OE025: Advanced Topics in Literature I

Fall 2012: Imagining Nations, Medieval and Modern

NOTE: Course topics change every semester. This sample syllabus is intended to give a general idea of the kind of course a student might encounter, rather than specific information about upcoming topics. For information about the upcoming year's topics, please consult the most recent OHS Course Catalog.

Course Description

Imagining Nations, Medieval and Modern will examine how ideas about nations and national identities have shaped and continue to shape the political and cultural makeup of the world. At the same time, it will interrogate the claims of competing theories of national identity and nationalism. Most theories of national identity argue that nations are a specifically modern Western European phenomenon, arising together with the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, scholars of other periods (Renaissance, Medieval, Classical) and other places (China, India, Japan, the Americas) are eager to challenge this restrictive definition. This class will seek to address some of the following questions: What is at stake in the definition of nations? Why is national identity so effective in mobilizing large groups of people? How does national identity stack up against other, competing (or coordinate) modes of identity, such as those based on religion, ethnicity, legal systems, and language? Why is there such competition to control the definitions of key terms in nationalist discourses? Why has the nation-state become a paradigm? What other paradigms are possible, and what are their benefits and drawbacks? Primary source readings will be from the medieval period, supplemented by modern scholarly theories of national identity. The last two weeks of the course will turn to students' presentations on nationalist literature of their own choosing, from past or present.

Texts

Malory Le Morte Darthur,
ed. Helen Cooper
Oxford University Press, USA; Reissue edition (December 15, 2008)

History of the Kings of Britain,
Geoffrey of Monmouth, trans. Michael Faletra
Broadview Press, 2007

Beowulf,
Seamus Heaney translation

Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities
Grading Breakdown

Half-credit Option:

- **Weekly participation**: 70 %
  (includes quality of verbal responses to reading questions and also of listening and responding to classmates)

- **Presentations**: 15% each (30% total)
  Note: Students may present in pairs for the first presentation if desired

Full-credit Option:

- **Weekly participation**: 30 %
  (includes quality of verbal responses to reading questions and also of listening and responding to classmates)

- **Presentations**: 10% each (20% total)
  Note: Students may present in pairs for the first presentation if desired

- **Paper prospectus (for full credit option)**: 15%
- **Final paper (for full credit option)**: 35%