

English 407: Senior Seminar: The Gawain-Poet

Spring Term, 2014
Tuesdays 2:00-4:50
CRN 34699
22 Onyx Bridge

Prof. Laskaya
357 PLC (x-6-1517)
Hrs: Wednesdays 10:30-noon, 1-2:30
and by appointment
email: laskaya@uoregon.edu

Textbooks:

Complete Works of the Pearl-Poet, trans., Finch, eds., Andrew and Waldron (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) papbk.

Oxford Very Short Introduction to Medieval Britain, Gillingham, (Oxford: Oxford UP 2002).

**Other materials provided via Blackboard and on Course Reserve in the Knight Library.

Main Online Resources:

The Middle English Dictionary: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

The Cotton Nero A. x. Project, the digitized manuscript: <http://gawain.ucalgary.ca/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this Senior Seminar, we will read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one of the finest works of late medieval English literature in its original Middle English. Close reading in the original language will reveal the beauty of a text that is most often read in modernized translation. We will also explore the text's interpretive challenges, its medieval context, as well as the social, political, and ethical issues central to the poem, teasing out its aesthetics, which are woven into every element of the poem. What links the aesthetics of *Sir Gawain* with its historical context? What is the relationship between its aesthetics and the ethical conundrums central to its mythic narrative? When deception sustains life, is it morally acceptable? What are the limits of fantasy? imagination? civilization? honor? What kind of mirror does nature hold up to human society? Students will research formal features of the poem, its language, mythology, historical and manuscript contexts, and its on-going interpretive issues, including the poem's most recent translations. Why has this narrative poem held such fascination for readers? What cultural work does it do in the American educational curriculum of the twenty-first century?

These and other issues will arise as we work on the text in a seminar setting. Gaining some mastery of the challenging Northwestern Middle English dialect will be the first task; to aid that, reading the original language aloud, careful linguistic study and research, close reading, and language quizzes will dominate the first weeks of our work together. Then we'll turn our attention to the interpretive challenges posed by the poetic narrative, including issues that arise when we place *Gawain* next to other poems by the same author. Students will conduct individual research, give both informal and formal oral presentations in the seminar, respond to other students' work, complete an in-class midterm, write four short, rigorous 'thought papers' (500-750 words each) posted on Blackboard before seminar discussions, and write a formal research paper (with a prospectus due week 6) that addresses a challenging interpretive question.

The course is designed for senior English Majors. Advanced students majoring in related fields with demonstrated success in senior-level literature courses are also welcome. *Prerequisite:

Senior Undergraduate students only. **Students should review course text the 1st day of class to be sure Middle English will not present undue difficulty, particularly since we will move relatively quickly with the ME text.** Discussion, punctuated with occasional lectures, will predominate. Lectures may provide literary, cultural, archival, and historical frameworks, and may examine analytical approaches to, and/or linguistic features of texts, but most work, after we get familiar with the Middle English, will be discussion-based. We will probe the text, and our own interpretations, locating key interpretative questions and assessing interpretive assumptions from several different analytical perspectives.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance & Steady Preparation, Readings. Participation in class discussions & activities. Oral reading/translating in class and in individual appointment. Assignments include: Blackboard posts, quizzes, midterm, 1 interpretive paper, 1 final research project.

GRADING:*

Quizzes, four rigorous 500-750 word 'Thought paper' posts, response to other students' posts and ideas, participation in seminar & short oral research presentation	40%
Oral reading quizzes	5%
In-class midterm	15%
Final research project (including proposal)	40%

*Consistent and full attendance is assumed. In the unlikely event that a student misses more than 2 seminar sessions (which equals 6 hours of class), I can help you withdraw from the course. Each hour of the seminar is equal to one class session on a MWF schedule. Arriving more than a few minutes late, leaving early or leaving the seminar while its underway will typically count as an absence. All major assignments and requirements, including the two individual oral assessments, must be completed to Pass this course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: In addition to gaining mastery over the original and difficult Middle English of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and considering historical and scholarly literary studies pertinent to an intense encounter with this major canonical text, the English Department's assessment procedure is built around six desired learning outcomes. ENG 407 thus requires students to:

1. read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary and other cultural texts;
4. write focused, analytical essays in clear, professional and grammatical prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.
7. In addition, this seminar requires students to participate actively in academic discussions, work effectively in a small group, and present ideas orally in clear and articulate communication.

NB: Medieval Studies Students will find these outcomes congruent with those of the MDVL program. Those learning outcomes are available here: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/midages/courses>

Quizzes: some of these will be announced and some unannounced. Some will require interpretive work and others will require reading comprehension, summary, and/or close translation of the Middle English.

