

English 322
Literature of Medieval Europe
(paired with Philosophy 312)
Fall 2006
T-Th, 11:00-12:20
Hoover 202

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Medieval Literature and Philosophy: The Pilgrim Spirit

The glory of Him who moves all things rays forth
through all the universe, and is reflected
from each thing in proportion to its worth . . .

As in a wheel whose motion nothing jars--
by the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.

These lines, the first and last of Dante's *Paradiso*, suggest the poles of vision that give the medieval world its unique and paradoxical character. On the one hand, the period of European history running from about 500 to 1500 is one of incredible diversity--not to mention upheaval and violence. On the other, medieval architects, philosophers, painters, and writers managed by about 1300 to bring all of history, indeed the entire cosmos, into a hard-won but comprehensive system of thought--a system in which every creature (from spinning seraph to comical devil; from martyr-mystic to Chaucer's corrupt pardoner; from lord to retainer; from knight to churl; from unicorn to dragon; from Dante's beloved Beatrice to the Wife of Bath) and every artistic and literary form (from Romanesque to Gothic; from epic to romance; from sacred hymn to fabliau) had its perfect and necessary place. And for a privileged moment of thought, unity and diversity, faith and reason, center and circumference come together, as Dante puts it, into a "single volume bound by love."

Although medieval literature in all its remarkable variety can profitably be studied on its own, it is especially rich to study the unique philosophical and artistic synthesis it expresses along with other expressions of that synthesis, and in the context of its wider historical matrix. To do so is to discover the special paradox, and the special meaning, of the period: a period in which unity and diversity, faith and reason, center and circumference come together. Thus this course is paired with Professor David Hunt's course in Medieval Philosophy. Together (although not always quite in tandem) we will read some exciting European texts (where we will often find the line between philosophy and literature a hard one to draw), and place their development in the matrix of one of the more complex and tumultuous periods in European history.

Both courses will be arranged chronologically. Philosophy students will explore (1) the roots of medieval thought in Plato's *Timaeus* and in the works of St. Augustine (354-430); (2) the Medieval Renaissance of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, embodied above all in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the recovery of Aristotle; and (3) the breakdown of that medieval synthesis (the diversity pole reasserted) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The literature we read will vividly illustrate the development traced in the philosophy course, as we move (1) from early Christian lyrics to the Old English and early French epic (*Beowulf* and *Roland*), while focusing on the first classic of Christian philosophy: Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*; (2) to the new courtly elegance of the Troubadours and Gottfried von Strassburg, as well as to the Gothic synthesis of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), inspired above all by the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas; (3) to the new trends reflected at the end of the period by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer (1340-1400). (The middle stage in this development, the rise of "courtly love," will also present a fine opportunity to explore gender issues in literature, a task more difficult to undertake in the philosophy course.)

The phrase "the pilgrim spirit" actually comes from the end of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, where the young Dante writes: "I call [my thought] a 'pilgrim spirit' because it makes the journey upward spiritually and, once there, is like a pilgrim far from home. . . . [F]or our minds function in relation to those blessed souls as the weak eye does in relation to the sun, and this the Philosopher [by whom Dante means Aristotle] tells us in the second book of the *Metaphysics*."

Virtually every text we read this semester will be about pilgrimage on some level; and indeed our reading itself will *be* a pilgrimage to a place as foreign to much post-modern thought as the heavens seemed to Dante. From Augustine's *Confessions* (the first true autobiography in European literature) as well as from his *Christian Doctrine* (the first post-classical work of literary theory), philosophers and other writers took the idea that life is an allegorical journey from this world (the literal "husk") to a better one (the "kernel" of divine reality at the center of all being)--a journey fraught with peril and difficulty, but also one ending in beatitude, wisdom, and love past all expression.

T.S. Eliot wrote (in a famous essay on Dante's *Paradiso*) that we "moderns" tend to suffer from "a prejudice against beatitude as a subject for poetry." The grim realities of medieval history suggest that this prejudice is not a new one. But it is a prejudice that can make the appreciation of medieval texts especially difficult. By no means all the works we read will *represent* beatitude directly (some are quite violent, some frankly erotic, some hilarious, most quite earthy--none of these writers had heard of Queen Victoria!). But virtually all share St. Paul's vision of "beatitude past utterance" as the goal of existence and the worthiest end of human thought and endeavor.

