

**ENGLISH 316: MEDIEVAL ROMANCE
COURSE SYLLABUS:**



Guinevere gasps and covers behind King Arthur as the decapitated Cavalier Green turns his ghastly gaze upon Gawain, who grasps the gisarme grimly.
Detail from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, MS. Cotton Nero AX f. 94. (Image Credit: Cotton Nero AX resides in the British Library; complete digital images thereof are published by The Cotton Nero A. X Project, hosted by the University of Calgary, Copyright 2012)

Course Information:

Instructor: C. Fee
Meeting Time: MWF 1:10-2:00 PM
Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 209
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Office Hours: MWTHF 2:00-3:15, and by appointment
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Required Texts:

Borroff, Marie. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Verse Translations*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. 0-393-97658-0
Chaucer, Geoffrey, and Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. 0-14-042438-5
Chrétien de Troyes, William W. Kibler, and Carleton W. Carroll. *Arthurian Romances*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1991. 0-14-044521-8
Fee, Christopher R., and David Adams Leeming. *Gods, Heroes & Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 0-19-517403-8
Gantz, Jeffrey. *The Mabinogion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976. 0-14-044322-3
Marie de France, Glyn S. Burgess, and Keith Busby. *The Lais of Marie de France*. London: Penguin, 1999. 0-14-044759-8
Shepherd, Stephen H. A. *Middle English Romances: Authoritative Texts, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 0-393-96607-0

General Course Objectives:

This ain't your mother's Harlequin Romance, baby! Love you'll find, all right, but not the sappy sentimental kind you might expect, and in these tales battles, dragons, and the knights of King Arthur are every bit as common as lovers' tears, instant infatuation, and bodice-ripping passion. The genre of the Medieval Romance had its earliest vernacular genesis in French and Anglo-Norman translations of Latin epic poetry, and eventually it evolved into an extremely popular courtly narrative aimed at a secular aristocratic audience. Because of these origins and aims we might expect Romances to deal with the interests and values of the courtly class, and this is indeed often the case: Spectacles of battles, tournaments, feasts, quests, and the hunt abound, along with elaborate descriptions of clothes, arms, armor, and rituals, most notably those related to "courtesy," or polite courtly behavior. Perhaps the most well-known conventions of the Medieval Romance to modern readers are those of courtly love and "chivalry," the code of knightly virtue and conduct. These are indeed common facets of the genre, and often Romances in fact might be said to articulate and to validate the cultural values and practices of the elite classes of the Medieval West. The Romance is much more than a mere series of re-assertions of fundamental interests and principles, however, and often it critiques the very cultures it seems designed to laud. The Medieval Romance may be—for these reasons—more difficult to define accurately than it seems upon first inspection.

Specific Course Objectives & Structure:

In the Growth of the Medieval Romance course we will examine the literary, social and historical factors that led to the development of the Medieval genre of the Romance and its subsequent flowering in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The works we will read will include *lais* and romances by Marie de France, Chretien de Troyes, Chaucer, and others. Further, we will explore early Celtic and other pre-Christian influences that resulted in uniquely British romances. Finally, we will discuss ways in which the Romance is a singularly appropriate vehicle for age-old tales of journeys, quests, trials and tribulations, a vehicle that put new chivalric and adventuresome masks on the otherwise familiar face of the Hero of the Monomyth.

We will begin our journey by reading (in Modern English translation) a series of short *lais* (brief Romances or tales) by Marie de France, one of the greatest women writers of the Middle Ages, and possibly the best author of short fiction before Boccaccio and Chaucer. We then will delve into the work (also in translation) of Chretien de Troyes, who might be said to have invented the Arthurian Romance, and who certainly gives us our first glimpse into the love of Guinevere and Lancelot. We also will look at a number of tales and Romances translated from the great Welsh epic the *Mabinogion*, wherein we will find the earliest British tales in which King Arthur plays a primary role. We will read a lot about Arthur and the Round Table this term, perhaps most notably as we follow along with Sir Gawain on his quest for the Green Knight; but the Romance genre is not limited to Arthuriana, and we will read several tales that deal with entirely different topics and contexts. For example, we will examine how Chaucer uses classical material (and borrows from Boccaccio) in his *Knight's Tale*, and we will discuss the uniquely Celtic flavor of the Breton *Lai* variety of Romance, as well as such provocative conventions as the "Wild Hunt" and the "Loathly Lady." Where ever possibly we will look at a number of texts comparatively to note development or divergence of concepts or figures, and therefore the structure of the course will be thematic insofar as is practicable in order to facilitate such comparison.

By necessity we will read the Old French, Anglo-Norman, and Welsh material in translation, and many of the Middle English texts will be translated, too; we will, however, read half a dozen works in the original Middle English. I will provide ample tutoring and background to make Middle English accessible (no

previous knowledge of Middle English is required,) but you should note that the works in the original language—although short—will require plenty of extra reading time; plan accordingly.

