, “The Monsters and the Critics”; Shippey. “Fairy-Tale Structure”; McKinnell; Barnes; Rosenberg

February 6: *Grettir's Saga*; Orchard

February 13: *The Saga of Arrow-Odd*; Andersson

February 27: *The Saga of Ketill Salmon*; *The Saga of Grímr Hairy-Cheek*; *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*; *The Saga of the Volsungs*; the Celtic material (Puhvel); the Irish material (Scowcroft); Pizarro; Stitt; Righter-Gould

March 6: *The Hobbit*; Shippey, *Road*; Chance; Christensen

March 13: *The Hobbit*

March 20: *Undermajordomo Minor*

March 27: *The Buried Giant*

April 3: Conclusion; presentation of final projects

Basic Secondary Material:

Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*.

Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1973. [Antti Aarne's *Verzeichnis der Marchentypen*, translated and expanded by Stith Thompson]

Andersson, Theodore M. *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967. [see pp. 200-10 for a structural analysis of the saga]

Barnes, Daniel R. “Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *Beowulf*.” *Speculum* 45 (1970): 416-34.

Benson, Stephen. *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003.

[includes a chapter on “The Role of the Folktale in the Development of Narratology”]

Boberg, Inger M. *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.

Chance, Jane. *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*. Revised edition. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. [pp. 48-73, “The King Under the Mountain: Tolkien's Children's Story”]

- Christensen, Bonnie-Jean. "Tolkien's Creative Technique: *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*." *Mythlore* 57 (1989): 4-10. [earlier version in *Orcrist* 7 (1972-73): 16-20; both based on an otherwise unpublished dissertation from USC, a copy of which I do have if you are interested]
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979.
- . *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- Howlett, David. *British Books in Biblical Style*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997. [pp. 504-40]
- Jameson, Fredric. "The Formalist Projection." *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972, pp. 43-98. (but really just the section on Propp, pp. 64-9; see also Jameson's comments on Lévi-Strauss, pp. 112-20)
- . "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism." *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981, pp. 103-50.
- Lapidge, Michael. "Beowulf and Perception." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001): 61-97.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "Structure and Form: Reflections on Work by Vladimir Propp." Trans. Monique Layton. *Vladimir Propp, History and Theory of Folklore*. Ed. A. Libermann. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 167-89.
- . "The Structural Study of Myth." *Journal of American Folklore* 68 (1955): 428-44.
- Leyerle, John. "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967): 1-17 [reprinted in the Norton edition of Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*]
- McKinnell, John. *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005. [particularly pp. 126-46, "Þórr and the Bear's Son"]
- Niles, John D. *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.
- . "Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*." *Publications of the Modern Language Association [PMLA]* 94.5 (1979): 924-35
- Orchard, Andy. "Grettir and Grendel Again." *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*. 1995. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, pp. 140-68.
- Parks, Ward. "Ring Structure and Narrative Embedding in Homer and *Beowulf*." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89 (1988): 237-51.
- Pizarro, Joaquín Martínez. "Transformations of the Bear's Son Tale in the Sagas of the Hrafnistumenn." *Arv* 32-33 (1976-77): 263-81.
- Propp, Vladimir. *The Morphology of the Folktale*. 2nd edition. Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Puhvel, Martin. *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979.
- Righter-Gould, Ruth. "The *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*: a Structural Analysis." *Scandinavian Studies* 52 (1980): 423-41.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *Beowulf*: A Counter-Proposal." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1975): 199-209.
- Scowcroft, R. Mark. "The Irish Analogues to *Beowulf*." *Speculum* 74 (1999): 22-64.
- Sharma, Manish. "Metalepsis and Monstrosity: The Boundaries of Narrative Structure in *Beowulf*." *Studies in Philology* 102.3 (2005): 247-79.
- Shippey, Thomas A. "The Fairy-Tale Structure of *Beowulf*." *Notes and Queries* 16 (1969): 2-11.
- . *The Road to Middle Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. [pp. 55-93, "The Bourgeois Burglar"]
- Stitt, J. Michael. *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition*. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 1946. Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1977.
- . *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jestbooks and Local Legends*. 6 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 5-48.

---. "On Fairy Stories." *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 109-61.