In so doing they challenge us to undertake, at least vicariously, a journey "beyond the sphere that makes the widest round." For most of us, no doubt, the journey is a vicarious one. But the great value of an allegorical world view is that it allows the appreciation of truths (even ancient ones) on a variety of levels. If one goal of a liberal education is to liberate us from imprisonment in our own, inevitably limited, time and place, this course should admirably serve that end.

Required Texts:

Dante Alighieri. *The Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi. New York: New American Library, 1954.

_____. *The Paradiso*, trans. John Ciardi. New York: New American Library, 1961.

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962.

Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry. New York: Columbia UP, 1960.

Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Kent and Constance Hieatt. New York: Bantam, 1964.

Charles W. Kennedy, trans. *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic*. New York: Oxford UP, 1940; 1968.

Roger and Laura Hibbard Loomis. *Medieval Romances*. New York: Modern Library, 1957.

Dorothy L. Sayers, trans. *The Song of Roland*. New York: Penguin, 1957.

You will also be responsible for a volume of shorter readings and hand-outs (*Readings*; price t.b.a.).

Required Work:

(1) Prompt and regular attendance at all class sessions (including one evening film on Feb. 14 or 15). If you must miss a class, you should get class notes from another student and include them in your notebook with proper acknowledgment. (Roll will be taken, and final grades dropped one step--e.g. from a B to a C--for each absence after the first two. Thus six absences will be regarded as grounds for failure of the course.)

(2) Reading assignments to be completed *before* the dates for which they are assigned (i.e. in time for class discussion).

(3) Satisfactory completion of three exams, two of them take-home "midterms."

(4) Two analysis and response papers (3-4 pages each)--on issues of interest to you in the readings we cover in the first two thirds of the course.

5. One longer paper (10-12 pages), which will be done in conjunction with the paper for Philosophy 312 for those enrolled in the pair.

6. A comprehensive in-class final exam.

Note: Late work will be accepted, but will be marked down one half grade for each class day after the due date. Under extraordinary circumstances, I will consider an extension without penalty--provided that I am consulted in advance and that the circumstances seem serious enough to warrant such an extension.

Grading Factors:

1. Attendance, preparation and discussion	10
2. Midterm exams	25
3. Response papers	20
4. Longer paper	20

5. Final exam

25
100%

Note: All work must be turned in, and of a passing quality (even if it is turned in so late as to have fallen--theoretically--to an F), in order to result in a passing grade in the course.

Grading Options:

1. A - F
2. Credit/No Credit (non-majors only)

Manuscript Style:

Papers are to be typed double-space in a 12-point font (this syllabus is typed in 12-point Times), and printed on a laser-quality printer. They should be handed in on separate sheets of 8 1/2 X 11 bond paper, stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Margins should be one inch; paragraphs are to be indented five spaces. Spaces should not be skipped between paragraphs. Any notes or bibliography you may want to use must follow the *MLA Handbook*, copies of which are available in both the library and the bookstore. (The style is also described on pp. 207-213 in your *Random House Handbook*.)

Always keep hard-copies of all your work. Documents can get lost--both from my desk and from your disk, whether hard, floppy, or c.d. Should this occur, I will expect you to be able to produce a copy *immediately*; otherwise, I will be forced to count the paper as late beginning with the day of your failure to do so. (See above for general policy on late papers.)

Note: Electronically submitted work will not be accepted. It is your responsibility to leave enough time to submit a clean hard copy for evaluation.

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism occurs whenever the true author of a piece of prose, of an idea, or of a line of thought is not the person who claims to be the author. Plagiarism can occur in varying degrees, and will be penalized

--in this class as in all others at the College--in proportion to its severity. Papers in which plagiarism is sufficiently serious will receive an F, and student's name will be turned in to the Dean of Students. A repeated act of plagiarism will result in an automatic F in the entire course, in addition to any action taken by the Office of Student Life (which can include suspension from the College). A number of such serious sanctions have been imposed in recent years.

A particularly common and egregious form of plagiarism is the down-loading of materials from various websites. Please be aware that faculty have the tools to identify any work unfairly borrowed from the web--as well as other sources.

If you are in doubt about the need for documentation of borrowed material, please feel free to consult me or any other professor on campus. Also be sure that you have mastered the material in the 2005-2007 College Catalog, 29-34. Ignorance of this material will not be regarded as an excuse.

