

## EXPLORING MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

### OBJECTIVES

"Romance" is a genre that, in popular understanding, provides an expression of the dominant secular social and cultural institutions of the High Middle Ages: the ethos of a warrior class bound by imperatives of chivalric conduct, the concept of "courtly" love and courtoisie in general. This is our modern horizon of expectations for the "romance" genre. But what was the horizon of expectations for the medieval readership? How it evolved? We will explore these questions, probing into the complex origins of "romance" and examining a range of texts, from the early birds through the classics of the genre to late reflections. On the way, we will see how the idea of "romance" becomes solidified enough to work as a template and a subtext for other narrative types: hagiography, history etc., as well as providing a firm and fruitful ground for parodies and ironic treatments of various kinds. Inevitably, we will also touch on the issues of the social horizons of the genre as well as those of gender.

### PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

- 1) week 1 – Introduction: themes, approaches, procedure
- 2) Thematic characteristics of romance; romance in English (Chrétien and its English redaction)
  - week 2 – *Yvain and Gawain* / Chrétien de Troyes: *Yvain* (selection 1)
  - week 3 – *Yvain and Gawain* / Chrétien de Troyes: *Yvain* (selection 2)  
Pearsall, "The Romancing of the Arthurian Story: Chretien de Troyes"
  - week 4 – *Sir Perceval of Galles*  
Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance"
  - week 5 – concerns and varieties of romance; concluding debate
- 3) pre- to post-romance: evolution of the genre and late reflections
  - week 6 – Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* (selection)  
Gaunt, "Romance and Other Genres"
  - week 7 – John Gower: *Confessio Amantis* – the framework (selection)
  - week 8 – John Gower: *Confessio Amantis*, book VIII (selection)  
Stevens, "The Images of Romance"
  - week 9 – William Shakespeare: *Pericles*  
Riddy, "Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy"
- 4) romance and hagiography
  - week 10 – *The Liffade ant te Passiun of Seinte Juliene* (selection)  
Wogan-Browne, "Virgin Passions: Romance, Raptus, Ritual"
- 5) romance and history
  - week 11 – the story of Havelok in Geoffrey Gaimar: *L'Estoire des Engleis* (in English)  
Cooper, "When Romance Comes True"
- 6) subversions of romance
  - week 12 – Geoffrey Chaucer: "The Merchant's Tale", *The Canterbury Tales*  
Patterson, "Chaucerian Commerce: Bourgeois Ideology and Poetic Exchange in the Merchant's and Shipman's Tales"
- 7) week 13 – Conclusions

## MATERIAL

Middle English texts listed in the programme will be provided in the original and in Modern English translation. A range of secondary texts, covering the larger issues connected with romance, will be made available in the Moodle.

Secondary literature:

- Derek Pearsall, "The Romancing of the Arthurian Story: Chretien de Troyes" in *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, Wiley-Blackwell 2003, 20-39 (selection)
- John Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance", *The Chaucer Review* 15.1 (1980) 44-62, 15.2 (1980) 168-181 (selection)
- Simon Gaunt, "Romance and Other Genres" in Roberta L. Krueger, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, CUP 2000, 45-59
- John Stevens, "The Images of Romance" in *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*, Hutchinson 1973, 142-167 (selection)
- Felicity Riddy, "Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy" in Roberta L. Krueger, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, CUP 2000, 235-252
- Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Virgin Passions: Romance, Raptus, Ritual" in *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations*, OUP 2001, 92-122 (selection)
- Helen Cooper, "When Romance Comes True" in Neil Cartlidge, ed., *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, Boydell & Brewer 2008, 13-28
- Lee Patterson, "Chaucerian Commerce: Bourgeois Ideology and Poetic Exchange in the Merchant's and Shipman's Tales" in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, University of Wisconsin Press 1991, 322-349 (selection)

## PROCEDURE AND ASSESSMENT

Students are expected to give one presentation of 10-15 minutes (ideally complemented with a 1 page handout summarizing the main points) and submit a paper of 1,000 words for a credit. An essay of 5,000 words should be submitted as a graded paper. Active participation is of the essence.

The seminar will combine Moodle forum with class sessions.

The forum is designed to serve as a preparation for the class discussion. Students will take turns introducing the respective texts to their colleagues through a brief personalized summary – describing the interpretative problems they have encountered in reading. There will also be questions for discussion posted in the forum, which the students should consider and respond to briefly (picking one problem and commenting on it in the space of 1-2 sentences). Finally, students are encouraged to add their own questions to the forum.

The class session will expand on this initial embryonic debate, allowing all participants to interrogate, compare and combine their individual insights and conclusions.

Further details will be discussed during the first introductory session.