School of English: Creative Writing Portfolio
[EN4315, Old English Afterlives: Literary Anglo-Saxonism]

This module deals with the relationship between Old English literary culture and modern writing. The idea is to try to teach an area of medieval literature perceived as difficult by some students through practices more usually associated with creative writing: so, learning by 'doing' Old English.

The final units of assessment (following two academic critical essays and a class test in translation) comprises a creative writing portfolio of the student’s own Anglo-Saxonist work. The portfolio draws the students into the processes of literary transmission that they are asked to analyse in the more conventionally academic first half of the course. The module as a whole thus constitutes a hybrid of 'creative' and academic approaches. Students are encouraged to be innovative in their responses: prevision submissions have included portfolios submitted on CD; home-made booklets; a ship/funeral poem printed on the cut-and-paste-down flaps of a model ship.

Benefits/impact on students/staff: The creative option often generates extra enthusiasms, and can bring out hidden talents. It remains a way of assessing academic knowledge. Students are asked to produce a bibliography of what they've read in order to write their own 'Anglo-Saxonist' work; this is often more extensive than with conventionally scholarly essays. Students actually go and find out what their poem should look/sound like by reading criticism. In some ways, this option develops a better understanding of formal poetic features such as form, technique, rhythm etc. than a standard 'Discuss the techniques used by the poet ...' question. However, not all students would be comfortable in being assessed in this way and we would not want to mandate it outwith an option module such as EN4314.

Student feedback:

'I actually feel like I can work with Old English now! I understand i-mutation'

'[The] creative writing aspect was particularly interesting, a good way to engage with the Old English'

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