ADA Policy:

If you have any disabling condition that may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements, please begin by contacting Disability Services in Center for Academic Success (extension 4840, located in Science 105). I will be happy to provide any accommodations regarded by the Director as appropriate, but am not in a position to offer such accommodations independently. Short of actual accommodations, however, please feel welcome to talk with me about anything I can do to help you succeed in the course.

The Final Exam:

The final examination will be given only at the published time (Thursday, May 18, 10:30 to 12:30), so plan your departure for winter break accordingly. Plane tickets purchased by students not consulting the schedule (or not informing their families of the schedule) will not be accepted as an excuse for missing (or rescheduling) the exam. If you should find yourself scheduled for three final exams on a single day, you are (as the catalogue notes) entitled to request an adjustment from your professors.

The Schedule (subject to change as necessary):

The Early Middle Ages, 476-1150

- Feb. 9 Brief introduction to the period, the course, and the pair.
- 14 General Introductions; Late Roman and Early Christian Lyrics in Latin (17-600 C.E. [A.D.]). Readings, 5-31. How do the early Christian lyrics subvert the imagery and values implicit in the pagan works? (Note especially Ausonius and Paulinus of Nola.)
- 7:30 p.m. Showing of *Breaking the Waves*, a postmodern saint's life by Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier. Platner 202. How does the film draw on the generic qualities of a medieval saint's life? To what extent does von Trier subvert the genre? To what extent does he validate it in a postmodern context?
- 15 2:30 or 7:30 p.m. Alternative showings of *Breaking the Waves*. Platner 202.
- 16 Late Classical/Early Christian Philosophy: Boethius (480?-524), *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Books I and II, and *Readings*, 30-31. What is Philosophy's "diagnosis" of Boethius' problem? What is the relationship between Fortune and Love?
- 21 *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Books III-V. What is happiness and why do most people fail to find it? What should be our view of the wicked? Why? What is the relationship between Providence, Fate, and Free Will?

- 23 Old English elegiac and religious poetry: "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "A Dream of the Rood" (seventh and eighth centuries). *Readings*, 33-37. How do the first two poems combine Old Norse pagan wisdom with Christian allegory? How is Christ represented in "A Dream of the Rood"? Any ideas why?
- 28 Old English Epic: *Beowulf* (early eighth century) and *Readings*, 38. What "pagan" elements do you find in the story? What elements indicate that the author was a Christian? Come prepared to consider Beowulf's first two battles. Also look at the roles of women in the poem. What is their function in the society the poem (quite accurately) represents?
- Mar.** 2 *Beowulf*. Come prepared to consider Beowulf's final battle and the end of the poem in light of Hrothgar's discourse on pride at its middle. What does the poet suggest about heroic action and material culture? How do you account for his ambivalence?
- 28 The Romanesque *Chanson de Geste: The Song of Roland* (late eleventh century) and *Readings*, 39-44. How is the world of *The Song* different from that of *Beowulf*? How is good defined in the two poems? How is evil defined? What is your experience of reading this text post-9/11?
- Oct. 2 Discussion day: Views of fate and Providence in Boethius, *Beowulf*, *Roland*, and the Old English lyric. First response paper due. Midterm # 1 distributed.

The High Middle Ages, 1150-1350

(1) France, Twelfth Century: The Rise of *l'amour courtoise*.

- 7 The Art of Courtly Love: Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love* (France, ca. 1175) and *Readings*, 46-49. What is new here that has been almost totally lacking in the previous works we have read? How do you account for the change? Were there any hints of this development in *Roland*? Where?
- 9 The Art of Courtly Love: the Troubadours and Trouvères. *Readings*, 50-67. Midterm # 1 due. How are the men and women poets similar? How different? What are the circumstances within which women are empowered; those within which they are disempowered? How is romantic love represented in these poems? What is the range of representation?
- 14 Gothic *chanson d' amour*: Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan and Isolde* (1210). Loomis and Loomis, 88-232. Consider the structure of the poem, as opposed to that of *Beowulf* and *Roland*. Why has Gottfried structured it so differently? Notice what

occurs at the exact center of the story (pp. 158-168), and come prepared to discuss this episode.

- 16 *Tristan and Isolt* and *Readings*, 68. What happens to the characters of Tristan, Isolt, and King Mark after their arrival on shore in Cornwall? What, ultimately, seems to be Gottfried's view of the lovers? (Find and record some passages to back up your view.)