Notes on Reading:

Casey Finch's translation, provided across from every page of Middle English text should be helpful, particularly at the beginning of the term as you get used to Middle English. However, you should not rely on this for an exact translation of each word or line. We will translate as we conduct close readings of the text in class; and quizzes will ask you to translate Middle English without aids. One good way to use modern translations is to read through the translation so you know what is happening in the text and then go back to read the Middle English carefully, line by line or sentence by sentence without translation aids, consulting the glossary in the back of the text and the MED online. Reading the text without aids is the only way you can quickly bring yourself up to an efficient and effective level of Middle English proficiency. So, if you use aids, fine; just be sure to challenge yourself more and more to read only the Middle English text. I encourage you to gloss the Middle English text extensively... word by word at first, covering the right-hand page translation and going for the most accurate understanding of the Middle English as possible. This will be a slow process at first and will speed up very gradually. You will need to set aside hours during the week and on the weekend to study and review the Middle English to do well with it.

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability, please see me during the first week of the term so we can make appropriate accommodations for your full access to all course activities and requirements.

BLACKBOARD SITE:

Syllabus, course assignments, Weekly Blackboard postings, articles, and general course information will be available throughout the term on Blackboard and/or through e-reserve. Please check Blackboard regularly for postings, assignments, materials, and for the up-to-date schedule.

CLASS POLICIES:

Seminar sessions, respect, consideration, and participation: The course requires your active involvement. Active and respectful participation is inconsistent with texting, internet surfing, side conversations, arriving late, leaving early, sleeping, distracting other people, and coming to class unprepared and/or without your texts. Please turn off phones, laptops, tablets, audio players, etc. before class begins. Our work in class is intended to exercise your brain and its own strengths, so usually we won't use internet sources in class, though we may choose to do so occasionally as part of our seminar work.

Out of respect to others in the class, you are also expected to remain in the classroom during class time. We will usually take one 10-minute break half-way through the 3 hour seminar or two 5-minute breaks. Since exiting and entering the classroom during our scheduled class time can interrupt teaching and learning, it may result in a lower participation grade. (Distractions that

inhibit teaching or learning can violate the UO Code of Student Conduct.) Class discussions & lectures may not be recorded in any manner unless you have a communication-related disability documented with the University and have received permission from the course instructor. Should you miss a class meeting, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from your colleagues, so be sure to get to know others in the course who would be willing to help you and whom you would be willing to help. Missing class should, however, be a rare event since active preparation and participation is a course requirement.

Listen to others respectfully, and expect the same of them. And please feel free to speak up. What you have to say is important and unique. It will take effort and the best kind of cooperation to unlock the energy, the aesthetic brilliance, and the intellectual complexities in the texts we will read. This will require respectful attention to each other, and probably some kindness toward one another, too.

Preparation Time: From UO Catalog: “In planning a term’s studies, students should anticipate that each credit requires at least three hours a week for class meetings or homework.” This is a 4-credit senior seminar, so plan for 9 hours a week out of class preparation as a minimum. Nine hours out of class reflects the workload of lower-division courses more typically. Your research project will definitely take you beyond these minimum hours.

Tutorial help: Students may use services offered by the University of Oregon’s Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), located in 68 PLC (X6-3226). Any other assistance you receive on papers—organizing your paper, identifying your main points, typing, proofreading, editing and/or revising it—must be cleared with the professor. However, as you prepare for the seminar and as you work to understand readings and lectures, talking and reviewing with your colleagues outside of class is encouraged; this is different from directly assisting one another with a specific essay assignment. If you have questions, please see me.

Academic Integrity: The University of Oregon values academic honesty. Students are informed of the University’s policies and expectations about conduct and academic honesty when they matriculate. You are here because you clearly have the ability to engage your own mind in rigorous intellectual work. If you need a quick review of our campus community’s assumptions about academic integrity and conduct, see the Conduct Code on the UO website:

<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx>

Course policy on Academic Integrity: All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. Any use of sources (ideas, quotations, and paraphrases) beyond our lectures and discussion must be properly documented. In other words, rely on your own grey matter, and wrestle well, yourself, with the course material. Protect the integrity of your own work and that of others’. In cases of clearly established plagiarism or cheating, a final course grade of “F” will be recorded, and all incidents will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, as required by the University.

Notes on the four ‘thought papers’ you write during the term. These will be primarily analytical. If you conduct research when preparing these expositions and include other people’s

words or ideas in your postings, be sure to acknowledge those. (Documentation information should be provided at the end of the post and will not be considered in the word count requirement for the 'thought paper.')

Notes on the research project : Your research project will, of course, take you into the forests of other people's work and ideas. You can consult the University's Conduct Code and the UO library's website-- <http://library.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/index.html> --for definitions and discussions of plagiarism and for information on documentation. Please see me if you have any concerns about documentation and/or academic honesty. For this course, an honest and obvious effort to document is absolutely critical and far more important than commas, abbreviations, or 'correct' formatting. Either MLA or Chicago Style provide acceptable resources and formats for advanced work in literature.

SCHEDULE (subject to change). Up-to-date schedule always available on Blackboard.

*****NB** Scholarly articles and materials will supplement the readings listed below, particularly in the second-half of the term. See Blackboard for details.

