

English 661

Lara Farina, ENGL 661, Fall 2005

This course introduces students to medieval literature and its social contexts. Surveying writings from Late Antiquity through the beginning of the Early Modern era, we will make this swath of time interpretable by focusing our attention on texts that center on visual/visionary experience. For medieval writers, experiences of seeing were intimately bound up with discourses of authority and authorship, relations between laypeople and religious, and the demands of traditional genres for representation. Understanding these contexts for “visions” and “wonders” reveals much about conditions under which medieval literature was produced, distributed, and interpreted. The line-up for the class includes: 1) the literature of divine revelation, especially records of mystical experience, 2) the more secularized, allegorical genre of the “dream vision,” and 3) seen wonders, such as radical transformations, messengers from the “Otherworld,” and the exoticisms of travel literature. Toward the end of the course, we will compare medieval ways of seeing the “marvelous” with the different, more empirical “discourses of the eye” found in Early Modern travel narratives. We will end with a consideration of how modern representations of the medieval have portrayed these differences.

The course will require some reading in Middle English; however, I do not expect students to have prior experience reading ME. I will provide an introduction to the language, and, thereafter, a portion of each class will be devoted to practice reading and translation.

Required Texts:

The Life of Christina of Markyate. Trans. Talbot. (Toronto University Press)

Marie de France, Lais. Trans. Hanning and Ferrante. (Baker Books)

Ovid, Metamorphoses. Trans. Raeburn. (Penguin)

The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet. Ed. Andrew; trans. Finch. (U of California Press)

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville. Trans. Moseley. (Penguin)

The Showings of Julian of Norwich. Ed. Baker. (Norton)

Bildhauer, Bettina, and Robert Mills, eds. *The Monstrous Middle Ages*. (Toronto UP)

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Metamorphoses*. (Zone)

Please get the recommended editions/translations of these books: this will facilitate class discussion and keep you from buying an abridged or inaccurate version of the work.

To save money on required books, I will also put materials on electronic reserve. To access these, go to <http://ereserves.lib.wvu.edu>; enter “farina” for the username and “240” for the password. After choosing ENGL 221, you’ll see the files listed by author’s last name. The “pdf.0” files contain the entire file; the “pdf.1” and “pdf.2” files split the file into smaller files in case your computer can’t handle a large download.

A few other works, most notably the Chaucer poems, are available online, at the sites noted on the schedule below.

Required Coursework:

- five 3-page response papers (discussing the week’s reading, you choose which weeks)
one 20 minute presentation on a designated contextual topic two conference-length papers (10-12 pages) * consistent participation in class discussion

Contact Info:

My office is 357 Stansbury, phone # 293-3107 x. 33426. Drop-in office hours are Tu-Th 10:00-11:00, but please feel free to make an appointment to see me at other times or days. E-mail is Lara.Farina@mail.wvu.edu.

Schedule:

8/ 25 Introduction: Medieval History / Middle English. Excerpts from *Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. (handout)

Visions:

9/8 Saints’ Lives: *Andreas, Katherine, Margaret* (on e-reserve) Excerpts from Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*. (on e-reserve) Riches, “Encountering the Monstrous: Saints and Dragons in Medieval Thought” (MMA)

9/15 *The Life of Christina of Markyate*. Harte, “Hell on Earth: Encountering Devils in the Medieval Landscape” (MMA) Contextual Topics: Mysticism, Monasticism, Demonology

9/22 *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*. Excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe*. (on e-reserve) McAvoy, “Monstrous Masculinities in Julian of Norwich’s A Revelation of Love and The Book of Margery Kempe.” (MAA) Contextual Topics: Women’s Literacy, Heresy, Hermits and Anchorites

Wonders:

9/29 *Ovid, Metamorphoses*. Marie de France, *Fables*. (handout) Contextual Topics: Classical Legacies, Hermeneutics, Medieval Genders

10/6 *Marie de France, Lais*. Select tales from the *Mabinogion*. (on e-reserve) Mittman, “The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the ‘Marvels of the West.’” (MMA) Topics: Irish or Scots literature, Anglo-Norman England, Romance as Genre

10/13 Bynum, *Metamorphoses*. Trevisa, *Physiologus*. (handout) Mills, “Jesus as Monster.” (MAA) Contextual Topics: Bestiaries, Manuscript Marginalia

10/20 *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Excerpts from Maxwell, *Wolfpit*. (e-reserve) Contextual Topics: Medieval Sexuality, Witchcraft

10/27 *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*. (e-reserve) Chaucer, **The Prioress’s Tale, from *The Canterbury Tales*. (<http://etext.lib.virginia>) Bildhauer, “Blood, Jews, and Monsters in Medieval Culture.” (MAA) Contextual Topics: Crusades, Jews in Medieval Europe, Urban Drama

Dreams:

11/3 *Pearl*. Selections from Revelations Pluskowski, “Apocalyptic Monsters: Animal Inspirations for the Iconography of Medieval North European Devourers.” (MAA) Contextual Topics: Architecture, Medieval Theories of Vision

11/10 Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*. (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL>) Al-Attar, *The Conference of Birds*. (e-reserve) Contextual Topics: Islamic Spain, Translation, Sufism

11/17 Chaucer, *The House of Fame*. (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL>) Excerpts from De Lorris, *The Romance of the Rose* (e-reserve) Contextual Topics: Italian Poets, Allegory

Thanksgiving Break

Travels:

12/1 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. “Wonders of the East.” (handout) Salih, “Idols and Simulacra: Paganity, Hybridity, and Representation in Mandeville’s Travels.” (MAA)

12/8 *The Navigator*. (film on reserve) Zumthor, “The Medieval Travel Narrative.” (e-reserve) Strohm, from *Theory and the Premodern Text* (e-reserve)