

PROCLAMATION !

UPCOMING AMRS EVENTS

May 5th - The annual AMRS end of the year party will go from 4pm-6pm at Prof. Arnold's house! There'll be food, drinks, awards, and croquet! We hope to see you there!

Annual Essay Prize:

Do you have a piece of writing related to AMRS? Consider submitting it to the AMRS essay competition! Details are on page 11 of this issue!



THE STAFF OF THE TRIDENT

Student Editor: Jordan Waterwash

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AMRS Chair: Dr. Patricia DeMarco

Want to write a story? Have ideas for the next issue?

Send them to jmwaterw@owu.edu.



BEOWULF: REVIVING AN ANCIENT TRADITION

By: Matthew Pheneger

This school year has seen an increase of AMRS events on campus. The latest of these, a student led recitation of the Old English epic *Beowulf*, took place on a fittingly dreary March day and attracted a sizable crowd of

professors, majors, minors, and the casually interested. This event marks the revival of the campus tradition of hosting epic poetry "marathons," which allowed students to experience foundational works of literature outside of the classroom and in the spirit of their

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original oral presentation.

Though a rarity in modern times, the oral recitation of epic poetry has a rich history in cultures throughout the world. Both of the foundational works of Western literature, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, are believed by most scholars to have been poetic accounts that were entirely memorized and recited by skilled bards prior to their being preserved in writing. Old English, German, and Norse epics (such as *Beowulf*) were similarly preserved through memory and performance, though many of these works were lost when the Germanic peoples of Northern and Western Europe were Christianized. Those poems and works which do survive—namely *Beowulf*, *The Nibelungenlied*, various fragments of sagas, and the two *Eddas*—are all that remain of the beliefs and attitudes of the ancient Teutonic peoples. Edith Hamilton, the renowned classicist, notes that the material for an epic that would rival *The Iliad* exists in the “somber grandeur” of the Germanic myths and poems. Unfortunately, these works never had a Homer to work them over in the way that the ancient Greek stories did. Nevertheless, she maintains that many of the stories are “splendid. . .the best Northern tales are tragic, about

men and women who go steadfastly forward to meet death, often deliberately choose it, even plan it long beforehand. The only light in the darkness is heroism.”

Beowulf proves no exception. The fact that the poem survived at all is a miracle, as the only known manuscript copy very nearly was destroyed in an 18th century fire. After this, the poem was properly transcribed, edited, and translated until it entered the canon of English literature.

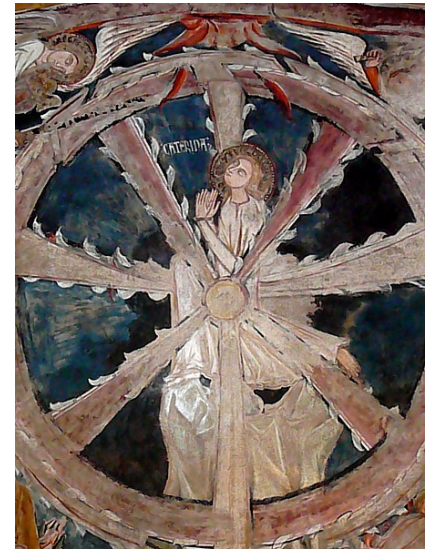
The edition used at the marathon reading was Seamus Heaney’s translation, which captures the somber, heavy characteristics of the Germanic epic described by Hamilton. The plot of the poem is carried by the heroic deeds of the Scandinavian prince for which



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it is named—in particular, his defeat of the monstrous terror Grendel, who has been mercilessly preying on the Danes and their king, Hrothgar. The heart of the poem is not only concerned with the encountering and overcoming of the monstrous, but also the manner in which one continues to live in the aftermath of such encounters. True to its origins, there is a certain fatalism which permeates the poem right up to its bitter end, culminating in Beowulf’s fight with a dragon and subsequent death. But this existential bent is what gives the Germanic poems their defining, memorable quality; that is to say, eventually there comes a time when courage, endurance, and great deeds prove not to be enough. Nonetheless, a true hero will choose to live by example and not yield, even in the face of death. Again in the succinct words of Hamilton, “for the poets of Norse mythology. . .the power of good is shown not by triumphantly conquering evil, but by continuing to resist evil even while facing certain defeat.”



SUBMIT TO THE ANNUAL AMRS ESSAY COMPETITION!

Papers must be on an ancient, medieval or, Renaissance topic. No page requirements nor assignment restrictions. Non-majors and majors/minors can apply so long as they have taken an AMRS course fall or spring semester of this year. A poster will be released soon with submission guidelines. They’re due April 27th!

