

Celtic 111: Shapeshifters and Manbeasts in Celtic Traditions
Prof. Catherine McKenna
Kate Leach
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30—11:45
Kates Room, 202 Warren House

Fall 2018

Syllabus

(For details of assignments and links to readings, see the assignment for each day under “Course Summary” on the website.)

Introduction: September 4, September 6

- Objects of visual culture from ancient Celtic societies
- Ancient classical writers on Celtic belief in transmigration and reincarnation
- Early Christian doctrine on Transmigration and metamorphosis (Augustine)
- Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*
- The medieval Bestiary tradition
- Background to the first tale: legendary pseudohistory of the six “takings” of Ireland, the nature of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the nature of the sídh

Assignments due at these classes: none

Transformed into an animal: September 11—October 18

In this unit, we read and discuss stories in which human persons are transformed into other kinds of animal through the agency of another human.

September 11: **The Fate of the Children of Lir**

Assignment due today:

- Read The Fate of the Children of Lir
- Study the material on The Fate of the Children of Lir and The Swan's Voice pages (on the course website)
- Read the "appendix" to *The Book of Beasts* by T.H. White (this is what would in most books be an introduction, but printed as an appendix). This serves as an introduction to the bestiary tradition.

September 13: **The Fate of the Children of Lir, The Wooing of Étaín**

Assignment due today:

- Read pp. 7-29 (pp. 8-30 of the PDF) of "The Religious Significance of *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*," by Caoimhin Breatnach,
- Read The Wooing of Étaín (*Tochmarc Étaíne*).
- Read “The Wooing of Étaín” by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (article discussing the text)

September 18: **The Story of Bran and Sgeolang**

Assignment due today:

- Read “The Story of Bran and Sgeolang”, edited and translated by Mark Scowcroft
- Read the prologue and chapter 1 of *Being a Beast* by Charles Foster.
- Read the “dog” entry on the Medieval Bestiary website.

September 20: **The Story of Bran and Sgeolang, Werewolves**

Assignment due today:

- Read "LO and Oral Versions of Oisín in the Land of Youth" from the essay "Some Material on Oisín in the Land of Youth" by Máirtín Ó Briain.
- Read "Werewolves, Cyclopes, Díberga and Fíanna: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland" by Kim McCone
- Read the "wolf" entry on the Medieval Bestiary website

September 25: **The Quarrel of the Pigkeepers**

Assignment due today:

- Read the Introduction to *The Táin*, translated by Thomas Kinsella, pp. ix-xvi
- Read "The Quarrel of the Two Pig-Keepers and How the Bulls were Begotten" in *The Táin*, pp. 46-50
- Read pp. 251-253 in *The Táin*.

September 27: **The Quarrel of the Two Pigkeepers**

No additional reading or writing due today

October 2: **The Frenzy of Sweeney**

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Frenzy of Sweeney"
- Submit first response paper.

October 4: **The Frenzy of Sweeney**

Assignment due today:

- Read Chapter One, "Mediated Origins: *Buile Suibhne*" (pp. 23-72, pp. 31-80 of the PDF) in *Feathered Glory: A Poet in Flight from Medieval Ireland to the Twentieth Century*, PhD dissertation by Denell M. Downum.
- Read Joseph F. Nagy's 1996 Introduction to the 1913 edition of *Buile Suibhne*.

October 9: **The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: Math Son of Mathonwy**

Assignment due today:

- Read "Math Son of Mathonwy"

October 11: **The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: Math Son of Mathonwy**

Assignment due today:

- Read Ian Hughes's introduction *Math uab Mathonwy: The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi*, pp. xxxiv-xciv at least (pp. 14-44 of the PDF).
- Look at "The Laws of Court" in Dafydd Jenkins's edition of *Hywel Dda: The Law*. **Read closely** pp. 32-33 (p. 17 of the PDF) on the Footholder.
- Look at "The Value of Wild and Tame" in Dafydd Jenkins's edition of *Hywel Dda: The Law*. **Read closely** pp. 178-9 (pigs), 184-88 (Deer and Hunting, Other Animals). These pages are pp. 6, 9-11 of the PDF.
- Examine the pages on the Bestiary website for the stag, the boar, and the wolf (again).

October 16: **The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: Math Son of Mathonwy**
Assignment due today:

- Read "Revising Math: Kingship in the Fourth Branch".
- Read Andrew Welsh, "Doubling and Incest in the Mabinogi".

October 18: **The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: Math Son of Mathonwy**
Assignment due today:

- First short paper

The obligations of the manbeast: October 23—30

In this unit, we focus on the great Irish hero Cú Chulainn.

October 23: **The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn**

Assignment due today:

- Read "Cúchulainn's Boyhood Deeds" in *The Táin*, pp. 76-92.
- Read "The Smith and the Hero: Culann and Cú Chulainn", by William Sayers

October 25: **The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn, and Cú Chulainn's Warp-Spasm**

Assignment due today:

- Read *The Táin*, pp. 137-156, and pp. 168-205.
- Read "Kicking Over the Traces: The Instability of Cú Chulainn", by Jeremy Lowe

October 30: **The Death of Cú Chulainn**

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Death of Cú Chulainn"
- Second short quiz

The power of transformation: November 1—6

In this unit, we read several stories about persons who have the power of transforming themselves into other kinds of animal.

November 1: **The Story of Tuan mac Cairell**

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Story of Tuan mac Cairell"

November 6: **The Story of Taliesin**

- Read "The Story of Gwion Bach, who became Taliesin"
- Read *Faeth Fiada* / The Deer's Cry,

Selkies: November 8—20

In this unit, we read and talk about legends of the seal people, which are widespread in Ireland and Scotland. We will also schedule screenings of three or four relevant films.

November 8: ***The People of the Sea***

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Man Who Married the Mermaid" from *Uair an Chloig cois Teallaigh / An Hour by the Hearth*.
- Read selection from *The People of the Sea: A Journey in Search of the Seal Legend*, by David Thomson, pp. 13-20
- Second response paper due.

November 13: ***The People of the Sea***

Assignment due today:

- Read *The People of the Sea*, pp. 81-94 and pp. 110-112

November 15: ***The People of the Sea***

Assignment due today:

- Read *The People of the Sea*, pp. 115-116 and pp. 122-126

November 20: ***The Dream of Oengus***

- . Read "The Dream of Oengus"

Transformations of Gender: November 27-29

This week we look at a tale or two that involves gender transformation, rather than species transformation, and look back at the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi from that perspective.

November 27: ***The Abbot of Drimnagh***

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Abbot of Drimnagh"
- Third response paper due

November 29: **Gender switching**

Assignment due today:

- Read "The Abbot of Druimenaig: Genderbending in Gaelic Tradition", by Barbara Hillers
- Refresh your memory of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi. Preview the document
- Read "Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in Math", by Roberta Valente
- Read "Youth, Warriors and Homoerotic Reproduction: Queer and Celtic in Irish Studies as Strange Bedfellows" by Phillip Bernhardt-House

December 4: **The animal companion**

Assignment due today:

- Second short paper due
- We read "Pangur Ban" together in class.