

English 141: Medieval Literature  
**Spring 2015**  
**Section 01: MW 12:00-1:15, SH 413**

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**Course Description:** This course will study some of the greatest dramatic and poetic texts of medieval Western Europe, texts whose combined wit, urbanity, sophistication, skepticism, and ambiguity articulate the concerns, conditions, and contradictions of a time aptly characterized by G. L. Kittredge as “scrambling and unquiet [...], when nobody was at rest but the dead.” During the course of the semester, students will engage the texts from a variety of contexts and viewpoints: textual, literary, political, social, and cultural; become familiar with a range of critical approaches to the texts; and reflect on the texts’ influences within the western literary tradition.

**Department of English and Comparative Literature Student Learning Objectives (SLOs):** Students will demonstrate the ability to

1. read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric;
2. show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature;
3. write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;
4. develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;
5. articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

**Course Requirements:** Daily reading responses (150 words minimum, 200 maximum), active class participation, a midterm exam, and a final exam.

**Required Texts:** *Chaucer: Sources & Backgrounds*, Miller (ed.)  
*The Mabinogion*, Ford (trans.)  
*Chretien DeTroyes Arthurian Romances*, Kibler (trans.)  
*Everyman & Medieval Miracle Plays*, Cawley (ed.)  
*Lais of Marie de France*, Burgess (trans.)  
*Njal's Saga*, Cook (trans.)  
*Sir Gawain & The Green Knight*, Winny (ed.)  
*Song of Roland*, Burgess (trans.)  
*Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival*, Hatto (trans.)  
*Wolfram von Eschenbach's Willehalm*, Gibbs (trans.)  
*Tristan*, Hatto (trans.)  
Chaucer: *Troilus & Criseyde* (available online at <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/English/TroilusandCressidaBk1.htm>)

**Class Policies:**

**Reading:** Assignments (including all introductory information) are to be read before the class session for which they are assigned. Close, careful reading takes time; plan accordingly. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

**Writing:** All written work is due at the beginning of class. Reader responses (150 words minimum) need not be typed, but they must be legible (if I can't read it, you didn't write it), and they must demonstrate a critical engagement with the language and/or content of the assigned texts—**no summaries**. No late work will be accepted unless you (1) make arrangements with me in advance, or (2) provide written verification that circumstances **completely beyond your control** prevented your getting the work in on time. **Please Note:** “having to work” is not completely beyond your control; it is a choice and is therefore not an acceptable reason for not getting assignments turned in on time. **Please Note** also that you must actually attend the class for which the assigned work is turned in; you may not simply drop it off and leave. *All* written work is to follow MLA formatting and documentation guidelines. Pages should be stapled in the upper-left corner (no paper clips, please!). Always title your work appropriately (Reader Response # is not a title.) Always keep a copy of everything you turn in. I do not accept work via email.

**Attendance and Participation:** On-time class attendance and active participation in class discussion are extremely important. If you miss class, you will always miss something important. The degree to which you do or do not come to class on time and prepared to contribute to the classroom exchange of ideas and information will be a 25% factor in determining your final grade in this course. **Please Note:** (1) You cannot contribute if you are not here; (2) your presence, in and of itself, does not constitute participation; (3) arriving late is both disruptive and disrespectful.

**Grading:** Your written work will be evaluated according to the following criteria.

### Qualities of “A” Writing

**Content:** complies with all parts of the assignment; displays original, provocative thought in one or more of the following ways:

- finds a general significance in the specific instance,
- identifies and resolves a contradiction,
- disproves or qualifies a common misconception,
- achieves a fresh insight into a frequently discussed topic,
- places the known in a novel context,
- supports an arguable assertion;

develops its thought by explanation, example, illustration, or analysis, as appropriate;

displays flawless logic; has the voice of a real person speaking to a real audience; is interesting and detailed.

**Organization:** has a recognizable thesis, stated or implied, that conforms to our definition of a thesis; has an effective and appropriate overall pattern of organization; has unified, coherent paragraphs organized around recognizable topic sentences that are verbally or logically related to the thesis; has effective and appropriate transitions between paragraphs; has an effective introduction and conclusion.