MEDIEVAL MERMAIDS: SYMBOLS OF VANITY

By: Jordan Waterwash

Medieval mermaids, also known as sirens or Syrens depending on who you ask, exist as symbols of sexuality and vanity. This isn't wholly unsurprising—they *are* depicted topless most of the time. But the objects they carry hold a greater significance than one might think.

Mermaids are often shown holding mirrors, which makes sense as a symbol of vanity. What better way to show someone is vain than drawing them holding a mirror up to their face? The mirror, though, means more than just an object to view yourself. The fact that mermaids specifically hold mirrors speaks to the demonization of women; vanity is one of the greatest sins one can commit, and because mermaids—an exclusively female creature—possess it, they are thereby considered one of the largest evils. This is especially true since tritons, the closest male equivalent to mermaids, are not shown with mirrors.

As if the mirror wasn't enough, the mermaid's long hair speaks to the differences between tritons and mer-

maids. Long hair is exclusively saved for female figures in medieval art in order to easily distinguish between men and women.

However, that wasn't the only use for long locks.

Women were supposed to have long hair, but they were still given trouble for it depending on how their hair was depicted. Another convention of mermaids was that their hair was often shown being pulled. Hair-pulling often signifies fornication, which marks another one of the worst sins one could commit.

Most of all, though, the sins of fornication and vanity hurt women the most. Of course men were told to avoid these sins as much as possible, but they were never punished as harshly as women were for breaking the rules. Mermaids, then, are symbols of the trials of women more than anything else.



LUCAN'S CIVIL WAR: EXCERPT FROM BOOK 6 IN TRANSLATION

Translated by: Merritt Ver Steeg

She [Erichtho] spoke and made the dark night twice as black with her art, and with her gloomy head hidden by a mourning veil of smoke she picked through the carcasses of the slain thrown upon the earth and denied a tomb. The wolves fled before her, and the vultures tore their talons free and flew away still hungry. The witch searches for her prophet, probing the marrow cold in death until she finds the stiffened lungs, listening for speech from the dead man's lips. Now the fate of many men killed in battle hangs on her decision. Who among them will she call up from below? If she had wished to raise the entire army on the plain to fight again the laws of the shadows would have yielded to her, and that great and monstrous multitude would have marched back through the gates of hell to fight again.

BEOWULF AND ARCHAEOLOGY: TEXT AND MATERIAL CULTURE

By: Joseph Acero

Beowulf is one of the earliest examples of English literature, and because of that evidence on its background can be hard to uncover. However, Professor Gale Owen-Crocker found a significant amount of information on the Anglo-Saxon culture surrounding *Beowulf* through the fashion and ornaments they made. Director of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, Professor Owen-Crocker elaborated on the descriptions of clothes and weapons used in the text at a presentation a few weeks back; she revealed the cultural importance of those items as well as their significance to the story itself.

Prof. Owen-Crocker presented quite a number of



amazing facts at the talk, showing not just her

knowledge of Anglo-Saxon fashion, but of the story of *Beowulf* as well. She discussed the fascinating mystery behind Grendel and how the ambiguity in its appearance was intended to add the fear of the unknown into the story. She pointed out the importance of night within the story, too, and how it was a time of both great fear and peace for Danish culture at that time.

The story of *Beowulf* is filled with a lot of description, especially when discussing the celebrations that the titular hero would participate in. Within these parties, numerous drinks are mentioned. Prof. Owen-Crocker made sure to point out how important the drinks were in this time. In fact, she pointed out that while drinks were brought up numerous times in the story, food is rarely presented, with the only form found with the bodies that Grendel consumes.

While celebration is a big aspect of society in *Beowulf*, war plays a prominent role as well, and there are plenty of descriptions of the various weapons involved.

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EXCERPT FROM RICHARD II

Mine ear is open and my heart prepared;
The worst is worldly loss thou canst unfold.
Say, is my kingdom lost? why, 'twas my care
And what loss is it to be rid of care?
Strives Bolingbroke to be as great as we?
Greater he shall not be; if he serve God,
We'll serve Him too and be his fellow so:
Revolt our subjects? that we cannot mend;
They break their faith to God as well as us:
Cry woe, destruction, ruin and decay:
The worst is death, and death will have his
day.

- King Richard II, Act 3, Scene 2

Owen-Crocker states how there's a lot of imagery involving spears, which indicated how prominent these weapons were in battle. Swords are also depicted, but not nearly as often because, as Owen-Crocker points out, they aren't exactly necessary—Beowulf's strength takes care of whatever a sword might accomplish. Because Beowulf is powerful enough to rip the arm off an immensely large monster, swords just aren't that important. His power, as seen with the fight with Grendel's mother, and, more importantly, the fight with the dragon at the end, shows through brute force rather than by way of weaponry.

