

TR 11-12:15
Buckman 325

Prof. S. Uselmann
uselmanns@rhodes.edu
Palmer 310
Office hrs: MW 3-5

English 320: Medieval Literature
Nuns, Mothers and Others: Medieval Women Writers

This course is designed to introduce you to women writers of the Middle Ages who wrote in English, French, and Latin. It examines the writings of medieval women -- abbesses, merchants, wives, mothers, and mystics -- to explore the challenges that female writers presented to orthodox Christianity, to gender stereotypes, and to medieval political and social structures. The course has three primary objectives: to discover the rich variety of women's literary voices in the Middle Ages, to analyze the works of medieval women in their historical context, and to explore the relationship between medieval and contemporary theoretical issues concerning gender and literature.

TEXTBOOKS:

Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace (CC)
The Letters of Abelard and Heloise (Penguin)
Chretien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances* (Penguin)
The Lais of Marie de France (Penguin)
Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Persea Books)
Anchoritic Spirituality, ed. Savage and Watson (Paulist Press) (AS)
Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin)
The Book of Margery Kempe (Penguin)
Optional: *The Wife of Bath*, Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Peter Beidler (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation, Quizzes, In-Class Writing. This class comes with a heavy reading load and will be run primarily in a discussion format. It goes without saying that I expect you to come prepared with your book and having done the assigned reading for the day. Regular, active participation is also required, although I will periodically give quizzes or informal writing assignments in class to help boost the grade of those who feel they haven't had a chance to contribute.

E-postings: As part of your class participation, you will be required to respond to the readings by posing a question or series of questions to the class at least TEN (10) times over the course of the semester. The questions are due by **9:00 p.m. on the Sunday before class**. The class email address is:

10278@rhodes.edu

The response should be in the form of a question(s) that struck you as you read – for example some incident, passage, framing device, etc. that struck you as strange, unfamiliar, or problematic. You may also, if you like, offer a brief answer to your own question, but this is not required.

Group-Led Discussion and Response Paper on Supplementary Readings. In addition to the required readings, each member of the class (together with a partner[s]) will be responsible for reading and presenting on ONE supplementary reading to the class. The readings are available on reserve at the library, and address core theoretical concepts considered central to our understanding of medieval/women writers. This assignment is 10% of your final grade, and consists of three parts:

1. Reading the assigned supplementary article and posting a brief summary (250 words or less) to the class e-mail list **by the Tuesday before your presentation**. You and your partner(s) will write this summary together.
2. Leading a 20-minute discussion in class. Here, you and your partner(s) might introduce the most salient concepts to the class and/or ask them questions about the day's reading that struck you as a result of your supplementary reading. Be sure to email me to let me know your plans **by the Tuesday before your presentation**.
3. Writing a 1-2 pg. response paper. This is your own work, to be done apart from your group work. The essay is not intended to be formal, but it will count as part of your grade for this assignment, and so should be clearly written and organized around a core question or set of questions – even if you decide not to provide an answer to these questions (i.e. a central thesis). The essay is **due by the Thursday following your presentation**.

All three parts must be completed in order to receive a passing grade on the assignment. If you have any questions, about the readings, the assignment, or just want to run some ideas past me, please don't hesitate to email or come by to see me.

Essays and Exams. There will be 3 essays and a "midterm" exam (which actually occurs rather late in the semester). Essay 1 will be a literary analysis of one or more texts. Essays 2 and 3 as well as the midterm exam will require you to integrate supplementary material – including (1) the essays from the *Cambridge Companion*, (2) your own supplementary reading, and (3) the presentation/summaries of those of your classmates.

Absences. Regular, punctual attendance is required. Arriving more than 15 minutes late three times counts as an absence. Failure to bring your book to class or to pass the day's quiz also counts as an absence. Absences for extracurricular activities, religious holidays, or illness may be excused as long as you have contacted me in advance and completed the necessary homework/make-up work on time. You are allowed two (2) absences free-of-charge; each additional absence will cost your *final course average* two tenths of a point. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course.

Late Paper Policy. There will be NO extensions on any assignments in this class. Instead, you will be allotted three (3) "free" days at the beginning of the semester, which you may use when and as you wish. Each day is worth 24 hours (e.g. a paper due on Thursday may be handed in by Friday by 12:15), and you are free to use them up all at once or space them throughout the semester. It's up to you, but be aware that once these three days are used up, your letter grade on any given essay will drop 1/3 grade *for each day it is late*.

Grading.

Class participation, quizzes, informal/in-class writing assignments and e-postings – 10%

Group-Led Discussion, Summary and Response Paper – 10%

Essay #1 (5-7 pp.) – 15 %

Essay #2 (5-7 pp.) – 20%

Essay #3 (8-10 pp.) – 30 %

"Midterm" Exam — 15%

Honor Code. All work must adhere to the honor code.