**Style:** frequently chooses grammatical options that mirror the content portrayed; shows a variety of sentence lengths and openers; frequently and appropriately uses emphatic sentence patterns such as long cumulative and periodic sentences, various strong parallel structures, and compound sentences using semicolons and conjunctive adverbs to control rhythm, pace, and emphasis.

**Conventions:** has NO diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors; demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of English grammar, syntax, punctuation, and usage.

### Qualities of “B” Writing

**Content:** complies with all parts of the assignment; displays original, provocative thought in one or more of the ways listed above; attempts to develop its thoughts in the ways listed above; contains no overt logical fallacies; has the voice of a real person; is detailed.

**Organization:** has a recognizable thesis, stated or implied, that conforms to our definition of a thesis; has an overall pattern of organization; has unified, coherent paragraphs organized around recognizable topic sentences related to the thesis; has appropriate transitions between paragraphs; has an introduction and conclusion.

**Style:** shows a variety of sentence lengths and openers; frequently and appropriately uses emphatic sentence patterns such as long cumulative and periodic sentences, various strong parallel structures, and compound sentences using semicolons and conjunctive adverbs.

**Conventions:** has no more than ONE diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling error; the error does not prevent comprehension; does not repeat an error marked on a previous paper; demonstrates a sound knowledge of English grammar, syntax, punctuation, and usage.

### Qualities of “C” Writing

**Content:** complies with the main parts of the assignment; finds significance beyond the subjective response;

goes beyond mere description of the topic and response (analysis, generalization, etc.); is detailed.

**Organization:** has a recognizable thesis, stated or implied, that conforms to our definition of a thesis; has coherent paragraphs organized around topic sentences, most of which relate to the thesis; has a recognizable beginning, middle, and end.

**Style:** shows a variety of sentence lengths and openers; occasionally uses emphatic sentence patterns such as cumulative and periodic sentences, parallel structures, and compound sentences using semicolons and conjunctive adverbs.

**Conventions:** has no more than TWO diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors; errors do not prevent comprehension; does not repeat an error marked on a previous paper; demonstrates the ability to write correct simple, compound, and complex sentences.

### Qualities of “D” Writing

**Content:** complies with the main parts of the assignment; makes a definite statement about the topic; attempts to support that statement.

**Organization:** has a recognizable thesis; attempts to support that thesis; has paragraphs organized around topic sentences; has enough coherence to be recognized as a unit.

**Style:** varies sentence types frequently enough to avoid monotony; attempts the occasional stylistic emphasis of an important point.

**Conventions:** has no more than THREE diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors; errors do not prevent comprehension; does not repeat errors marked on a previous paper; demonstrates a basic understanding of the conventions of written English.

**Written Work Note 1:** With regard to Reading Responses, I will drop your lowest grade, which means that you can miss (or completely mess up on) one without penalty. By the same token, if you complete all of them, the “extra” one will count as a bonus added to this portion of your grade.

**Written Work Note 2:** Any assigned writing that earns less than a “D” in any of the four grading categories will be considered unacceptable and will receive a failing grade.

Your class participation will be assessed as follows:

- A = Regular, pertinent questions and comments; fully engaged
- B = Occasional, pertinent questions and responses; good listening
- C = Infrequent, tangential questions or comments; attentiveness questionable
- D = Rare interaction; disengaged from discussion; not prepared for class
- F = Regularly absent, physically or mentally

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Reader Responses	25%	(SLO 1-3, 5)
Midterm Exam	25%	(SLO 1-3, 5)
Classwork/Participation	25%	(SLO 1-3, 5)
Final Exam	25%	(SLO 1-3, 5)

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU [Catalog](#) (“The Grading System”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure. Courses graded according to the A,B,C,NoCredit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC, for NoCredit, shall replace D or F. In A,B,C,NoCredit courses NC shall also substitute for W (for Withdrawl) because neither NC nor W affects students’ grade point averages. In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

**SJSU Academic Integrity Policy:** Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.htm>. The SJSU rules against plagiarism are set forth in the SJSU Catalog, which defines plagiarism as the act of representing the work of another as one’s own (without giving appropriate credit) regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements. Plagiarism at SJSU includes, but is not limited to, the act of incorporating the ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, or parts thereof, or the specific substance of another’s work, without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one’s own work. It is the role and obligation of each student to know the rules that preserve academic integrity and abide by them at all times. This includes learning and following the particular rules associated with specific classes, exams, and/or course assignments. Ignorance of these rules is not a defense to the charge of violating the Academic Integrity Policy. All violations of the university’s Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Dean of Student Services.