(2) Italy, Thirteenth Century: *La dolce stil nuovo*.

- 21 Italian vernacular poetry: St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226); Jacopone da Todi (1236-1306); Jacopo Lentino (fl. 1230-1245); Guido Guinizelli (c. 1230-1296); and Guido Cavalcanti (c. 1255-1300). *Readings*, 70-78. How do Francis and Jacopone draw on the aesthetic legacy of the Troubadours? What do they do with that legacy? What, in turn, do Jacopo and the two Guidos do to develop it? How is their representation of romantic love different than that of the Troubadours, both men and women?
- 23 Guest Lecture by Professor Hunt. (Professor Furman-Adams at Conference on John Milton in Murfreesboro, TN.) How does the change in the representation of love connect with changes in the philosophy and theology of the high middle ages? the changes in style between Romanesque and Gothic?
- 28 Dante Alighieri (1265-1321): *La Vita Nuova* (ca. 1300). *Readings*, 56-61. You are reading only an excerpt of this [self]-portrait of the artist as a young man. But from the little you have read, what seems to be Dante's purpose in the work? How does he both draw on and reject the work of his predecessors?
- 30 Gothic Synthesis: Dante's *Commedia*. Read *The Inferno*, cantos I, II, III, IV, V, and *Readings*, 84. How does Dante represent the Limbo of the virtuous pagans? Why, in view of that, do you think he chooses Virgil as his guide? What light does the tragic (true) story of Paolo and Francesca cast on the tradition of courtly love? How can you relate Dante's purpose here with Andreas'? With Gottfried's? How is it similar? How different? How would Guido Guinizelli respond to Canto V? What about the young Dante?
- Nov. 4 *The Inferno*, Cantos IX-XIII, XV, XXXII-XXXIV. What is the difference between the souls in upper hell and those in Lake Cocytus? What is the principle that ties all the souls together?
- 6 *The Paradiso*, Cantos I, III, VIII-XII. How do cantos I and III change Dante's perspective on the fate of the souls in the *Inferno*? How does Dante represent Beatrice? How does he represent the Doctors of the Church? Why does Thomas Aquinas serve as the master of ceremonies?

- 11 *Paradiso*, Cantos XXIII-XXXIII and the apotheosis of love. What, for Dante, is finally the significance of human love? What, in other words, is the essence of Beatrice's meaning? Second response paper due. Midterm # 2 distributed.

The Late Middle Ages: 1350-1500

(1) Italy, Fourteenth Century: Humanism, Renunciation, and Realism.

- 13 Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). *Readings*, 88 ff. What is different in Petrarca's construction of Laura from Dante's construction of Beatrice? What has happened here to "courtly love," as defined by the Troubadours? What's new in Boccaccio's framed fiction? What is represented and how? Compare and contrast this representation to the literature we have read from both the early and middle ages.

(2) England, Fourteenth Century: Piety, Bawdry, and Romance.

- 18 Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400), *The Canterbury Tales*. Read the General Prologue, 2-41. (Also see the English lyrics in *Readings*, 93.) Pay attention to the Middle English text and see how much you can understand. Midterm #2 due. How is Chaucer's narrative frame both like and unlike Boccaccio's? How is his representation of this twenty-nine pilgrims different from anything we have seen represented before? Be sure to notice both clergy and laity--the ethical as well as the social scale.
- 20 Chaucerian Romance: "The Franklin's Tale," 296-337. How does Chaucer rewrite romance in this story (a "Breton lay")? What's familiar? What's new?
- 25 Chaucerian Fabliau: "The Miller's Tale," 146-81. How does the fabliau comment upon courtly love and the romance genre as we have seen it all semester?

Thanksgiving Vacation, November 27-30.

- Dec. 2 Arthurian Spiritual Romance: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1350). Loomis and Loomis, 328-89. How does the poet of this conservative Northern English romance use the genre? How is his use different from Chaucer's--or Gottfried's? What do you make of his use of numbers and colors? We are reading a prose translation, but the poem was written in alliterative verse. Any ideas why?
- 4 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
- 9 Last day of class. Discussion and review. Final paper due. (Those in the pair should submit two copies for the two professors.)

Dec. 11 (Thursday) 10:30-12:30, Final Exam.