Fall 2015

ENG 225: THE AGE OF KING ARTHUR
MWF 12pm in 185 Lillis

Instructor: Professor Stephanie Clark
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Office hours: W 1:45-2:45 and F 1:45-3:45
Course website: on Canvas

Part One: Course Description and Goals

In “The Age of Arthur” we will read literature from a variety of medieval genres, including instructions on how to behave during a love affair, Arthurian romances about Lancelot, an infuriating Cinderella-like tale, and late medieval mystical writings. We will consider the ways various medieval authors explore three fundamental questions that the Middle Ages bequeathed the modern era: Is the highest form of love that which is freely given, or is it better to fulfill one’s vows? Can one give away one’s will, or are there limits to obedience? Can language be used to talk about the unknowable, and can we know the truth of another person’s experience?

As an introduction to the literature of the Middle Ages set against the backdrop of medieval culture, this course is designed to present a more extensive selection of accessible and representative texts from the Middle Ages than is available in ENG 220, “Introduction to the English Major,” as well as to offer an introductory window on the Middle Ages to non-literature majors. Students will gain skills in attentive analytical reading and in writing about this literature. Most texts will be read in translation, but a few short works will be presented in Middle English, allowing students to glimpse the beginnings of modern English. My intention is that this class will cultivate an appreciation of a culture that is markedly different from ours in some ways, and that in other ways serves as the foundation for modern society.

Grading Breakdown:

Participation: 15%  Essay 1: 15%  Personal Essay: 15%
Daily Quizzes:* 20%  Essay 2 (with proposal): 20%  Final Exam:** 15%
* In lieu of midterm
** Final exam optional. If you opt not to take it, the 15% credit will be folded into your Daily Quiz grade; they’ll then be worth 35%.
Required Texts*
Coursepacket available at the Duck Store.
* Medieval texts exist in many different versions. It’s important that you get the ones assigned so we’re all working from the same text. Do not buy e-books.

Recommended:
Any style/grammar book as a reference for MLA style and to look up grammatical issues marked in your papers (online resources are generally not accurate enough to rely on).

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Main Goals**: To better understand and more accurately represent the main ideas of medieval texts, to recognize the specific questions they explore and the cultural assumptions embedded within them. This class will also allow you to situate yourself more deeply within the long tradition of English literature and thought as well as to gain greater knowledge of some of the early literary traditions similar to it.

**Read/Analyze.** Your careful reading of the assigned texts in preparation for class should give you greater awareness of the particular characteristics of narrative-based or literary ways of knowing about the world. Lectures will orient you to the formal characteristics of medieval literature and to cultural contexts for interpretation. You should gain ability in analyzing and articulating which specific features in a medieval text carry medieval cultural content. Class discussion will give you opportunity to practice these skills.

**Contextualize.** The introductions to assigned texts read in preparation for class and class lectures will introduce major terminologies and methodologies necessary for the study of medieval literature. In addition, these two resources will help situate the texts read within their cultural, historical, and literary contexts. You should thus become able to recognize the cultural phenomena of the medieval world and analyze its presence in the primary texts. You should also be able to articulate continuities and breaks between the medieval and modern worlds. Both class discussion and the written assignments will give opportunity to practice and to try out your ideas.

**Write.** The written assignments are structured to train you in crafting persuasive and logical arguments from textual evidence. To gain greatest benefit, you must allow yourself adequate time for writing and revising; some of that is built into the process through the series of stepped assignments including a brief comparative paper, a paper proposal, and final essay. You should therefore gain skill in writing focused analytic essays in clear grammatical prose that advance an original argument. There are various resources on campus to help you; my office hours are one of them.
**Part Two: Syllabus**

*Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.*

**Week 1**  
M Sept. 28  Introduction: The Medieval World  
F Oct. 2  Court of Love

**Week 2**  
W Oct. 7  “The Knight of the Cart,” cont., pp. 201-31 (through paragraph ending, “When the king heard this oath, he felt no joy”).  

**Week 3**  
W Oct. 14  “Erec and Enide,” cont., pp. 29-57 (through paragraph ending, “Cadoc of Carlisle rode off with his young lady … to report the news to King Arthur and the queen”).  

**Week 4**  
DUE: Essay 1, hard copy in class

**Week 5**  

**Week 6**  

**Week 7**
W Nov. 11 Francesco Petrarch, “Griselda.” Coursepacket. Excerpts from the book of Job. Coursepacket. (Not required reading. Included for those who don’t know the Job story.)
F Nov. 13 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “Introduction” (skim). “The Clerk’s Tale.” Coursepacket. The “General Prologue” is included to give context to the situation and characters in the later tale. The opening on pp. 3-4 (until the description of the Knight) gives the frame story; the Clerk’s description is on pp. 10-11, and the closing is on pp. 22-26.

**Week 8**
W Nov. 18 Finish up Griselda stories.
F Nov. 20 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Introduction; pp. 11-56 (ch. 33). We’ll focus esp. on pp. 11-19 and chs. 1-7, 10-12, 16, 23-25.
DUE: Essay 2 Proposal

**Week 9**
M Nov. 23 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, pp. 56-101. We’ll focus esp. on chs. 43, 45-47, 50-51, 62-66, 74-75.
F Nov. 27 NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Holiday

**Week 10**
DUE: Essay 2, hard copy in class

**Final:** Thursday, Dec. 10 at 10:15am (optional)

**Personal Essay due by Friday, December 11 at 10am. Bring hard copy to my office.**