

Welcome to "Celtic Mythology"! No previous knowledge of anything Celtic is required. We will explore the storytelling traditions (and the worldviews they reflect) of the Celtic peoples, from ancient to more recent times. While we will examine what we know about Celtic mythology and religion from the writings of classical authors about the many Celtic-language peoples of their world and from the findings of archaeology, most of our attention will be focused on the extensive narrative literatures produced in medieval Ireland and Wales, in which former goddesses and gods, legendary kings, and epic heroes abound.

There will be a midterm exam (take-home, essay; worth **thirty percent** of the final grade), a final exam consisting of a research paper (topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor or our Teaching Fellow, Ms Rachel Martin) of 2,000 to 2,500 words plus bibliography (**forty percent**), and the occasional multiple-choice quiz (**ten percent**). Sections will meet on Friday in two groups: 12:00-1:15 and 1:30-2:45. Further information on sections and Rachel's office hours may be found [here](#). **Faithful attendance at the lectures and participation in the sections are required (twenty percent)**. Graduate students enrolled in the class should discuss with Nagy the graduate-level workload.

There will be required readings from three paperback books that those enrolled should buy. They are available from the Harvard Coop and from Amazon.

Patrick K. Ford, trans., *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (University of California Press).

Jeffrey Gantz, trans., *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Penguin).

Elis Gruffydd, trans. Ford & Hunter, *Tales of Merlin, Arthur, and the Magic Arts: From the Welsh Chronicle of the Six Ages of the World* (University of California Press).

Questions? Please contact the instructor, Professor Joseph Nagy, at jfnagy@fas.harvard.edu.

In Weeks 2 and 3, we will be reading the following text, perhaps the most dramatic example of a "theogony" (battle of the gods) and maybe even of a creation myth to have survived in Celtic traditions:

Elizabeth A. Gray, trans., "The Battle of Mag Tuired," available at: [Link](#)

(Apologies for the two links, which seem to come together in the same package. It's the same text but in different formats.)

And, for recommended though not required reading, but here's most of the "critical apparatus" included in the book version of Gray's edition/translation--introduction (including discussion of the key themes), list of abbreviations, notes on the text/translation, "Index to Persons" (a very useful compendium of information about the characters mentioned in the story), and an index of place-names--that you might find useful, especially if an essay or paper topic involves this text.

[Gray Mag Tuired intro, notes, indices.pdf](#)

Recommended or any additional required readings will be posted on our website when possible.

PLEASE KEEP UP WITH THE READINGS ACCORDING TO THE DATES GIVEN IN THE SCHEDULE BELOW.

Week 1 (September 6)

[celtic 137 f 2023 pp 1.ppt](#)

Silly Images of "Celts" in the Movies: clip from *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* (1991): [Link](#); scene from *The Viking Queen* (1967): [Link](#)

Nagy's definition of myth (on p. 32): [jfn celtic dragon myth pub.pdf](#)

recommended reading: [Proinsias Mac Cana, "Celtic Religion"](#)

Week 2 (September 11, 13): The Battle of the Gods? Please read Gray, pp. 25-43 [Link](#)

[celtic 137 f 23 PP 2-2.pptx](#)

"It Might as Well Be Spring," Rodgers and Hammerstein, from *State Fair*, dir. Jos  Ferrer (1962) [Link](#)

Week 3 (September 18, 20): The Invention of Culture? *Please read Gray, pp. 45-73* [Link](#)

[celtic 137 f 23 P 3.pptx](#)

Rachel Martin - Guest Lecture

[celtic 137 f 23 P 4F](#)

"You're Welcome," Lin Manuel Miranda and The Rock, from *Moana*, dir. John Musker and Ron Clements (2016) [Link](#)

Week 4 (September 25, 27): This World and Otherworlds. *Please read Gantz, "Introduction," "Wooing of Óta" and "Dream of Engus," pp. 37-59, 107-112, and endnotes*

[Wenceslao Moreno Centeno \("Seán or Wences"\) and the Head](#)

(talking inanimate objects, or objects that should be inanimate--such as severed heads; cf. Ogma's sword, the Dagda's harp which can "sing" but also slay, and other examples from Celtic storytelling traditions to come)

[Alexander Nevsky \(1938, dir. Sergei Eisenstein\)](#)

(This is the famous "Battle of the Ice" sequence, demonstrating *montage* as a cinematic technique. It's also usable in verbal storytelling, as we often see in medieval Irish literature, for example, in the battle sequence in *Cath Maige Tuired*!)

[The Fly](#) (1958, dir. Karl Freund), trailer

[The Fly](#) (1958), recognition scene

Comparison of *The Fly* (1957) with *The Fly* (1986) [Link](#)

(demonstration of multiformity--and of the fascination with the fly! Warning: GRUESOME)

[The Mummy](#) (1932, dir. Karl Freund)

(theme of incarnation lives!)

[The Mummy](#) (2017, dir. Alex Kurtzman)

(now it's the woman who comes back!)

