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LIT 522.01: Seminar in Comparative Literature - Medieval and Contemporary Poetry: Medieval Lyrics, Postmodern Voices

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ENLT 522.01: Medieval Lyrics, Postmodern Voices

Tuesday 3:30-6:30; LA 103B

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Office Hours: M 3-5; Thursday 10-12; by appt

Course Description

The poetry of the past century has seen numerous returns to the “medieval” as a source of language renewal, re-engagement with the strange and the alien, and reflection on the ways in which modern life is both disjunctive from, and continuous with, its past. This course will offer a conceptual framework for thinking about this recursive recycling of culture through the paradigm of “medievalism,” a word that medieval scholars have used to describe the various ways that this period of time has been “re-written” and “re-used” as a cultural cypher for present concerns. Throughout the semester, we will be reading contemporary poetry that responds to this corpus of writing, and the culture that produced it. This poetry will include translations, “responses” and adaptations, as well as more conceptual, book-length projects that incorporate various aspects of the “medieval” into a contemporary poetic project.

We will begin with by studying the origins and development of the short English poem from the Old English elegy to late Middle English love poetry, paying specific attention to the influences on, and distinctive features of, English lyric writing. This will be organized around the study of three major repositories of lyric poetry: the Exeter Book (Old English elegy), the Harley Lyrics (Middle English, French, and Latin lyric), and the Findern Lyrics (late Middle English complaint). While a discussion and analysis of these book contexts will serve to localize our attention to the interests of early readers of this poetry, students will be encouraged to read and think widely about their own relationship to the poems, applying critical and theoretical models of their own construction in developing interpretations.

All Old English poetry will be read in modern English, but all Middle English poems will be read in their original language. The language of some of the early poems may present difficulties for students with no previous background in Middle English. The *Norton Critical Edition of Middle English Lyrics* provides exceptionally good glosses on difficult words and I will supplement their annotations as the case requires. I expect that initially students will have some difficulty but that those problems will recede as students become more familiar with the language.

Course Requirements (see separate doc for detail)

Seminar Work (35%): weekly critiques (due each Tues before 9 a.m.); seminar presentations

Short Critical Essay (25%): due by November 16th

Research Paper /Final Project (40%): due December 13th

Required Texts (with abbreviations used on the syllabus)

LMA: *Lyrics of the Middle Ages* (ed. James Wilhelm) (MOODLE)

FPE = *First Poems in English* (3rd Edition) tr. and intro. Michael Alexander. Penguin Books, 1966/2008.

Norton ME: *Middle English Lyrics: Norton Critical Edition*. ed. by Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman. London: Norton & Co, 2000.

Szybist, Mary. *Incarnadine: Poems*. 2013. Print

Swensen, Cole. *Such Rich Hour: Poems*. Iowa City: U of Iowa City, 2001.

Charles, Jos. *Feeld*. 1. ed., Milkweed Editions, 2019/

Bergvall, Caroline. *Alisoun Sings*. Nightboat Books, 2019.

Policy Statements

Attendance

When you attend, you will need to wear a mask as long as the mask policy remains in place. We will look for opportunities while the weather is conducive to meet outside, but while we are inside, we will all be masked.

A seminar has a high premium on being there: 3 hours of class time if you miss. But, of course, it's The Time of COVID, and we absolutely need people to take care of their health. It's going to be a hard class to Zoom into, but it's possible that if students know they will miss multiple sessions, we will try to accommodate that. If you need to miss, communicate as far in advance as possible, and make up the work in the Moodle platform: do some further writing on the reading for that week, and engage with the posts your peers make.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an affront to the fundamental values of an academic institution, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student's part in sustaining academic community. Acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, all work that has influenced your thinking, including work you cite, but also work from you have adapted major ideas. The University's official warning can be found in the Catalog, which refers you to the [Student Conduct Code \(Academic Conduct\)](#), available on the web at the following link:

Disability Accommodation

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations for coursework. To request accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible in the semester. I will work with you and Disability Services in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the [Office of Disability Equity Services](#), or call 406.243.2243 (Voice/Text).

Add-Drop Deadlines and Incompletes

For information on these topics, please see the following link: <http://www.umt.edu/registrar/calendar.php>

Nota Bene: A reading and work schedule follows. The work schedule will remain unchanged, with slight revisions in due dates possible, but the reading schedule is subject to change based on the evolving interests of the class during the semester, including the research projects students choose. I will post revisions on Moodle and announce both in class and on email when that is necessary.

Reading Schedule

August 31st: Introductions/The Exeter Book

Discuss lyric genre/English short poem; manuscript study; in-class reading of Old English lyric; brief primer on Old English/Middle English; class framework; medievalism.

Sept. 7th: Enigmatic Subjects: Old English “Elegy” and the Exeter Book

Poems: *Earliest English Poems/First Poems in English*, Introduction, and the following poems: “The Ruin,” “Caedmon’s Hymn,” “Bede’s Death Song,” “Deor,” “Widsith,” “The Wanderer,” “The Seafarer”

Read 1 of the Modernist translations / responses to “Seafarer”: William Carlos Williams, W.H. Auden, and Ezra Pound (HANDOUT)

Critical/Historical Context:

Anne Klinck, “The Nature of Elegy in Old English,” *Old English Elegies* (223-251) (Moodle)

Sept. 14th: Gender, Identity, Lament: critical case studies

Poems: “The Wife’s Complaint” (aka, *The Wife’s Lament*; including Klinck’s notes); “Wulf and Eadwacer” and “The Husband’s Message”

W.H. Auden “The Secret Agent” and Miller Oberman, excerpts from *The Unstill Ones* (HANDOUT)

Critical/Theoretical Readings: PICK ONE of these essays (Moodle) or one of your choice

Write a critical summary for Moodle and come to class ready to explore.