Questions, problems, or concerns? Please always feel free to contact me. Most difficulties can be prevented from becoming serious problems fairly easily -- if the professor knows about them in advance.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: The Problem of Authorship

Week 1:

R 8/26 Introduction
Old English poetry

Week 2:

T 8/31 *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, pp. 3-111
Jennifer Summit, "Women and Authorship" (CC, pp. 91-108)
(optional: Christopher Baswell, "Heloise," CC, pp. 161-71)

R 9/2 *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, c'tued
Presentation #1: "The Death of the Author" and "What is an Author?"

Week 3:

T 9/7 Chrétien de Troyes, pp. 207-94, "The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)"
Sarah McNamer, "Lyrics and Romance" (CC, pp. 195-209)

R 9/9 Chrétien de Troyes, "The Knight of the Cart," c'tued
Presentation #2: "The Readers and their Romances"

Week 4:

T 9/14 *The Lais of Marie de France*, pp. 41-126
Roberta Krueger, "Marie de France" (CC, pp. 172-83)

R 9/16 *The Lais of Marie de France*, cont'd
Presentation #3: "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor"

Unit 2: The Problem of Antifeminism

Week 5:

T 9/21 Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale
Dyan Elliott, "Marriage" (CC, pp. 40-57)
Due: Draft of Essay #1

R 9/23 Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, c'tued
Presentation #4: "Destiny Is Anatomy"

Week 6:

T 9/28 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* pp. xxvi-xxx (list of Christine's works);
pp. 3-55 (Book 1, sections 1-20); pp. 62-79 (sections 27-37); pp. 86-95 (sections 43-
46); pp. 99-106 (book 2, sections 1-4).

David Hult, "The *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan, and the *querelle des femmes*"
(CC, pp. 184-94)

R 9/30 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, c'tued
Due: Essay #1
Presentation #5: "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Week 7:

T 10/5

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, pp. 110-126 (book 2, sections 7-17); pp. 134-135 (section 25); pp. 142-149 (sections 30-33); pp. 153-158 (sections 36-41); pp. 160-162 (section 44); pp. 164-168 (sections 47-48); pp. 184-192 (sections 53-57); pp. 209-223 (sections 2.66-3.4); 234-245 (sections 10-13); pp. 254-257 (section 19).

(optional: Barbara Hanawalt, "Widows," CC, pp. 58-69)

R 10/7

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, c'tued
Presentation #6: "The Daemonic Agent"

Unit 3: The Problem of Women and the Church

Week 8:

T 10/12

Ancrene Wisse, pp. 47-207 in AS (read Intro, Part I (skim), Parts II-III, VI-VIII)
Christopher Cannon, "Enclosure" (CC, pp. 109-23)

R 10/14

Ancrene Wisse, c'tued
Presentation #7: "Epistemology of the Closet"

Week 9:

T 10/19

No Class – Fall Break

R 10/21

Holy Maidenhood (AS pp. 225-43)
Saint Katherine (AS pp. 262-87)
Saint Margaret (AS pp. 288-305)
Saint Juliana (AS pp. 306-321)
Ruth Evans, "Virginites" (CC, pp. 21-39)
Presentation #8: "Reading as a Woman"

Week 10:

T 10/26

The Wooing of Our Lord (AS pp. 245-58)
An Orison to God Almighty (AS pp. 322-24)
A Song of Praise to Our Lord (AS pp. 325-28)
An Orison to St. Mary (AS pp. 329-30)
Due: Draft of essay #2

R 10/28

Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love*, pp.41-63
Presentation #9: "La Mystérique"

Week 11:

T 11/2

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, pp. 63-180
Nicholas Watson, "Julian of Norwich" (CC, pp. 210-21)
Due: Essay #2

R 11/4

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, c'tued
Presentation #10: "Stabat Mater"

Week 12:

T 11/9 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 33-169
Carolyn Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe" (CC, pp. 222-39)

R 11/11 Margery Kempe, c'tued
Presentation #11: "Women's Time"

Week 13:

T 11/16 Margery Kempe, pp. 169-297
Sarah Salih, "At home; out of the house" (CC, pp. 124-40)

R 11/18 Margery Kempe, c'tued
(optional: Alcuin Blamires, "Beneath the Pulpit," CC, pp. 141-60)
MIDTERM EXAM

Week 14:

T 11/23 TBA

R 11/25 No Class -- Thanksgiving

Week 15:

T 11/30 Joan of Arc
Nadia Margolis, "Joan of Arc" (CC, pp. 256-66)

R 12/2 Joan of Arc
Presentation #12: "One is Not Born a Woman"
Due: Draft of Essay #3

Week 16:

T 12/7 Joan of Arc

* * Friday 12/10 -- Final Essay Due by 5:00 p.m.