

**English 349: Medieval Literature**  
**Riddles, Romances, and Dream Visions**  
**Fall 2007**

Ms. Dobbs

Mears 213, ext. 3108

Office hours: TWTh 4-5, or by appointment

In this seminar, we will consider two related topics—the construction of meaning and the process of interpretation—in Old English, Old French, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English literature. Both topics were of great concern to medieval writers and are rooted in problems of language. Our interpretation of Old English riddles will set up models of the two topics; we will test these models in our reading of *Beowulf* and *Grendel*, of Chretien's knights and Marie de France's Celtic lovers, and finally of both Gawain and the Green Knight and Chaucer's dreamers.

**Required Texts:**

*The Earliest English Poems*, trans. M. Alexander

*Beowulf, A Dual-Language Edition*, trans. H.D. Chickering, Jr.

*Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Kibler

*The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. G. Burgess and K. Busby

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Brian Stone

*Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. H. Phillips and N. Havely

**Requirements:**

--careful preparation of the readings (I suggest you allow four-five hours for your preparation time.)

--thoughtful participation in class discussions

--passing occasional surprise quizzes

--reading Middle English

--at least two oral explications of our readings

--a 1250-word argument on *Beowulf* or on one or more of Marie's lais (Let me know by 1b which argument you'll do; it's first come, first served on choice.)

--a ten-minute formal oral presentation of this argument

--a 3000 to 3750-word argument (seminar paper) on a topic of your choosing (due by noon on 12/14)

--a ten-minute formal oral presentation of work-in-progress on this paper (12/6 or 12/11)

**N.B.** Late work is not accepted.

Your course grade will be determined by these percentages: intelligent participation in seminar discussions, 35%; quizzes and reading Middle English, 5%; oral explications, 15%; formal oral presentations, 10%; first argument, 10%; seminar paper, 25%.

**Web Sites of Interest**

Labyrinth Library <http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/>

Look up, e.g., Old English for Anglo-Saxon Culture and Anglo-Saxon MSS, Middle English for Gawain and Chaucer.

Medieval Feminist Index [www.haverford.edu/library/reference/mschaus/mfi/mfi.html](http://www.haverford.edu/library/reference/mschaus/mfi/mfi.html)

**Seminar Paper Research**

When you begin work on your seminar paper, the MLA International Bibliography and The Literature Resource Center, both on the Internet (accessed through Burling Library's "Databases and Indexes") will be useful.

**Foreign Language Option:** If you have sufficient knowledge of Latin, Italian, or French, you might choose to make translation of a work in one of these languages a part of your seminar paper. "Sufficient knowledge" generally means that you have reached the 300-level in language study. The Latin option involves reading the Ceyx and Alcyone story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; the Italian, reading part of the *Divine Comedy*; and the French, reading Marie de France's *Lanval*. If you're interested, please meet with me before Fall Break.

**Academic Honesty:** As in all course work at the College, students in this course will be held responsible for the standards of honesty in academic work. Consult the *Student Handbook* for the official College policy. If you have questions about the meaning of this statement, see me immediately. The form for end notes and bibliography in this course is that of the current *MLA Style Sheet*.

**Schedule:**

For general literary and historical background on both the Old and the Middle English periods, you should review the relevant section of your text from Traditions I. I will rely on your having at least that section as background knowledge. You should also read all introductions in the texts for this course.

**Week**

- 8/30 Introduction to course  
Lecturette: Some Thoughts on Riddles and Some Background
- 1a Riddles: 1, 5, 6,7, 12. For each of the riddle classes, prepare an explication of at least one of the assigned riddles, but carefully consider all of them. Don't look at the possible answers to the riddles, until you've spent, say, 75% of your time trying to work out on your own what's going on in them. You'll find the Riddles in Old English on the Labyrinth website. Look under Labyrinth Library, Old English, Poetry, Exeter Book, and Riddles.
- 1b Riddles: 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35
- 2a Riddles: 42, 43, 47, 50, 51, 60, 85
- 2b *Beowulf*, lines 1-1250
- 3a *Beowulf*, lines 1251-3170
- 3b Presentation and discussion of *Beowulf* arguments
- 4a Chretien de Troyes, *Erec*, pages 1-52
- 4b , *Erec*, pages 52-92
- 5a , *Yvain*
- 5b Marie de France, *Lais*: \**Guigemar*  
*Equitan*  
*Le Fresne*
- 6a *Bisclavret*  
\**Lanval*  
*Les Deus Amanz*
- 6b *Yonec*  
*Laustic*  
\**Milun*
- 7a *Chaitivel*  
*Chevrefoil*  
\**Eliduc*
- 7b Presentation and discussion of Marie arguments

**Fall Break**

- 8a Chretien de Troyes: *Lancelot*
- 8b anon.: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Parts I and II
- 9a : *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Parts III and IV
- 9b Reading Middle English
- 10a Chaucer: *The Book of the Duchess*, 1-557 (prepare five lines to read in Middle English.)
- 10b : *The Book of the Duchess*. 558-1334
- 11a : *The House of Fame*, Book I

**Thanksgiving Break**

- 12a : *The House of Fame*, Books II and III
- 12b : *The Parliament of Fowls*
- 13a Work on seminar paper
- 13b Oral presentations of work-in-progress on seminar paper
- 14a " "
- 14b Work on seminar paper

December 14: Your seminar paper is due in my office by 12 noon.