When Beowulf is going toe-to-toe with the ferocious dragon, he attacks the creature with such force that it breaks his sword and he has to



use his knife, something that Owen-Crocker puts a lot of focus on. Owen-Crocker discusses the long history of knives within Anglo-Saxon society, stating how they were always worn by lords and were even buried with them alongside their helmets. Helmets are another prominent grave good that Owen-Crocker brings up, since the designs of the helmets, with straps on the chin and decoration and focus on the face, shows how the dragon was able to go for Beowulf's neck.

All of this information and more was presented at Prof. Owen-Crocker's talk, which showed the various intricacies found in the *Beowulf* story and how they held more meaning than one might expect. The background of *Beowulf* is one that is still filled with mystery, but with experts like Professor Gale Owen-Crocker, we are able to find the largest amount of information in the places that one might not expect.

Joseph Acero is a graduating Medieval Studies and Creative Writing major, and served on the AMRS Student Board.

CLOSING REMARKS FROM THE AMRS STUDENT BOARD CHAIR

By: Colin McGarry

Now that the school year is coming to a close, I feel as though we can safely say that this has been a successful year for the AMRS program. We managed to bring in a few new traditions—such as our wonderful marathon reading of *Beowulf*—and a few new majors joined us in the crazy AMRS journey along the way. Along with that, we've had some great lectures that really enhanced the interdisciplinary nature of AMRS. We've learned about how to preserve historical sites, what museum work really looks like, and that *Beowulf* is far more complex than anyone could have imagined. We're even making t-shirts, which is a new installment for the department! (And there still available to order if you're interested.)

Back at the start of year, I said that the board was focused on the students in the program in ways that other boards are unable to do, and I think we accomplished just that. We were able to do things we'd never done before, as well as bring back some traditions that got left at the

wayside. I, along with the rest of the Student Board, had a fantastic time being able to work with and for you this past year, and we're all excited to see how all of you will continue working to grow the department in the future.. With four of our five members graduating, we're happy to pass on the torch to any newcomers who want to get involved with the department. Email Dr. De-marco if you're interested!

We wish you the best during the rest of your academic journey. Thank you for a fantastic year!



Graduating members (in order of appearance): Matthew Phe-neger, Colin McGarry, Joseph Acero, and Kyle Rabung

CAPSTONE CORNER: RICHARD II AND HIS BOYHOOD TROUBLES

By: Kyle Rabung

Richard II is a much-maligned figure in history. Most people probably know him as one of two things, either as the tragic figure from Shakespeare's play *Richard II*, or as the boy king of England. Historians instead know him as the tyrant figure who marks a turning point in political history. His death represents the changing of a dynasty and the beginning of the Early Modern Period in English history. Who, then, was this tragic boy tyrant and how did he become such a character in our history?

Richard's story is deeply tied to both the politics



and gender norms of the late medieval era in which he lived. As a boy, Richard was crowned king at the age of ten and thus denied any time period of youth in which he may have proved himself a man. Instead he became a figurehead for his council that ruled for some time in his name. Certainly, the standard which Richard was compared to was high, as his grandfather, the previous king Edward III, had been a prolifically manly man by medieval standards. Even so, Richard attempted to excel within the gender system. He received praise for his actions during the Peasant Revolt and led successful military campaigns in both Scotland and Ireland. In fact, his household records indicate that he spent more time and money hunting (a traditionally manly medieval activity) than even his grandfather had.

How then does Richard become the boy king in our history? That question is perhaps best answered by the actions of his usurper, Henry IV. Henry was Richard's cousin, and about six months younger than him. Yet, Henry is associated with many of the manly attributes that Richard



was not. Perhaps one critical factor is that Henry not only had a period of youth, but he had an exceptional one. During Richard's reign, Henry stole his wife from a monastery where her brother-in-law had sent her, fought against rebels during the Peasant's Revolt, fought in Richard's Scottish campaign, received public glory for his role in the

WHO, THEN, WAS THIS TRAGIC BOY TYRANT . . . ?

Battle of Radcot Bridge, fought in Spain, crusaded in the Baltic, toured Europe, and visited the Holy Land. During this time, he was also a prolific hunter and jousting. He and his wife also had many children whereas Richard and his

wife had none. Ultimately, once Henry had seized the throne and his cousin had died, he had the ability to hold great influence over the narrative of the kingdom's history. Chronicles of this time praise him considerably and attack Richard in his most vulnerable area: his perceived youth. After all, in comparison to the feats of masculinity that Henry had performed Richard did seem like a boy. These perceptions certainly influence the way that Richard was perceived by future historians, but are they the truth? Possibly, but it is more likely that Richard was a figure whose public image was vulnerable and that his enemies exhibited expert precision in using this against him and thus left his reputation tarnished for future generations and historians.

Kyle Rabung is a graduating Medieval Studies and History major and served on the AMRS Student Board.