

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2020-2021

Literature in English: Older Period II (A005258)

Due to Covid 19, the education and evaluation methods may vary from the information displayed in the schedules and course details. Any changes will be communicated on Ufora.

Course size (nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)
Credits 5.0 Study time 150 h Contact hrs 30.0 h

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2020-2021

A (semester 1) English Gent lecture 30.0 h

Lecturers in academic year 2020-2021

Latré, Guido LW07 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2020-2021

	crdts	offering
Master of Science in Teaching in Languages (main subject Linguistics and Literature)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject Dutch - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - German)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - Greek)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - Italian)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - Latin)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - Scandinavian Studies)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject English - Spanish)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature (main subject French - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Historical Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

English literature; history; Middle Ages; fourteenth century; literary genres

Position of the course

This course explores the literary and historical antecedents of the Renaissance period, which was dealt with in the bachelor course English Literature III: Older Period (A005342).

Contents

Late medieval themes and genres in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Canterbury Tales*

Johan Huizinga's *Herfsttij der middeleeuwen* (*The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 1919), a seminal study of the 14th and 15th centuries, is now just over a century old. Its insights have been refined by later cultural historians and literary scholars, but its main argument remains intact: the late Middle Ages were a period of harvesting the fruits of a very rich period in European cultural history, characterized by increasing refinement, but also by a deep-rooted fear that old aristocratic and spiritual values were beginning to decline.

What Huizinga calls '*levens felheid*' ('the fiery intensity of life'), a result of the tension

between joy of harvesting and anxious preparation for a long winter, is eminently expressed not only in the medieval literary works and chronicles from France and the Low Countries that Huizinga consulted. A strong expression of the autumn of the Middle Ages can also be found across the Channel, in narrative masterpieces written by the Gawain-poet and Geoffrey Chaucer.

The course aims to explore the way in which these two late 14th century poets develop late medieval themes in some of the most famous of their stories, as well as the way in which they adopt and challenge literary genre conventions of their time.

First, the dominant themes and motifs of medieval *romance* will be studied extensively on the basis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the author claims to have found his Arthurian narrative in 'the best boke of romaunce.' Then follows a discussion of some of Chaucer's most famous *Canterbury Tales*. The first of these is the Knight's Tale. Students will be invited not only to read Chaucer's version of this narrative (either in Middle English or in translation), but also to watch a 2003 BBC adaptation.

The Knight's Tale in particular, but also more generally the genre conventions of chivalric romance, as well as those of late medieval Mystery Plays, are subtly parodied in what on the surface appears to be no more than an exceedingly 'bawdy' story: the Miller's Tale. Deeper down, this *fabliau* is a sophisticated ode to the art of storytelling itself.

The genre of the *beast fable* reaches its perfection, but is also undermined, in a masterpiece of comedy and intertextuality: The Nun's Priest's Tale. It is in many ways a miniature version of *The Canterbury Tales*, and is seen by many as Chaucer's absolute best among the tales.

The course ends on a musical note, with students and their lecturer listening to and joining in the chorus of a beautiful *Christmas carol*: 'As I lay on Yoolis night,' a moving literary elaboration on the story of Jesus' birth and infancy as told in the Gospel of Saint Luke. This lyrical coda concludes the course's composite picture of late medieval narratives, their themes and their genres.

Initial competences

In order to register for this course, it is not necessary to have attended the above-mentioned bachelor course English Literature II: Historical Survey: Older period (A005342). A general knowledge of medieval history and literature, acquired in the bachelor programme of Linguistics and Literary Studies at UGent or elsewhere, or in other Arts faculty programmes, is largely sufficient.

Final competences

- 1 To acquire a nuanced understanding of relevant phenomena, and of the cultural, political and historical context of relevant texts
- 2 To gain a critical vocabulary and method to reflect on relevant phenomena and historical developments from the late medieval period
- 3 To be able to apply aforementioned specialist analytical and critical skills to persuasively communicate ideas about literature of the older period, including texts not discussed explicitly in the course of the lectures
- 4 To be able to formulate an original research question on one or more texts or extracts, and to develop an answer to that question in a correctly structured short academic essay in idiomatic English.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Lecture, self-reliant study activities

Extra information on the teaching methods

Ample use is made of audiovisual materials (esp. Powerpoint). Students prepare classes by reading primary and some secondary sources.

Learning materials and price

- 1) Notes taken in the course of the lectures, and materials (including powerpoint-presentations) freely accessible on Ufora.
- 2) Required reading
 - a) a selection of texts from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (package 1, volume A: The Middle Ages), in either the 9th or the 10th edition. A lot of students will have acquired this volume already in the third year of their bachelor programme. It is possible to buy this first volume of the first package separately, but Standaard Boekhandel, Kouter 31, Ghent has a limited stock of the entire package 1 of the 9th edition at a substantially reduced rate (3 volumes, 28 euros - a reduction of 40% compared with the original price).

b) for extracts and stories from *The Canterbury Tales*, David Wright's verse translation (Oxford World's Classics, paperback, student rate 9.75 euros at Standaard Boekhandel) remains highly recommended. Students also have free access to translations of *The Canterbury Tales* on the internet, like the interlinear one put online by Harvard University:

<https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/literary-works>

This reliable translation is meant to understand the original text better, and reads less smoothly than Wright's translation, which was already used by students in their Renaissance text course of 2019-20.

c) some texts freely available on Ufora, including an article by Guido Latré on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

3) Required viewing

Students will be asked to watch *The Knight's Tale* in a BBC version of 2003. They will have a chance to watch it in the classroom, but if they want to watch it (again) at home, they can try and get it for free on the internet, or buy this particular tale, or the entire box set of six BBC adaptations of the *Canterbury Tales* (prices vary and change all the time).

References

Course content-related study coaching

Students will be given advice about which texts to prepare for the next lesson, and about other aspects of the course, via the Ufora platform. Appointments with the lecturer can be made before or after the lessons.

Evaluation methods

end-of-term evaluation and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic evaluation during the first examination period

Oral examination

Examination methods in case of periodic evaluation during the second examination period

Oral examination

Examination methods in case of permanent evaluation

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent evaluation

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

(1) assignment: a short essay (500 words) about a passage from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *The Knight's Tale*, due before 29 November 2020

(2) Exam period: oral exam online

- a defence of the essay and on class content
- two questions on class content and required reading, listening and viewing

Calculation of the examination mark

- written text of the essay: 20%
- oral defence of the essay: 5%
- oral exam on class content, required reading and audiovisual materials: 75%

Facilities for Working Students

Possible rescheduling of the oral exam and exam feedback