WEEK ONE: Introductions

U 4/1 Intro to course & one another; starting to read Middle English (ME/PDE)
The Manuscript online, issues of interpretation

*F 4/4 Cambridge students' Blackboard postings I, due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, reread the Intro lines we started and work through Part I (line 490) in Middle English thoroughly. Come to class ready to work on the grammar and vocabulary of these lines. Identify questions you have about specific sentences and/or words. Also read all of the Oxford Very Short Introduction to Medieval Britain noting the major issues and events you think important for understanding SGGK.)

WEEK TWO: The Initial Challenge

TU 4/8 Discussion: Cambridge Postings I and Oxford responses.
SGGK in the original through line 490.
Discussion of *VSI Medieval Britain*

*F 4/11 Oxford students' Blackboard postings II, due by 5 p.m.

[Over the weekend, reread any portion of Part I you feel you need to review. Then work through Part II (lines 491- 1125) in Middle English thoroughly. Prepare the grammar and vocabulary of these lines. Explore the entire website created to understand Orkney is- lands' folklore, esp. the game of 'ba' <http://www.orkneyjar.com/tradition/bagame/baorigin2.htm>, noting the major issues and events you think might be helpful for understanding SGGK and what skepticism we should retain about any parallels suggested on the website. Additional reading: article on 'folklore in Gawain,' essay on 'performance of self in 100-yrs war.]

WEEK THREE: Gawain's arming, journey, arrival

TU 4/15 Discussion: Oxford Postings II and Cambridge responses.
 SGGK in the original through line 1125.
<http://www.orkneyjar.com/tradition/bagame/baorigin2.htm>
 Susan Crane Performance of Self (Hundred Years' War) U Penn 2002 (on BB)

*F 4/18 Cambridge BB postings, III due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, reread any portion of Part II you feel you need to review. Then work through Part III (lines 1126- 1997) in Middle English thoroughly. Come to class ready to work on the grammar and vocabulary of these lines. Also note the major issues and events you think might be helpful for understanding SGGK. Additional reading: Crane and Salisbury, etc. on BB.)

WEEK FOUR: Hunting and Seduction

TU 4/22 Discussion: Cambridge Postings III and Oxford responses.
 SGGK in the original through line 1997
 Readings on hunting Susan Crane "Animal Encounters"
 Joyce Salisbury the animal within; readings on seduction/courtly love

*F 4/25 Oxford Group BB postings, IV due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, reread any portion of Part III you feel you need to review. Then work through Part IV (lines 1998- 2530) in Middle English thoroughly. Come to class ready to work on the grammar and vocabulary of these lines. Also note the major issues and events you think might be helpful for understanding SGGK. Study for midterm.)

WEEK FIVE: Confrontation/Confession

TU 4/29 Discussion: Oxford postings IV and Cambridge responses
 SGGK in the original through line 2530
 **IN-CLASS MIDTERM 1 hour (close translation, objective questions based on weeks 1-4 readings, postings and seminar sessions)

*F 5/2 Cambridge students' BB postings V, due 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, reread any portion of Part IV you feel you need to review. Come to class ready to work on the grammar and vocabulary of these lines esp passages we did not cover 4/29. Also note the major issues and events in Part IV you think might be helpful for understanding SGGK. Study the parallel passages from different translations provided on BB. Work on research paper proposal.)

WEEK SIX: Rethinking the 'conclusion' and multiple SGGKs

TU 5/6 Discussion: Cambridge posts V, Oxford responses
 Continued discussion of Part IV (through line 2530)

We will compare several translations of several passages from SGGK.

TH 5/8 Research paper proposal assignment due

*Sun 5/11 Oxford Blackboard postings VI, due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, read 'Patience' in translation, consulting original where you feel it might be crucial; 2 critical articles on BB.)

WEEK SEVEN: SGGK in light of 'Patience'

TU 5/13 Discussion: Oxford postings VI, Cambridge responses
Critical theory, criticism on the poem; *Patience* in translation

*F 5/16 Cambridge Postings VII, due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, read 'Pearl' in translation, consulting original where you feel it might be crucial; 2 critical articles on BB)

WEEK EIGHT: SGGK in light of 'Pearl'

TU 5/20 Discussion: Cambridge posts VII, Oxford responses
Critical theory, criticism of SGGK, *Pearl* in translation

*F 5/23 Oxford posts VIII, due by 5 p.m.

(Over the weekend, tba; Likely material from Objects and Ethics, Cohen)

WEEK NINE:

TU 5/27 1.5 hrs: Discussion: Oxford posts VIII, Cambridge responses
1.5 hrs: Presentations of 6 research projects (10 minutes each w/few minutes for questions)

WEEK TEN:

TU 6/3 2 hrs: Presentations of 9 research projects (10 minutes each w/few minutes for questions and responses)
1 hr. Conclusions and continuing questions

Final Research Project: There will be no final exam in the course. Seminars require intense active engagement and academic performance throughout the term. Final research projects are due during finals' week: **Tuesday, June 10, 3 p.m.**