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## **Selected Courses**

### **Undergraduate**

#### **Medieval Literature: The Romance**

We will survey the development of the medieval vernacular romance—and the development of “romance”—in its historical and cultural context, and explore the vexed question of genre as we consider audience, theme, function, and influence. Likely texts: Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale and/or *Troilus and Criseyde*, selections from Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*, French examples of romance, including excerpts from the legend of Tristan and Iseult and from the works of Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, along with short treatises on love, lovesickness, adultery, marriage customs and laws. In essence, we will study what Denis de Rougemont famously called *Love in the Western World*: the beginnings of a history of desire before Freud and Lacan taught us to think about desire, and consider how the medieval concept of love and romance has certain continuities and discontinuities with our own. At the same time, we’ll also consider what romance is *not* by reading a handful of *fabliaux* and that best-known of *chansons de geste*, *The Song of Roland*, in order to explore how the ideologies of romance function in opposition to, or are embedded in, other genres. In addition, we’ll read the “oriental” romance *Floris and Blancheflur* (a Western imagining of Islamic culture), and also venture beyond the borders of medieval Western Europe to read the thirteenth-century West African romance-epic *Sundiata*. We’ll screen cinematic representations of medieval romance when appropriate.

#### **Chaucer**

When we look back on the Middle Ages, we are faced with two equally alluring but mutually exclusive temptations: to see medieval people as being very much like us, or to see them as radically different. We will keep these temptations (and pleasures) in mind as we read some of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Our main focus is the works of Chaucer that represent romantic and carnal love across genres: the dream vision, the *fabliau*, the *lai*, and, of course, the romance itself. In essence, we will study what Denis de Rougemont famously called *Love in the Western World*: the beginnings of a history of desire before Freud and Lacan taught us to think about desire, and we will consider how the medieval concept of love and romance has certain continuities and discontinuities with our own.

More broadly, our task will be to work out an understanding of Chaucer’s works within their late medieval setting and against our contemporary experiences. Other critical issues include the relationship of author to text, the self-conscious and self-reflective narrator, problems of influence and genre, medieval constructions of race, class, and gender, and how and why Chaucerian texts continue to be read. We will read Chaucer in translation, but will spend some time on Middle English, and consider how translations and modernizations both help and hinder an appreciation of Chaucer.

### **Tolkien, Lewis, Pullman: Old Tales Retold**

J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis were friends, colleagues, and sometimes rivals. Both were distinguished scholars of medieval and early modern literature, both chose fantasy as their primary fictional genre, and both left an indelible mark on every author who has since attempted to write fantasy and/or science fiction. And Philip Pullman is, arguably, the only fantasy writer of Tolkien's and Lewis' caliber working today. What all three have in common is an ability to take an old tale and make it new, and make it as compellingly rich as, if not richer than, the original. We will read Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as Lewis' science fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *The Hideous Strength*), and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (*Northern Lights* [*The Golden Compass* in the US]; *The Subtle Knife*; *The Amber Spyglass*). In addition, we will read those first tales that inspired each of these three writers: Norse sagas and Anglo-Saxon poetry for Tolkien; medieval travel and romance literature for Lewis; and John Milton's and William Blake's poetry for Pullman. In addition, since all three rewrite the Christian myth of fall and redemption, we will consider the Genesis story and its elaborations. As we go, we will examine what constitutes the genres of fairy tale, fantasy and science fiction. While we will not read R.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, they will serve as a constant "other" text in the class, and we should keep the Harry Potter films in mind as we watch *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and excerpts from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as well as the film adaptation of *The Golden Compass*. Finally, we will consider what it means to study books that many of us have read for pleasure and on our own for many years.

### **Graduate Courses**

#### **World Literatures, 1100-1500**

The "medieval" and the "Middle Ages" are decidedly Western European constructs, both temporal and spatial. What of the "rest" of the world? We will read with/in and against the notion of the European medieval by exploring a variety of texts (in translation) across a variety of cultures, including excerpts from Malory's *Morte Darthur* and a text or two of Chaucer's (England); the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Ireland); the *Song of Roland* (France); *Sundiata* (Africa); and excerpts from *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Mongolia), the *Tale of Genji* (Japan), and the *Arabian Nights* (India, Persia [modern Iran], Syria and Egypt [?]). We will supplement our texts with a few films (*Excalibur*, the anime version of the *Tale of Genji*, *Sundiata*, and the Russian *Mongol*). Our literary and critical interests include questions of genre (mainly romance and epic; recall of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would be beneficial), narrative theory (what do modern readers do with pre-modern texts?), and difference (race, gender, class). We will also spend a little time theorizing the medieval (beginning with Raymond Williams' *Keywords*)—which also allows us to theorize the modern. Finally, one theme that dominates these texts is that of the nation and either the founding or dissolution of the nation: we'll examine how such national narratives functioned then and function now.

#### **Reading/Watching the Middle Ages—Text and Film**

Our primary focus is the medieval romance and how various tales are retold and refashioned within the genre in the Middle Ages. Arthurian legend is central to such an inquiry, but we will also read romances set in the Middle East (or the "Middle East") that exist in different versions,

as well as romances dependent upon classical sources. As we read clusters of medieval romances with analogues and antecedents, we will also inquire into how such romances continue to live beyond the Middle Ages, and therefore we will consider a handful of modern cinematic adaptations of medieval texts. Among the assigned texts and films: selected legends of Tristan and Isolde (and Cocteau's *L'Eternel Retour*); selected episodes from Malory's *Morte Darthur* (and Boorman's *Excalibur*); selected episodes from the French Vulgate *Lancelot* and from Chrétien de Troyes's works (and Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*); the "oriental" *Floris and Blanchefleur* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* (and Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* and the BBC's *Man of Law's Tale*); Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (and the BBC *Knight's Tale*), and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. We'll read the transcripts of the trials of Jeanne D'Arc in order to understand how her history becomes romanticized in post-medieval retellings, and pair these readings with Besson's *The Messenger*. Our theoretical interests: representations of race and gender, narratology and narrative, intertextuality, and film theory.