Martin Green, “Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife’s Lament*”

Sarah Semple, “A fear of the past: the place of the prehistoric burial mound in the ideology of middle and later Anglo-Saxon England”

Fiona and Richard Gameson, “*Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife’s Lament*, and the discovery of the individual in Old English verse”

Helen T. Bennett, “Exile and the Semiosis of Gender in Old English Elegies”

Dronke, Peter. “On the Continuity of Medieval Love-Lyric,” *England and the Continental Renaissance*, ed. Edward Chaney and Peter Mack. Bury St. Edmunds: D.S. Brewer, 1990, pp. 7-21.

Sept. 21st: *Clerices Vagantes* and the Troubadour Revolution

Carmina Burana (LMA 26-33)

Introduction to Provençal Lyric (LMA 45-7)

All of the poems in LMA by the following authors: Duke William IX of Aquitaine, Cercamon, Marcabrun, Jaufre Rudel, Bernart de Ventadorn, Arnaut Daniel

Critical/Theoretical Readings:

Peter Dronke, “Performers and Performance,” *The Medieval Lyric* (13-31)

Sept. 28th: The “Dialogic” Lyric in Context: MS Harley 2253

Poems: All Harley lyrics included in Norton ME (see Textual Sources Table on pp. 234-245)

Poem #s (not pg. #s): 4, 13, 26-36, 60, 100-103, 105, 173-4, 189, 191, 193-4, 206, 226-8

Alba, Pastourelle, and the Female Voice

Anonymous, “Now, my sweet girl friend, come—” (LMA 10-11; HANDOUT)

Walter of Chatillon, “As the winter cold was waning” (LMA 14-15; HANDOUT)

Anonymous, "In a garden under a hawthorn bower" (LMA 47-8)
Marcabru, "The other day, along a hedgerow," "In the orchard at a stream" (LMA 63-66)
Raimbaut of Orange, "Friend, I stand in great distress" (LMA 82-3)
Countess of Dia, "I've suffered great distress," "I have to sing" (LMA 83-5)
Girault de Bornelh, "Glorious King, true light and clarity" (LMA 87-9)
Giraut Riquier, "To St.-Pons-de-Tomeiras" (LMA 116-118)
Cielo d'Alcamo, "Fresh, sweet rose, my summer sprout" (LMA 125-129)
Anonymous, "Would you like it if I sing" (LMA 167)
Steinmar, "A farmhand lay all hidden" (LMA 222)
"In a frith as I con fare fremede" (Norton ME 30)
"My deth I love my lyf ich hate" (Norton ME 34)
William Dunbar, "In secreit place an hyndir nycht" (Norton ME 91)

Critical/Theoretical Readings:

Elizabeth Fay, Introduction to *Romantic Medievalism* (pp. 1-24)
Rosemary Woolf on "In a frith" (Norton ME 311-317)

Oct. 5th: The Spring Scene and Love-Longing: Secular and Religious Parody

Harley Lyrics (listed here by page number):

"When the nightgale singes" (Norton ME 35)
"Lutel wot it any mon" (x2) (Norton ME 37 **and** 201)
"Als I me rode this endre day" (Norton ME 16)
"As I me rode this ender day" (Norton ME 183)
"When I see blosmes springe" (Norton ME 107)
"Lenten is come with love to toun" (Norton ME 6)

Background/Context:

Anonymous, "The woods are dressing their branches" (LMA 9-10)
Anonymous, "Now Zephyr's rising lightly" (LMA 11-12)
Walter of Chatillon, "As the winter cold is waning" (LMA 14-15)
Marcabrun, "Winter goes, and the time is pleasant" (LMA 59)
Jaufre Rudel, "In May, when the days are long" (LMA 66)
Bertran de Born, "How I like the gay time of spring" (LMA 90)
Azalais of Porcairagues, "Now we've arrived at the frigid season" (LMA 85)
"Winter wakneth al my care" (Norton ME13)

Critical/Theoretical Readings:

William McClellan, "Radical Theology or Parody in a Martian Lyric of MS Harley 2253" (Moodle)
Essays on "I Sing of a Maiden" (324-349)

Oct. 12th: Mary Szybist, *Incarnadine*

Students present a selected piece of criticism

Oct. 19th: Cole Swensen, *Such Rich Hour*

Students present a selected piece of criticism

Oct. 26th: Alison Bergvall, *Alisoun Sings*, excerpts from *Meddle English*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (MnE translation)

Students present a selected piece of criticism

Nov. 2nd: Jos Charles, *feeld*

Excerpts from Geoffrey Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*

Students present a selected piece of criticism

Nov. 9th: Findern Anthology: Constructing a Reading/Writing Audience

Poems: All Findern poems in Sarah McNamer, "Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript" (Moodle: Early Modern English)

Nov. 16th: Critical essay due; independent book presentations

Nov. 23rd: book presentations

Nov. 30th: TBD: Class Choice

Dec. 7th: Wrap-up; Workshop on final papers

December 13-17th: FINALS