Because of the nature of our discussions, and the volume of literature which we will cover, it is vital that you keep up with the reading. This is both a participation-oriented course and a writing-intensive course; grades are therefore largely determined by these two aspects of the course.

Course Evaluation:

Daily Preparation & Participation: +/-20%

Fourth-Hour Class Moderation, Informative Handouts, and Annotated Bibliography: +/-10%

Fourth-Hour Group Translation Facilitation: +/-10%

Short Paper: +/-20%

Long Paper: +/-40%

ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.

Preparation & Participation:

You are expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable; it is part of your task to help to provide a comfortable, supportive class environment in which all members are empowered to speak. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't argue; far from it. It is important, however, that we be respectful of one another, and that we solicit opinions which diverge from our own. In this course we will read texts aloud, in translation and in Middle English, every class period. You often will be expected to read only short selections prior to each class, but you will be expected to have read each selection completely and carefully several times; in the case of Middle English texts, you will be expected to have practiced reading sections of it aloud, and to be able to translate and to contextualize any given passage. Regularly I will ask each member of the class to read portions of a Middle English text aloud and to offer a translation and some commentary upon that selection. Your participation score (20% of your total grade!) will depend largely upon your efforts in this endeavor. In addition to this requirement, you must be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This is always a touchy and somewhat subjective area to evaluate, so you'll do us both a favor by trying to put in your two cents! Finally, I should note that if you miss more than three classes for any reason you should think about dropping; you can't participate if you don't come!

Course Requirements:

Papers:

There will be two papers. The first paper will be 6-8 pages in length, and should focus on some interesting critical, cultural, or historical aspects that you unearthed while preparing to moderate a text for class. This paper is not intended to be an onerous theoretical assignment, but rather an engaging discussion of the historical background, folkloric aspects, mythic archetypes, oral or textual sources, and

linguistic characteristics that are associated with the text you moderated. This paper is due at the beginning of class one week after you have moderated class.

The second paper will be 15-20 pages in length, and should illustrate your mastery of critical and scholarly materials as well as your ability to interact profitably with texts and ideas associated with the genre of the Medieval Romance. I will offer a number of suggestions, but the choice of topic is up to you. This paper may not exactly duplicate the work presented in paper one, although it very well may be a more scholarly exploration of the texts, themes, and relationships outlined in that first paper. In this paper you should stake out your position regarding your topic in the context of other scholarly voices. It is difficult to give precise guidelines for such an assignment, but it would be reasonable to expect that you will deal at some length with a minimum of 2-3 primary (medieval) texts and a minimum of 4-5 secondary (modern critical) articles or books. You should begin thinking about this paper (and looking for sources!) immediately, and you must schedule a formal conference to discuss this paper with me. We should have this conference before Spring Break; sooner is better than later. This paper is due during the Final Exam period.

Fourth Hour Requirements:

There are two main ways in which this course demands substantial, out-of-class time and work which are in addition to ordinary reading, writing, and class preparation: These include the class moderation exercise and the translation group exercise. In both cases, you will learn a great deal because your goal will be to facilitate the learning of others in the course; in both cases, you will meet with the instructor for detailed guidance and feedback. You will be evaluated for this work in accordance with the guidelines you will receive from the instructor.

Class Moderation, Informative Handouts, and Annotated Bibliography:

Each student will choose one text (e.g., Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*) for which that student will be primarily responsible on the day we cover the text in class. The student will be expected to have studied the sources and analogues of the given text, as well as the historical context and any particularly interesting linguistic or thematic points. Much of the information necessary for the successful moderation of a class might be found in the introductory material of a good scholarly edition of the text at hand. Class moderation will begin with our discussion of *Erec and Enide* in week three, and we will sign up for class moderation in week two. I expect each student to confer with me at least one week in advance of that student's moderation of class. I usually can help you find all the materials you'll need pretty quickly. You'll also be expected to provide the class with an interesting, informative handout and annotated bibliography on the chosen day. You should expect the necessary preparation to require a minimum of several hours.

Translation Groups:

The class will be divided into a number of small groups (likely four or five) that will take turns leading our translation of the Middle English texts during the second half of the semester. I will show you what I mean during our first couple of forays into translation, but basically you will be expected to have read through an assigned portion of Middle English text thoroughly and accurately, to have identified the most interesting and problematic passages therein, and to be able to lead your peers through those sections. You will at times read and explain passages yourselves, but the most successful groups will facilitate the interaction of their peers with a given text by asking individual students to read aloud, to translate, and to offer commentary, all the while gently coaching each student in a direction that keeps class discussion moving in interesting ways. In the past, the most successful groups have devised interactive exercises, contests, and the like, complete with handouts and audio-visual aids. Groups who

have developed creative multimedia aids which strongly underscored connections between Medieval texts and their modern descendants have often done particularly well. These groups clearly spent many hours preparing for this assignment.

