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FRCH 310.01: French Literature and Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance - Women and Women Authors in the Premodern World

Elizabeth A. Hubble

University of Montana, Missoula, elizabeth.hubble@umontana.edu

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FRCH 310 Les femmes et les écrivaines d'avant l'ère moderne

TR 9:30-10:50

LA 138

Instructor Information:

Professor Elizabeth A. Hubble
Director, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Office: LA 138A-B
Office Hours: MW 12-1, TR 8:30-9:15
E-mail: elizabeth.hubble@umontana.edu

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the literature of the Global Premodern and Early Modern periods through writings by, for, and about (but mostly by) women during the 12th-17th centuries with a focus on francophone literature and cultures. We will explore how medieval and early modern female authors found their voices and constructed alternative discourses of gender, religion, and sexuality against the dominant medieval vision of woman as Bride of Christ or Devil's Gateway. The class will be a hybrid class, co-convening with WGSS 423, and will focus on writings in French with a few English and French translations of texts in Japanese, Chinese, Latin, and Arabic. Supplementary readings will include secondary scholarship and criticism in the fields of medieval, early modern, queer, and gender studies.

Students will read and discuss Marie de France's Arthurian *Lais* (12th c.); the courtly love poetry of the troubadours (13th c.); the letters of Abelard and Heloise (12th c.); the mystical writings of the Marguerite Porete (burned at the stake in Paris in 1310) and other medieval European mystics; Christine de Pizan's poetry and prose (Europe's first professional woman author, 15th c.); *Sundiata, Epic of Old Mali*, the story of the 13th-century founder of the Mali Empire; *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros*, a 17th-century Ethiopian Christian nun; the Renaissance poetry of Louise Labé and Madelaine de l'Aubespine (16th c.); writings about early modern encounters of European Christian missionaries with the indigenous populations of the Americas; and the philosophical writings of Marie de Gournay (16th c.).

Students Learning Objectives:

- 1) Students will develop an understanding of the literature and culture of the area of Europe now known as France as it existed in the medieval and early modern periods, roughly 850-1650, in dialogue with readings from the broader francophone world and other medieval and early modern cultures.
- 2) Students will improve their proficiency in spoken and written French through in-class discussions, writing assignments, and in-class presentations.
- 3) Students will improve their comprehension of written and spoken French through readings and lectures.
- 4) Students will develop skills in analyzing literature with respect to literary forms and theory with a focus on feminist and queer theories.
- 5) Students will explore and problematize modern ideas of authorship and authority by analyzing the origins of these concepts in the European Middle Ages in dialogue with non-Western texts.
- 6) Students will gain knowledge of pre- and early modern women authors within their historical and global contexts.

Major Theoretical Questions:

Why do we conceive of the Middle Ages as a European phenomenon? What is an author? What is a text? How do the European Middle Ages and Early Modern periods speak to a more diverse and global conception of gender, literature, and authorship? How did marginalized writers find and authorize their voices? How did the medieval and early modern world conceive of and construct gender and sexuality? How were medieval and early modern identities formed?

Classroom Etiquette:

Students should arrive on time and not leave until class is over. All cell phones must be turned off and left off your desk or table. Students may use laptops or tablets to take notes. Students should not text while in class, and Internet use should be limited to topics related to class. First offense=tardy. Second offense=absence. Students will sign a classroom technology agreement on the first day of class.

Attendance:

Attendance is required. After one unexcused absence, your participation grade will be lowered one notch for each absence (A to A-). An excess of 5 unexcused absences will result in an F in the course. A failure to prepare and participate may also be grounds for being counted absent. Tardiness will not be tolerated. Two tardies will equal one absence. There will be NO make-up assignments or late submission of homework for unexcused absences. If you are sick or have some other emergency, please contact me.

Texts: All books are required and are available at the UC Bookstore. Additional readings are available on Moodle.

- 1) Marie de France, *Lais* (Livre de Poche, 1990)
- 2) D.T. Niane, *Soundjata, ou l'épopée mandingue* (Presse africaine, 1971)
- 3) Louise Labé, *Oeuvres complètes*, (Garnier-Flammarion, 2018)
- 4) Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir des âmes simples et anéanties* (Albin Michel, 2011)
- 5) *Life of Walatta-Petros*, trans. Belcher and Kleiner (Princeton U Press., 2018)
- 6) Madeline de l'Aubespine, *Selected Poems and Translations* (UChicago Press, 2007)

Required Videos:

- 1) Lost Kingdoms of Africa Series (available for free on youtube):
 - a. S1E2 Ethiopia
 - b. S1E4 West Africa
 - c. S2E1 Kingdom of Asante
 - d. S2E3 Berber Kingdom of Morocco

Extra Credit Movies:

- 1) Add'l Lost Kingdoms of Africa episodes
- 2) List of other films on Moodle

Assessment:

Weekly Reading Journals: 25%
Midterm Essay/Project: 25%
Final Essay/Project: 25%
Preparation and Participation (inc. Items of Interest): 25%

Weekly Reading Journals: This course may expose you to many new authors, cultures, and ideas. It may challenge your accepted opinions. Your reading journal is a place to share the questions, thoughts, and reactions you have to the readings and class discussions. Journals are due each Friday at midnight, and should be 1 full page, double-spaced. You must write a minimum of one page per week to receive full credit. For each week's journal, you should:

- Briefly summarize the primary-source reading for that week, including author, country of origin, very brief historical context, and main ideas of the assigned reading.
THEN

- Connect the reading to the themes of the course/course learning objectives and secondary-source readings.
- Connect the readings to your own life and/or contemporary issues; why does the reading matter? This prompt is where you should reference either items of interest.
- Provoke further thought; pose one question for class discussion

Items of Interest: Every Thursday, you will present an item related to that week's topics to your classmates. In your journal for each week, you must indicate what your item of interest was and what one of your classmate's items was and how both connect to the readings and/or discussions for that week.

Papers/Projects:

Instead of exams, this class will require a midterm and final paper or project. Students wishing to do projects for both assignments must schedule a meeting with me to discuss.

Research Papers

Papers will be 4-5 pages in length, in French. The first paper is due March 5 and should focus on authors and topics from the first half of class. The second paper is due May 7 and should focus on authors and topics from the second half of class. Each paper must use at least 3 outside sources, i.e. books, articles, etc., not read for class. Wikipedia does not count. Use of websites as outside sources must be pre-approved by me. Essays must conform to the basic standards of proper composition. They should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point font, 1-inch margins. Essays must be carefully organized with proper paragraphing, correct sentence structure, and appropriate punctuation. You will be graded not just on content but also on organization, rhetorical skills, strength of argument including supporting evidence, and adherence to the convention of standard, written English. **I will provide you with a handout of potential topics and more detailed instructions. Several weeks before the due dates, you will be required to submit a half-page proposal for your essays.** Electronic files must be .doc, .docx, .pdf, .rtf.

Creative Project

Because of the ways in which francophone women's writings challenge western literary and academic traditions, you may choose to submit a creative project for either the midterm or final. Your project could take many forms, from a powerpoint/prezi to artwork to poetry to dance to film. It should take its inspiration from the authors and topics from class. It must be accompanied by a 2-page, double-spaced paper in French that describes your inspiration, the project's connection to class, and your process. Students completing projects must schedule an approval meeting with me prior to beginning the project.

Notice about written assignments: An essay or response paper is not an occasion to show how well you can quote, paraphrase or summarize an author, but how well you can think as an explorer of the work and ideas of your author. Any utilization of the words or work of others (including ideas) in any assignment must be given full reference credit. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. If you have questions about proper citation and/or plagiarism, please see me. Included in the university's definition of plagiarism is the use of translation programs. If I suspect you have written a paper or journal in English and used a translation program, you will be required to take an essay test on a topic of my choosing, in my office.

Notice about writing in French: you are not expected to have perfect French grammar and vocabulary. This course is part of the process of further developing those skills. However, you must type correct accents and other diacritical marks—do not write them in by hand. Not including accents when writing or typing in French will hinder your ability to ever write and speak fluently. You will be graded on my ability to understand your ideas. Grammar will not be graded unless it hinders my ability to understand your paper.

You may be familiar with many online French/English dictionaries. To take your writing to the next level, I would recommend <http://linguee.com/>.

Participation and Preparation: Coming to class prepared, i.e. having read all material and ready to participate in discussions, is essential and counts for a large percentage of your final grade. Participation does not merely mean responding when called upon but showing a willingness to raise your hand and enter discussions. Quizzes may be given at the beginning of class as necessary. Each Thursday, you will be required to bring in an item of interest related to that week's readings and discussions to deepen your connection to the course. Items may include news articles about the authors and/or time periods we are studying; modern pop culture with echoes of class topics; academic articles; artwork; songs; etc.

Grading Scale:

93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
77-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
67-69%	D+
63-66%	D
60-62%	D-
59% and below	F

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. For more information, please consult <http://www.umt.edu/disability>.

Content Warning: This course deals with several difficult topics, including misogyny and medieval rape culture. You should feel free to talk to me about any issues you have with the topics we are discussing and ask for excused absences.

Statement of Inclusivity and Diversity: This classroom is a hate-free zone, and is part of WGSS's commitment to addressing and redressing racism, Islamophobia, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Blackness, and all systems of privilege and oppression in our classes, in our academic units, and in higher education.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement: I would like to acknowledge that we are in the aboriginal territories of the Salish and Kalispel people, and express the university's appreciation of that.