

Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00 a.m.-12:00 noon EST and 3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. EST, Or email me at cmckenna@fas.harvard.edu to arrange a convenient time.

(No office hours on Wednesday February 1)

MS National Library of Wales Peniarth 1, [The Black Book of Carmarthen](#), ca. 1250; f. 29v

The earliest surviving manuscript entirely in Welsh, it consists entirely of poetry. Here we have the opening of the 'Oianau', one of the poems attributed to Myrddin.

This course focuses on medieval Welsh poetry, including selections from *hengerdd*, *barddoniaeth y tywysogion*, and poetry of the *cywyddwyr*. Poetry has been at the center of Welsh literary culture from its inception, and remains vital to this day. What other country awards a chair for the best poem in the 'strict metres' that originated in the Middle Ages, and a crown for the best poem in 'free metres', while awarding only a medal for the best work of prose, as the Welsh do at the annual Eisteddfod Genedlaethol?

Not surprisingly, the syntax of medieval Welsh poetry tends to be quite different from that of medieval prose; it is dense, compact, often ambiguous, and challenging. This course presumes a familiarity with the basics of Middle Welsh as the foundation on which we base our decoding of a selection of verse. We also learn the basics of metrics and ornamentation, including the glory of Welsh poetry, *cynghanedd*, introduced by the *cywyddwyr* of the fourteenth century.

Quite a few different manuscripts are represented in the poems that we read, and thus, quite a few different approaches to Welsh orthography. These can be somewhat bewildering to a student used to the orthography of the White Book *Mabinogi*. Accordingly, our base texts are drawn from Thomas Parry's *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, which presents them in modernized Welsh orthography. From that base, we look at the manuscript texts, thereby broadening our grasp of the various orthographical conventions at play in medieval Wales.

Our class sessions will include

- translation and analysis of texts in Thomas Parry's *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*
- examination of the manuscript texts of these poems and their context
- discussion of the periods, genres, poetics and manuscript tradition of the poetry
- discussions of secondary readings

Course materials include

- Thomas Parry, *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford and New York, 1962), which is out of print and increasingly hard to find, unfortunately. The texts will be posted here on the course website. See 'files' and 'pages' in the menu column.
- translations of the poems we're reading: it's acceptable to refer to translations as an aid to your own reading of the texts. My favorite translator is Joseph Clancy (*Medieval Welsh Poems*, 2000;); there are good translations as well by Anthony (Tony) Conran, and of particular poets by A.O.H. Jarman, Marged Haycock, Rachel Bromwich, Dafydd Johnston, Gwyn Thomas and others.
- Welsh dictionary: we work without glossaries in this course. You need to use the [Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru](#), available online and as an app..

Course requirements:

- assigned written translations (~12 lines each), including discussion of syntax and poetics as appropriate (about 3 pages), one for each section (*hengerdd*, *barddoniaeth y tywysogion*, *cywyddwyr*) (45%)
- journal of notes on assigned secondary sources, submitted as a Word doc. or PDF (15%)
- Preparation, in-class translation, and participation (40%)