**Campus Policy on Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with Accessible Education Center (AEC) to establish a record of their disability.

### Course Schedule

Assigned Readings are to be completed before the class period designated; schedule is subject to change by instructor with 7-day notice given in class or via class email.

#### Week 1

M 1/26 Course Introduction and Overview  
 W 1/28 Miller: Medieval Literary Theory: Macrobius, Hugh of St. Victor, Augustine, Dante, John of Garland, Vinsauf. **Reader Response #1 due**

#### Week 2

M 2/2 *Mabinogion*: “Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed,” “Culhwch & Olwen” **RR #2 due**  
 W 2/5 *Mabinogion*: “Tale of Gwion Bach & Tale of Taliesin,” “Cad Goddeu,” **RR #3 due**

#### Week 3

M 2/9 Miller: Three Estates: Temporal Rulers and Chivalry, pp. 165-186; Marie deFrance: “Equitan,” “Bisclavret,” “Lanval” **RR #4 due**  
 W 2/11 *Tristan*, Prologue & Books 1-8, **RR #5 due**

#### Week 4

M 2/16 *Tristan*, Books 9-17, **RR #6 due**  
 W 2/18 *Tristan*, Books 18-29, **RR #7 due**

#### Week 5

M 2/23 *Tristan* (Thomas’), Books 30-40, **RR #8 due**  
 W 2/25 Chretien: *Perceval*, pp. 381-437 (to “And the maiden thanked him.”) **RR #9 due**

#### Week 6

M 3/2 *Perceval*, pp. 437-499, **RR #10 due**  
 W 3/4 Wolfram: *Parzival*, pp. 7-99, **RR# 11 due**

#### Week 7

M 3/9 *Parzival*, pp. 100-204, **RR #12 due**  
 W 3/11 *Parzival*, pp. 205-293, **RR #13due**

#### Week 8

M 3/16 *Parzival*, pp. 294-411: Review for Exam  
 W 3/18 **Midterm Exam: bring large exam books**

Week 9

M 3/23 & W 3/25 **Spring Break**

Week 10

M 3/30 *Song of Roland*, **RR #14 due**

W 4/1 *Willehelm*, Books I-III, **RR #15 due**

Week 11

M 4/6 *Willehelm*, Books IV-VI, **RR #16 due**

W 4/8 *Willehelm*, Books VII-IX, **RR #17 due**

Week 12

M 4/13 *Njal's Saga*: chapters 1-53, **RR #18 due**

W 4/15 *Njal's Saga*: chapters 54-106, **RR #19 due**

Week 13

M 4/20 *Njal's Saga*: chapters 107-159, **RR #20 due**

W 4/22 *Sir Gawain & The Green Knight*, Fitts 1 & 2, **RR #21 due**

Week 14

M 4/27 *SGGK*, Fitts 3 & 4, **RR #22 due**

W 4/29 Cawley: *The Annunciation, Noah's Flood, The Second Shepherd's Pageant, Everyman*, **RR #23 due**

Week 15

M 5/4 Miller: *Courtly Love*: Ovid, pp. 275-288; Capellanus, pp. 291-299 & 357-359; Rolle, pp. 349-350; Harley MSS 2253, pp. 352-355, **RR #24 due**

W 5/6 Chaucer: *Troilus & Criseyde*: Books 1-3, **RR #25 due**

Week 16

M 5/11 *Troilus & Criseyde*: Books 4-5, **RR #26 due**

W 5/13 **Catch up; Review for final exam**

**Final Exam: Thursday, 5/21, 0945-1200: Bring large exam books**