

English 9153A
Professor Anne Schuurman
Fall 2017
Mondays 12:30-3:30



The Works of the Gawain-Poet

This course will be an in-depth study of the four alliterative Middle English poems contained in British Library manuscript Cotton Nero A.x. Most scholars believe that the same author wrote *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, but we know very little about who this author might have been. Linguistic analysis of the poems suggests that both the author and the scribe who copied the manuscript were from the West Midlands of England, and lived and worked during the second half of the fourteenth century. The poems themselves are brilliant works of art, displaying the poet's knowledge of courtly culture, aristocratic pastimes, and literary and folklore traditions in French, Celtic, and Anglo-Saxon; the author was also trained in the Latin theological, penitential, and homiletic traditions of the Church.

Knowledge of Middle English is not a prerequisite of the course. The language is more difficult than Chaucer's English, but it is accessible to a diligent and careful reader. Through our study of these poems, we will explore matters of authorship, scribal culture, and textuality. We will also immerse ourselves in the late medieval genres represented in the poems—romance, homily or Biblical paraphrase, and dream vision allegory—and the historical and political phenomena that shaped these genres, such as the rise of lay piety and vernacular theologies and the development of an English national identity.



Texts:

Required:

The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript. Ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron. 5th ed. Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies. Liverpool, UK: U of Exeter P, 2008.

Brewer, Derek, ed. *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*. Cambridge, UK and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997.

Recommended:

Fulk, R.D. *An Introduction to Middle English*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2012.

The Bible. <https://www.biblegateway.com>.

Middle English Dictionary. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

Work:

All written work must be submitted both in hard copy in class **and** in electronic format (Word or RTF). I may use plagiarism-checking software.

- **Weekly response papers** (5 over the term x 4% = 20% of course grade)

You must submit **five** short response papers (750 words max) in which you discuss and analyze a key idea or passage in the reading assigned for the week; **do not summarize or generalize**. Your papers must be submitted electronically (in Word or RTF by email attachment) to me by Tuesday at 12:00 pm of each week. Do not submit a response paper in the week that you are giving your presentation.

- **Oral presentation** (20%)

You are required to give a 20-minute presentation on one of the primary texts, and to lead a discussion following from your presentation. You must analyze the text under consideration, not summarize it, and present a thesis about its meaning and significance. You should make use of relevant material from the *Companion to the Gawain-poet* as well as other secondary sources you find in your own research. The aim of your lecture is to open and lead class discussion. You will be evaluated on the content of your ideas, the clarity of your presentation, and your efficacy in leading discussion. You must also submit a 6-7 page write-up of your presentation on the day you give your lecture. To facilitate discussion, please share this write-up with your designated respondent the day before you present.

- **Oral participation and designated response to one presentation** (15%)

You will be expected to participate actively in every seminar by coming to class having read the assigned texts, by asking thoughtful questions and contributing to the class discussion. You will also be assigned the role of designated respondent for another student's oral presentation. As respondent, you may ask for clarification, formulate questions for discussion, or present counterpoints to the presenter's thesis.

➤ **Research Essay (45%)**

Your research essay must be between 18 and 20 pages in length. You may choose any topic or approach relevant to the course material. **Please make an appointment to discuss your ideas with me before getting started.** Use MLA or Chicago style for formatting and documentation.

Course Policies

No laptops or electronic devices in class. You must purchase the specified editions of the two required textbooks and bring them to every class. Be sure to bring print copies of articles and supplementary readings.

Absences are inexcusable except in extenuating circumstances.

On plagiarism:

The Senate of the University of Western Ontario writes:
"Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. **Plagiarism is a major academic offense.**"

See the Scholastic Offence Policy in Western Academic Calendar:

http://uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

On mental health:

Students who are in emotional or mental distress should refer to MentalHeath@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Class Schedule

September 11: Introductions

September 18: *Patience*; "The Manuscript" (*Companion* 197-219)

September 25: *Patience*; "Scriptural and Devotional Sources" (*Companion* 257-276)

October 2: *Cleanness*; "Allegory and Symbolism" (*Companion* 315-328)

October 9: Thanksgiving (no class)

October 16: class cancelled; read “The Historical Background” and “Feasts” (*Companion* 71-90 and 131-142)

October 23: *Cleanness*; “Narrative Form and Insight” (*Companion* 329-349)

October 30: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; “Christianity for Courtly Subjects: Reflections on the Gawain-poet” (*Companion* 91-104)

November 6: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; “Courtesy and Chivalry: The Order of Shame and the Invention of Embarrassment” (*Companion* 351-364); “Landscapes and Geography” (*Companion* 105-118)

November 13: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Harwood, “Gawain and the Gift”; Dinshaw, “A Kiss is just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”;

November 20: *Pearl*; “Jewels in *Pearl*” (*Companion* 143-156)

November 27: *Pearl*; “The Gawain-poet as Vernacular Theologian” (*Companion* 293-314).

December 4: *Pearl*; Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment in Middle English Literature”; Coley, “Pearl and the Narrative of Pestilence”