WESTERN UNIVERSITY  
Department of Languages and Cultures  

Graduate Course in Comparative Literature  
**CL 9690B Writing the Medieval Body**

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Tue. 2:30-5:30pm on Zoom

**WRITING THE MEDIEVAL BODY**  
The course will focus on sexuality and illness in the medical, religious, and literary discourses from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Of particular interest will be the development of medieval technical literature (*Fachliteratur*) as it moved from the monastery to the university and with its preference for prose distanced itself from the "less truthful" texts (romances, poetry, fabliaux, etc.) which were written in verse. Works studied in the course will be examples in which two or more of the discourses converge or collide, starting with Hildegard von Bingen's medical text *Cause et Cure* from the twelfth century. Literary works from the classical Middle High German period will be studied in combination with their foreign, in particular French, forerunners or parodies (*Cligès*). They will include Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, in which women healers, a love potion, and trial by ordeal figure prominently, Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* whose protagonist suffers from madness, *Der Arme Heinrich* with a protagonist afflicted by leprosy, and *Gregorius* which features double incest. In the medical works of medieval and Renaissance school medicine the emphasis will be on sexuality and procreation, two areas from which the religious discourse is never completely absent as Maino de Maineri's *Regimen sanitatis*, and Jakob Rueff's gynecological work *Hebammenbuch* illustrate. The course will conclude with a look at the representations of the body in the fabliaux and Shrovetide plays of Hans Sachs.

**Required Texts:**


Optional:
**Course Requirements:**

Critical Report (1500 words)* 25%
Seminar (up to 1 hour) 25%
Term Paper (ca. 20 pages) 40%
Class Contribution 10%
*Choose one of the books from the list whose author is underlined, report to be presented in class first, and handed in later.

**Course Outline Winter 2021 (subject to minor modifications):**

Jan. 12  Introduction, (course requirements, outline), *The Name of the Rose*

Jan. 19  MEDICINE AND THE BODY: Transmission of knowledge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Humoral Theory, Non-Naturals (overview)


Feb. 2  CHRISTIANITY AND THE BODY: sexuality and procreation (Hildegard of Bingen’s *Cause et Cure*), sexual renunciation (*Brown*), pleasure (*Foucault*) [critical reports]

Feb. 9  CHRISTIANITY AND THE BODY: food and fasting (*Bell*) (*Bynum: Holy Feast and Holy Fast*) [critical reports]

Feb. 16-19  READING WEEK

Feb. 23  CHRISTIANITY AND THE BODY: construction of gender (*Bynum: Jesus as Mother*) (*Newman*) [critical reports]
LITERATURE AND THE BODY: Hartmann von Aue (introduction)

March 2  LITERATURE AND THE BODY: *Der Arme Heinrich*

March 9  LITERATURE AND THE BODY: *Der Arme Heinrich* [presentation], *Gregorius*

March 16  LITERATURE AND THE BODY: *Gregorius* [presentation], Chretien de Troyes, *Yvain*, Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*

March 23  LITERATURE AND THE BODY: *Yvain/Iwein* [presentation], introduction to *Tristan* (the myth of Tristan and Isolt, literary sources)

March 30  LITERATURE AND THE BODY: *Tristan* (sexuality, suffering, healing), Chretien de Troyes, *Cliges* [presentation/s]

April 6  THE BODY IN PRINT (or: EMBARRASSMENT AND SHAME): late-medieval and early-modern representations of the body in the medical literature, the fabliaux and Shrovetide plays of Hans Sachs, course review
**Bibliography:**


**Essay Topics:**
You can choose your own topic. If you are not sure what areas to explore, here are some suggestions:

- Virginity and/or widowhood in one or more works of Hartmann, or Tristan Adventures and the Body (Tristan and/or Hartmann)
- Nature vs. Culture, or The Civilising of the Body (in Tristan, Gregorius, or Iwein)
- The Function of Physical Suffering in Tristan
- Heroes in Pain
- Healing in Gottfried and Hartmann
- Love and the Body
- Beauty and Ugliness in Gottfried and/or Hartmann
- Conception and Birth in Gottfried and/or Hartmann