

OBERLIN COLLEGE
SYLLABUS
English 202: Medieval European Literature
Fall Semester, 2007

Meeting time: MWF 1:30
Meeting place: King 241
Credit Hours: 4

Instructor: Robert Longworth
Office: 404 Mudd Library
Office Hours: MW 11:30-12:30

Aims of the Course: Courses in English at the 200 level are, to quote the college catalogue, “designed to introduce students to the discipline of literary study in English through attention to fundamental issues and methods of interpretation in critical reading and writing, substantial coverage of texts, and instruction in the conventions of genre, period, and region as appropriate.” In this particular course, an effort will be made to achieve those objectives by the scrutiny of several works written in several languages during the several centuries that are loosely known as “the Middle Ages”—that is, the period between the end of the Roman Empire around the fifth century of the Common Era and the beginning of the presumptively modern world with the arrival of the Renaissance in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Virtually all of the works will be read in translation.

Evaluation: The instructor will assess each enrolled student’s performance in the course based on written work to be submitted, specifically:

- weekly submission of journal entries prepared in advance of each class meeting, dealing with the works studied and due at the beginning of class on each in-session Friday during the term
- a critical essay on a topic to be chosen no later than November 20 in consultation with the instructor, due at the end of the designated “reading period” (December 16)

Texts (required)

Beowulf: A Verse Translation, tr. Seamus Heaney, ed. Daniel Donoghue (New York and London: Norton, 2002).

Gottfried von Strassburg. *Tristan*, tr. A.T. Hatto. Baltimore: Penguin, 1960.

The Portable Dante, ed. and tr. Mark Musa. Penguin Books

Staines, David, tr. *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) [paperback].

N.B.: some assigned readings are available through the electronic reserve services (ERes) of the Oberlin College Library. Some others may be found on line—URLs are noted.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Sept. 5 Introduction

7 Latin and Vernacular Languages in the first millenium. Read: the Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book IV, chs. 23-24 (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book4.html>); “Caedmon’s Hymn” (ERes)

10 Latin lyric poetry in the first millenium. Read: from Helen Waddell, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, poems by Boethius, Venantius Fortunatus, and Alcuin (ERes)

- 12 Icelandic Saga. Read: “Thorstein Staff-Struck,” from Gwyn Jones, *Eirik the Red and Other Icelandic Sagas*, 78-88 (ERes)
- 14 Icelandic Saga. Read: *Eirik the Red*, from Jones, 126-157 (ERes)
- 17 Anglo-Saxon Epic. Read: *Beowulf*, pp. xv-xxii; lines 1-835
- 19 Anglo-Saxon Epic. Read: *Beowulf*, lines 836-2199
- 21 Anglo-Saxon Epic. Read: *Beowulf*, 2200-3182; pp.103-130, 212-223
- 24 Celtic Epic (Welsh). Read: *Math Son of Mythonwy*, the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi* (available online in a translation by Will Parker at <http://www.mabinogi.net/translations.htm>)
- 26 Celtic Epic (Irish). Read: “The Combat of Ferdiad and Cuchulain,” from the *Táin Bó Cualnge [Cattle Raid of Cooley]*. It can be found online at <http://adminstaff.vassar.edu/sttaylor/Cooley/Ferdiad.html>
- 28 Provençal Poetry: Troubadours and Trouveres. Read poems in Flores, 5-35 (ERes)
- Oct.** 1 [Continued]
- 3 The Making of the Arthurian Tradition. Read Lacy and Ashe, *Arthurian Handbook*, 2nd ed., 1-52 (ERes)
- 5 Arthurian Literature: Lancelot, Courtly Love, and Chivalry. Read Chrétien de Troyes, *Knight of the Cart*, in Staines, pp. 170-227
- 8 [Continued] Read Chrétien, *Knight of the Cart*, in Staines, pp. 227-256
- 10 Arthurian Literature: the Holy Grail. Read Chrétien, *The Story of the Grail*, in Staines, pp. 339-383
- 12 [Continued] Read *The Story of the Grail*, in Staines, pp. 384-449
- 15 Latin Hymnody of the High Middle Ages. Read *Dies Irae*, *Pange Lingua Gloriosi*, *Stabat Mater*, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (the “Golden Sequence”), *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. All available online and (ERes)
- 17 Legendary Narratives: Saint’s Lives and Miracle Stories. Read “The Tumbler of Our Lady” (available, e.g., at <http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/>) and “The Murder of Thomas Becket” (available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/grim-becket.html>)
- 19 Allegory and Romance. Read excerpts from *Romance of the Rose*, in Flores, 126-138 (ERes)
- 29 Romance of Adultery. Read Gottfried, *Tristan*, prologue and chs. 1-7
- 31 [Continued] Read Gottfried, *Tristan*, chs. 8-16

- Nov.** 2 [Continued] Read Gottfried, *Tristan*, chs. 17-29
- 5 [Continued]
- 7 Exaltation of the Lady. Read Guido Guinizelli, “The Gentle Heart,” in Flores (219) [ERes]; Guido Cavalcanti, “A Lady Begg Me,” in Flores (238) [ERes]; and Dante, “Ladies Who Have Intelligence of Love,” in *Vita Nuova* (*Portable Dante*, 611)
- 9 The Divine Comedy. Read Dante, *Inferno*, cantos 1-6
- 12 [Continued] Read Dante, *Inferno*, cantos 7-15
- 14 [Continued] Read Dante, *Inferno*, cantos 16-24
- 16 [Continued] Read Dante, *Inferno*, cantos 25-32
- 19 [Continued] Read Dante, *Purgatorio*, cantos 1-5, 27
- 21 [Continued] Read Dante, *Purgatorio*, cantos 30-31; *Paradiso*, cantos 1-2, 33
- 26 The Frame Story and Popular Narrative. Read Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, “Proem” and stories told on Day I, 1-6. The text is on line at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb
- 28 [Continued] From the same text, read stories told on Day II, 9 and 10; and Day III, 1 and 2
- 30 [Continued] From the same text, read stories told on Day X, 9 and 10; and the “Author’s Epilogue”
- Dec.** 3 Poetry of Francesco Petrarch. Read from *Canzoniere*, poems numbered 19, 132, 134, 292, 311, 332 (ERes)
- 5 [Continued]
- 7 Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Read “Owl” (94), “Garland of Peacock Feathers” (102), “Girls of Llanbadarn” (125), “Seagull” (222), “Trouble in a Tavern” (230) [all ERes]
- 10 Poetry of Christine de Pisan. Read in Flores, pp. 163-172 (ERes)
- 12 Poetry of François Villon. Read in Flores, pp. 184-191 (ERes)
- 16 CRITICAL ESSAY DUE