

EN 324: Love in the Middle Ages

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Course Description

Set aside the stereotypes: there's more to medieval love than gallant knights and fair maidens. This course will cover a rich literature of love and desire that displays a diversity surprising to modern readers. Some medieval writers cultivated divine love, others told dirty jokes; some celebrated marriage, others derided it; some regulated gender expression, others subverted its norms. Sometimes the same text did all these things at once.

Our focus will fall on works written in France and England during the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. In twelfth century Paris, a particular idea of romantic love came into being alongside new modes of philosophy and literature. By the fourteenth century, this idea—what we now call “courtly love”—had become the subject of satire and debate across Europe, a shift in temperament that we will explore in the second half of the semester. Because these two moments in the history of love emerge from broader cross-cultural exchange in the Middle Ages, we will attend to their antecedents in medieval Arabic and Hebrew love literature, as well as their shared classical and scriptural sources.

As we read through this tradition, we will investigate particularly medieval notions about love, sexual ethics, and gender, with particular emphasis on the central role of misogyny. But we will also pose transhistorical questions about consent, violence, and the desire that falls outside of normative arrangements. Throughout, we will ask how literary forms from the lyric to the epic condition our understanding of love and its consequences; to that end, you will produce a number of short analytical writing exercises in addition to two longer essays. The class will end with a sustained engagement with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—one of the great works of love-literature of any era.

Required Texts

- *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Radice (Penguin, 2004); ISBN 978-0140448993
- Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. Kibler (Penguin, 1991); ISBN 978-0140445213
- Marie de France, *Lais*, trans. Ferrante and Hanning (Baker, 1995); ISBN 978-0801020315
- Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Barney (Norton, 2006); ISBN 978-0393927559

And a course reader, available for purchase at the bookstore.

Course Assignments

- **“Problem sets” – 20%** Four short exercises (1-2 pp); prompts will be posted at least a week in advance.

- **Essay 1 – 20%** A short essay on a single text (4-5 pp); prompts will be posted two weeks in advance.
- **Essay 2 – 30%** A longer essay (6-7 pp or alternative); prompts will be posted two weeks in advance.
- **Midterm – 20%**
- **Participation and presentations – 10%** Come to class prepared to raise questions and engage with the views of others. I will provide discussion prompts each week.

Course Policies

Attendance is mandatory; missing more than three classes will automatically lower your final grade.

Late work will lose a third of a letter grade per calendar day – that is, if you hand in a B+ paper a day late, it becomes a B; two days, a B-, and so on. When you turn in papers, please email me a copy as well as submitting a hard copy.

No make-up or late exams will be given without a documented emergency. If you need an extension, please request it in advance. You must complete all assignments to pass the course.

Laptops, phones, and tablets should be put away during class (unless we're discussing readings on PDF). If this rule presents a hardship, let me know as soon as possible so that we can work out an alternative arrangement.

I will be available via email, and you should be as well. Discussion questions, essay prompts, and other course information will be made available via Blackboard and your BU email account, so check your email! (If another account works better, let me know at the beginning of the semester.)

For my part, I'll try my best to answer all emails promptly: within 24 hours during the week, 48 during weekends. I'm happy to field logistical queries and answer basic questions over email, but conversations about papers are always more productive in person. If you can't make the set hours, email me and set up an appointment.

This class is intended to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. If you would like to request accommodations, please tell me privately as soon as possible and make formal arrangements via the Office of Disability Services if you have not already done so. If there are concerns you need to share, or need assistance in case of emergency, please inform me immediately. This course will necessarily deal with some upsetting content; I encourage you to speak to me privately if issues arise.

Academic honesty is expected. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize, you will get caught. Consult the College of Arts and Science Academic Conduct Code for clarification of official standards, policies, and processes. You are not expected to use outside sources in the writing for this class, but I'm always happy to answer questions about the appropriate use of sources.

This syllabus is subject to change – I will keep you updated if and when it does, but if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask them in class, in office hours, or over email.

Schedule of Readings

Note: Readings marked with an asterisk are in the course reader.

Jan. 18 Introduction

Unit 1: Courtly Love and its Discontents

Jan. 23 Medieval love lyrics*

Jan. 25 Andreas Capellanus, *De Amore* (selections)*

Jan. 30 Abelard, Letter 1 (*Historia Calamitatum*)

Problem set 1 due

Feb. 1 Heloise and Abelard, Letters 2 and 3

Feb. 6 Heloise and Abelard, Letters 4 and 5

Feb. 8 Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight of the Cart*

Feb. 13 Chrétien, *The Knight of the Cart*

Problem set 2 due

Feb. 15 Chrétien, *The Knight with the Lion*

Feb. 20 *No class – Monday schedule*

Feb. 22 Chrétien, *The Knight with the Lion*

Feb. 27 Marie de France, *Lais*, “Guigemar,” “Equitan,” “Le Fresne”

Mar. 1 Marie, *Lais*, “Bisclavret,” “Lanval,” “Les Deus Amanz,” “Yonec”

Paper 1 due

Spring Break

Mar. 13 Marie, *Lais*, “Laüstic,” “Milun,” “Chaitivel,” “Chevrefoil,” “Eliduc”

Mar. 15 **MIDTERM**

Unit 2: Misogyny, Obscenity, and the Afterlife of Courtly Love

Mar. 20 *Arabian Nights*, Prologue, begin story of Qamar and Budur*

Mar. 22 *Arabian Nights*, finish story of Qamar and Budur*

Mar. 27 Christine de Pizan, *The God of Love’s Letter**

Problem set 3 due

Mar. 29 Selections, *Romance of the Rose*; Christine de Pizan et al., *Querelle de la Rose**

Apr. 3 *Troilus and Criseyde* 1
Apr. 5 *Troilus and Criseyde* 1

Apr. 10 *Troilus and Criseyde* 2
Problem set 4 due

Apr. 12 *Troilus and Criseyde* 3

Apr. 24 *Troilus and Criseyde* 4
Apr. 26 *Troilus and Criseyde* 5

May 1 Henryson, *Testament of Cresseid*
Paper 2 due