

Sophister Module Description 2023-24

Full Name: Women in Medieval Literature: Authors, Audiences and Patrons

Short Name: Women in Medieval Literature

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Alice Jorgensen jorgena@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10 ECTS

Semester Taught: MT

Year: SS

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module students should be able to

- reflect on the construction of gender, especially female gender, in selected medieval texts
- deploy knowledge of the work of a range of female medieval authors
- discuss how texts might be shaped by women's patronage or designed for a female audience
- evaluate arguments for female authorship of anonymous texts
- analyse intersections of gender and genre
- compare and contrast the concerns of selected medieval texts with modern-day debates

Learning Aims:

- survey a range of medieval texts written by and for women
- read widely in medieval literature, beyond the usual canon and without restriction to English-language texts, using translations
- stress the complexity of medieval literary culture
- provide historical context and resources for engaging in contemporary debates

Content:

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer famously makes his Wife of Bath protest at the unfair ways women are represented by men. In this module we will look at how women were actively involved in literary production in the medieval period, whether as patrons and audiences whose stated or perceived needs shaped particular compositions, or as themselves the authors of texts. The module will begin with the female-voiced poems in the tenth-century Exeter Book and extend through the fifteenth century, covering texts in Latin, French and English. All apart from a couple of late ME texts will be read in translation.

Texts will include the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, written to protect the political position of Queen Emma; works that reflect the importance of women to the emerging romance genre, both as patrons (Chrétien's *Lancelot*, written for Marie de Champagne) and as authors (the *lais* of Marie de France); works that show the emergence of distinctive female modes of spirituality, and that attest to women's use of religion for self-formation (including *Ancrene*

Wisse and the autobiography of Margery Kempe); and works that show women directly tackling misogynist traditions (Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*). We will also read some texts whose authorship is not known but which were arguably written by women.

In times of renewed public controversy over gender, feminism, and representation, the medieval period provides no simple foil to contemporary debates. Medieval women writers had their own concerns that modern women may not always share. Studying medieval women and their literary activity is a way to open up possibilities and perspectives, as well as to recover a past often ignored.

Assessment Details:

20% short essay of 1500 words

80% final essay of 4500 words

Preliminary Reading List:

Barratt, Alexandra (ed.) *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman, 1992)

Campbell, Alistair (ed. and trans.), *The Encomium Emmae Reginae*, with a supplementary introduction by Simon Keynes, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) [this text will be provided]

Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin, 1991)

Marie de France, *Lais*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986)

Hugh White, *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993)

B. A. Windeatt (trans.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 1985 repr. 1994)

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998)

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999)

Pearsall, Derek (ed.) *The Floure and the Leafe; and, The Assembly of Ladies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) [full text available online from TEAMS]

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- **Curricular information is subject to change.**
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**