FLR 410/510: Oral Traditions in Ancient and Medieval/Modern Culture

In this course we’ll explore the old and new examples of the oldest form of literature — literature composed, told, and transmitted orally. We’ll look at examples ranging from the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the medieval Irish epic, *The Táin*, to fairy tales, jokes, and urban legends. In these we’ll examine the ways memory and cognition shape form and narrative, and how oral literature has been used for thousands of years to enlighten, communicate, and entertain.

This class fulfills the Pre-1500 and Folklore requirements for the English major.

Required texts (available in the UO Bookstore):

Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles

*The Táin*, trans. Thomas Kinsella

*Beowulf*, trans. R. M. Liuzza (if you have this text in another edition, that edition will do; otherwise this is the best edition)

Additional texts for graduate students (and interested undergrads) — not in Bookstore, get these from the UO library or from online booksellers:


All other texts will be available in class or on Canvas.

Requirements for undergraduates:

midterm  20%
paper    20%
fieldwork project  30%
take-home final exam/paper  30%
reading, participation, and short assignments: not formally graded, but necessary to do well

Requirements for graduates:

midterm  20%
seminar paper    30%
fieldwork project  30%
take-home final exam/paper  20%
reading, participation, and short assignments: not formally graded, but necessary to do well

Learning Outcomes:
This class should help you to:

1. Identify, explain and apply basic concepts in oral tradition and theory
2. Develop the ability to conduct fieldwork on oral theory and integrate your research findings into written and oral presentations
3. Identify, explain, and analyze diverse oral traditions in relationship to the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which they are performed, employing appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches
4. Identify, explain, and critically analyze the role of oral traditions in community constitution, identity formation, and conflict negotiation for diverse groups of people in the United States and globally, both in the past and in the present
5. Compose an oral epic by resting overnight on a sacred oxhide (optional)

If you have a documented disability, you’re invited to let me know, and we’ll discuss accommodations for this class in conjunction with Disability Services.

Schedule:

week 1: **Introduction to Oral Literature: Starting to Think About Oral Tales**
March
Th 31: The role of modern oral literature in a literate society
    Assignment: bring in an example of modern oral literature
    • Reading: F. C. Bartlett, “Some Experiments in the Reproduction of Folk Stories”

week 2: **What Makes Oral Literature the Way It Is? What Makes It Memorable?**
April
Tu 5: Memorability and Meaning
    • Axel Olrik, “Epic Laws of Folk Narrative” (on Canvas)
    • Kenneth Jackson, from “The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition” (on Canvas)
Th 7:
    • Chip Heath et al., “Emotional Selection in Memes: The Case of Urban Legends,” from *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81:6 (2001), 1028-41 (on Canvas) — no need to absorb the statistics, just get the general ideas
    • John D. Niles, “Poetry as Social Praxis,” from *College English* 61 (1998), 143-66 (on Canvas)
        for graduate students and interested undergrads:

week 3: **Classics of Oral Tradition: The Odyssey**
Tu 12: *The Odyssey* books 1 and 2.
        for graduate students and interested undergrads:
        •• Lord, *Singer of Tales*, ch. 4, “The Theme”
Th 14: *The Odyssey* books 8, 9, and 10
• Additional reading: Lord Raglan, “The Hero of Tradition” (on Canvas)

week 4: **Classics of Oral Tradition: The Odyssey and Beowulf**
    for graduate students and interested undergrads:
    • Lord, *Singer of Tales*, ch. 8, “The Odyssey”
Th 21: *Beowulf*.
    for graduate students and interested undergrads:

week 5: **Beowulf and The Táin**
Tu 27: *Beowulf* continued.
    for graduate students and interested undergrads:
May
Th 29: *Beowulf* continued: Benjamin Bagby’s *Beowulf*. Fieldwork proposal due.

week 6: **The Táin**
May
Tu 3: *The Táin* pp. 1-2, 6-8, 21-25, 53-100
Th 5: *The Táin*, pp. 167-205

week 7: **Finishing The Táin**
    Th 12: Midterm

week 8: **Modern Oral Tradition**
Tu 17: Communal viewing of Spalding Gray, *Monster in a Box*. First paper due
    (undergrads).
Th 19: discussion of *Monster in a Box*

week 9: **Fieldwork!**
Tu 24: Fieldwork analysis due. Oral reports begin.
    Th 26: Fieldwork oral reports continued

week 10: **More Fieldwork; Finishing up**
June
Tu 31: Fieldwork oral reports. Final exam questions handed out.
June
Th 1: Fieldwork oral reports.
Correct: Parts can be melismatic, monophonic. Incorrect: sung in Latin, sung by a four-part chorus. You may hear similarities between Hildegard's modal melodies and the melodies and scales used by which sacred traditions? Middle Eastern. Which of the following describe plainchant of the Middle Ages and which do not? Recent papers in Classical Tradition in Modern Culture. Papers. People. The contribution focuses on the reception of classical theories of contagion in Early Modern Culture discussing passages taken from ancient sources (Hippocrates, Varro, Vitruvius, Seneca, etc.) as well as from medieval and early modern more. The contribution focuses on the reception of classical theories of contagion in Early Modern Culture discussing passages taken from ancient sources (Hippocrates, Varro, Vitruvius, Seneca, etc.) as well as from medieval and early modern theorists (Ugo Benzi, Pier Candido Decembrio, Michele Savonarola, Filippo Beroaldo the Elder, Nicolò L Previous (Oracle Bone Script). Next (Orange (fruit)). Oral tradition, oral culture and oral lore is a way for a society to transmit history, literature, law and other knowledges across generations without a writing system; one set of criteria specifies material held in common by a group of people, over several generations, and thus distinct from testimony or oral history. In a general sense, "oral tradition" refers to the transmission of cultural material through vocal utterance, and was long held to Medieval and Renaissance visual culture. The term "visual culture" is also used for a second reason that is less to do with definition than with method. Including the various arts under the umbrella of "visual culture" implies their inseparability from the visual rhetoric of power on the one hand, and the material culture of a society on the other. Alberti himself had received a humanist education based on the study of ancient Greek and Roman culture, and he was not alone in pointing out that painting and drawing had been included in an ancient liberal education. Early fifteenth-century humanist educator Vittorino da Feltre, working at the Gonzaga court in Mantua, employed artists in the programme of liberal education he offered the sons of rulers (Warnke, 1993, p. 39).
Historians have divided history into ancient, medieval and modern. This division has problems. It is a periodisation that is borrowed from the West where the modern period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity—science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where these features of modern society did not exist. History | Ancient Origins. 912 views. Sponsored by Forge of Empires. A tradition is a belief or behavior (folk custom) passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. A component of folklore, common examples include holidays or impractical but socially meaningful clothes (like lawyers' wigs or military officers' spurs), but the idea has also been applied to social norms such as greetings. Traditions can persist and evolve for thousands of years. The word tradition itself derives from the Latin tradere... Ancient and Medieval History and Culture. The BA degree in Ancient and Medieval History and Culture concentrates on the period c. 2000 B.C. to c. 1500 A.D. It explores the changes in society, politics, religious practices, and art and architecture that have helped to shape the world we live in. Over the four years of the programme you will explore topics such as the development of different systems of government (from democracy in ancient Greece to monarchy and empire in the Middle Ages), the formation of Europe, ancient and medieval belief systems and religious practices (from the pantheon of ancient deities to the dominance of Christianity), the development of the legal system, and the role of warfare in bringing about change.