[celtic 137 f 23 PP 5.pptx](#)

Week 5 (October 2, 4): Heroes and Heroines. *Please read Gantz, "The Cattle Raid of Fráech," "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," "The Labour Pains of the Ulaid and the Twins of Macha," pp. 60-106, 113-29, and endnotes*

"Dream Lover" (composed and sung by Bobby Darin, 1959 [Link](#))

"All I Have to Do is Dream" (composed by Boudleaux Bryant and sung by the Everly Brothers, 1958) [Link](#)

from *West Side Story* (1961), dir. Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins; music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim [Link](#)

[Key Points and Passages in "Wooing" and "Destruction"](#)

No Friday section this week, on account of:

The Harvard Celtic Colloquium Conference, Thompson Room, Barker Center, October 11-13 (Friday-Sunday)

All are welcome! Program: TBA

Week 6, (Monday, October 9): **no-class- HOLIDAY**

(Wednesday, October 11): Review **TAKE-HOME MIDTERM has been posted on the "Assignments" page**

"Selfie Le Le Re" song (no subtitles, alas) from *Bajrangi Bhaijan* (2015), dir. Kabir Khan; song by Pritam &

lyrics by Mayur Puri, sung by Vishal Dadlani, acted, and danced, by Salman Khan: [Link](#)

[Hindi lyrics translated](#)

Week 7, TAKE-HOME MIDTERMS WILL BE DUE BY THE END OF THIS WEEK

The First "Branch" of the Welsh *Mabinogi*. *Please read Ford, Introduction, and pp. 35-56 ('Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed')*

[Song from Devdas](#) (2002, dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali), music by Ismail Darbar, lyrics by Nusrat Badr, sung by Shreya Goshal; acted, and danced, by Aishwarya Rai (no subtitles, unfortunately):

[Lyrics translated](#)

["Meet Cute."](#) SNL

[Song from Shaan](#) (1980, dir. Ramesh Sippy, music by R.D. Burman, lyrics by Anand Bakshi, sung by Kishore Kumar, Mohammed Rafi, Asha Bhosle, acted by Amitabh Bachchan, Shashi Kapoor, Parveen Babi, Bindiya Goswami)

[Lyrics translated](#)

[Notes on the Mabinogi and the First Branch](#)

Week 8: Second and Third Branches. *Please read Ford, pp. 57-88 ('Branwen Daughter of Llyr,' 'Manawydan son of Llyr')*

"Music Land," Disney "Silly Symphony," dir. Wilfred Jackson (1935) [Link](#)

["The Two Mouseketeers" \(1952\), dir. Hanna & Barbera](#)

[Images of harvest mice](#)

Recommended reading: Ford, "Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities" [Ford Branwen, A Study of the Celtic Affinities.pdf](#)

[Notes on the Second Branch](#)

[Notes on the Third Branch](#)

Week 9: Fourth Branch. *Please read Ford, pp. 89-110 ('Math son of Mathonwy')*

"Rowdy Baby," from *Maari 2* (2018), with Sai Pallavi and Dhanush; sung by Dhee and Dhanush; music by Yuva Shankar Raja; choreography by Prabhudeva [Link](#)

Bollywood song film-sequence filmed in Wales (Aberystwyth primarily), music by Daboo Malik, sung by Udit Narayan & Alka Yagnik [Link](#)

[Correction to Gantz's translation of "Da Derga's Hostel" \(p. 67\)](#)

[Notes on the Fourth Branch](#)

Week 10: The Myth of Arthur. *Please read Ford, pp. 119-58 (Culhwch and Olwen = CO)*

from *Razorback* (1984), dir. Russell Mulcahy [Link](#)

"Unfrozen Caveman Lawyer" skit from SNL, with Phil Hartman (1991): [Link](#)

[Notes on Arthurian tradition and CO, part 1](#)

[Notes on CO, part 2](#)

Week 11: The Myth of Arthur (cont.). *Please read selections from Gruffydd, Tales of Merlin, pp. 51-103; Introduction, pp. 1-22 (recommended)*

Week 12 (M): The Myth of Arthur (cont.)

[Why "Athlone" is so named](#)

[clip](#) from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975, dir. T. Jones & T. Gilliam)

W: no class--HOLIDAY

Week 13 (M): The Eternal Poet. *Please read selections from* Gruffydd, pp. 107-115

["Nostradamus--Mr Know-It-All"](#) (SCTV TV show, ca. 1980; Dave Thomas, Joe Flaherty, Martin Short, Rick Moranis)

["Taliesin Prize,"](#) awarded by Harvard's Division of Arts and Humanities

(W) Bringing the Strands Together--Is there a "Celtic Mythology"?

[Vercingetorix and a woman warrior](#) (from *Druids* [2001, dir. J. Dorfmann])

["Celtic Myth beyond Celtic Myth"](#) packet (distributed)

And if you'd like to follow up on the "fairy bride" theme, may I recommend:

[Wood A_Fairy_Bride_Among_the_Druids.pdf](#)

and [Wood-FairyBrideLegend-1992.pdf](#)

FINAL CLASS MEETING (MONDAY, DECEMBER 4), SPECIAL EVENT

A conversation with our honored guests, Elizabeth Gray and Rick Riordan. . . .

Postscript--an analogue to episode where Arthur is "caught" by Huail at a dance:

["The Woody Woodpecker Polka"](#) (1951, dir. W. Lantz)

YOUR FINAL PROJECT DUE DURING THE EXAM PERIOD--See under "Assignments"