This fourth-hour work is to be completed outside of class in addition to all of the regular homework and assignments; please see the associated handouts for logistics and details. Each student should be prepared to spend several hours preparing to lead translation, in addition to several hours preparing class moderation exercises. In brief, our purpose is not simply to fulfill the dreaded “Fourth Hour” requirement, but to use that time profitably and constructively in order to teach others something important about what we ourselves are learning about the Medieval Romance, and to do so in an exciting and unforgettable manner. Whenever possible, students should take pains to illustrate how themes common to the Medieval Romance continue to assert themselves in popular texts and contexts ranging from films, television programs, graphic narratives, video games, and role-playing adventures. These assignments will be graded according to the rubrics provided by the instructor, and will count towards the final grade as indicated on the syllabus.

Learning Goals:

This course is designed with a wide range of specific learning goals: In addition to mastering general knowledge of and gaining conversance with the genre of the Medieval Romance, students in this course will develop a substantial understanding of ways in which some of our own contemporary texts reflect far older ideas and ideals. Within the outline of such broad strokes students will develop some detailed knowledge of the relevant literary, historical, social, religious, and philosophical context of Medieval Europe. Thus this course is of special interest to those with an affinity for the Medieval period. Most importantly, this course is especially appropriate for anyone who would care to plumb the depths of the relationship between the Medieval and the modern, and the sensitive reader will find echoes of Medieval Romance in venues as disparate as *Game of Thrones*, *Twilight*, *Supernatural*, *Burning Wheel* and *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Outcomes and Assessment:

How will we know that students in this course have achieved the course objectives? Students will demonstrate their growing mastery of the material in a number of ways: Literary and historical knowledge will be cultivated and illustrated through class participation; retention and synthesis of the major themes of the course will be facilitated and manifested in the successful completion of the written work and translation and moderation exercises. A much more significant measure of the success of this course, however, would be evidence of abiding student interest in and conversance with the development of Medieval Romance, and most especially knowledge of and engagement with the religious, philosophical, and historical background of contemporary texts which draw upon this material. This course will have been successful if students—perhaps long after the present semester— are empowered and inspired to choose to seek out and to attempt to contextualize aspects of our own culture with thematic roots in the Middle Ages.

**ENGLISH 316: MEDIEVAL ROMANCE
COURSE SCHEDULE:**

WEEK 1:

The Birth of Romance: The Lais of Marie de France
Prologue (Marie de France)
Guigemar (Marie de France)
Equitan (Marie de France)
Le Fresne (Marie de France)
Bisclavret (Marie de France)
Les Deus Amanz (Marie de France)
Yonec (Marie de France)
Laustic (Marie de France)
Milun (Marie de France)
Chaitivel (Marie de France)
Chevrefoil (Marie de France)
Eliduc (Marie de France)
(Fee ix-xi; 3-9)

WEEK 2:

Celtic Background and the Early Welsh Tradition
Macsen Wledig (Mabinogion)
Lludd and Llefelys (Mabinogion)
Culhwch and Olwen (Mabinogion)
Rhonabwy (Mabinogion)
(Fee 63-73; 75-77; 79-81; 99-101; 108-109; 114-115; 119-122; 126-127; 136; 169-187)

WEEK 3:

Love is a Many Splendored Thing—Except in Arthurian Romance
Erec and Enide (Chretien)
Gereint (Mabinogion)
Cliges (Chretien)
Lancelot [The Knight of the Cart] (Chretien)
(Fee 188-189)

WEEK 4:

The Search for the Grail
Perceval [The Story of the Grail] (Chretien)
Peredur (Mabinogion)
(Fee 188)

WEEK 5:

Chaucer, that old Romantic
The Knight's Tale (Chaucer)
The Squire's Tale (Chaucer)
The Tale of Sir Thopas (Chaucer)

WEEKS 6 & 7:



The Breton Lay: Trials, Tribulations, Magic, Mystery, and Fairy Folk
The Franklin's Tale (Chaucer)
Lanval (Marie de France)
Sir Launfal (MER)
Sir Orfeo (MER)
(Fee 201-206)

SPRING BREAK 2014: 3/10-3/14

WEEKS 8 & 9:

The Loathly Lady
The Wife of Bath's Tale (Chaucer)
The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure (MER)
(Fee 206-210)

WEEKS 10-11:

Yvain, the Knight of the Lion
Yvain [The Knight of the Lion] (Chretien)
Owein [The Lady of the Fountain] (Mabinogion)
Ywain and Gawain (MER)
(Fee 188)

WEEKS 12 & 13:

Gawain the Great
The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne (MER)
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Borroff)
(Fee 192-201)

WEEK 14:

Hamlet should Havelok at this guy: Don't whine—Grim and bear it!
Havelok (MER)



FINAL PAPER DUE BY 4:30 PM TUESDAY, 6 MAY

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change