Course: The Age of the Pearl-Poet – ENGL-375  
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Required Text:


Selected Web page resources:

- http://english.class.edgewood.edu/eng259/the_gawain_poet.htm
- http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/twomey/sggk/manuscript.html
- http://www.ucalgary.ca/~scriptor/cotton/blog.html
- http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/twomey/sggk/twomey.html

Course Objectives:

This course explores in depth the four poems in British Museum MS. Cotton Nero A.x.3: *Pearl, Cleanness* (or *Purity*), *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In connection with this study, you will be exposed to issues of authorship, provenance, manuscript production, textual difficulties, and modern approaches to medieval works. The four works in this manuscript represent three different genres in medieval literature: romance, dream vision, and expanded biblical narrative. They also represent the best of the alliterative revival in late medieval England, and they are contained in a unique manuscript. Thus, while focusing on a relatively limited body of material, you will explore a wide range of issues surrounding late fourteenth-century English literary texts.

The course is designed to meet the following goals and objectives of the CSUB English Department:

Goal I. To know (a) major writers, (b) genres in English, literatures, (c) historical contexts, and (d) cultural contexts.

Objectives: The student should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the following:

a. Style and Theme. Compare the stylistic and thematic characteristics of two or more authors;

b. Genre. Write an analysis of the characteristics of a particular genre;

c. Historical Context. Demonstrate knowledge of the historical context or literary period of the work or author being examined.
d. Cultural Context. Point out the gendered, ethnic, and racial concerns in that work.

Criterion: Ability to compare the stylistic and thematic elements of two or more authors; explain the techniques and literary contexts of at least one genre; discuss the historical context or literary period of at least one author; explain the gendered, ethnic, and racial concerns in at least one work.

Goal II. To analyze, interpret, and compare literary works in a written argument. Student’s written literary analyses should demonstrate a high level of understanding both of textual form and theme and should contain a cogent thesis as the core of a well-organized argument.

Objective: The student should be able to investigate the relationship between a text’s formal elements and its theme.

Criterion: Evidence such as essay examinations, reports, and papers will demonstrate that students can show the relationship between a text’s formal elements and its theme in (for example) a work of fiction and a poem.

Procedures and Grading:

In general, Tuesdays will begin with each student reading aloud in Middle English and verbally translating into Modern English a brief section from the assigned reading for the week. You will e-mail to me the lines you have translated before each session, and I will put together a working translation that we will read, discuss, and work with in class. You will have the opportunity to update and resubmit your translations as the term proceeds. This exercise will help you prepare the reading effectively, and it will ease you into the context of the poem and its language. Remaining class time on Tuesday and Thursday will be used for background lectures, explanations of difficult passages, specific exercises or lectures on broader application, discussion, and your individual presentations. The final course grade will be determined as follows:

Weekly Translation and Participation 20%
Presentation 20%
Midterm Exam 20%
Final Exam 20%
Final Paper 20%
Waiting List Policy:

On a waiting list, you are eligible for a place in the class

1. If you come to every class and
2. If you turn in the work while you are there

Being on a waiting list does not mean you are guaranteed a place in the class. It simply means you are welcome to wait for an opening in the class if you desire. If no one drops out of the section you’re attending, no students can add.

As a result, you should be aware of the last day to add and have a back-up class chosen if you need another class. This plan is especially important for financial aid recipients, who must carry a full load to receive their financial aid. **Being on a waiting list does not count as a class toward your full load.**

Instructor-Initiated Drop Policy:

This course is subject to the policy on instructor initiated drops. If the class is full and has a waiting list, I have the right to have you administratively dropped from the class by the end of the second week of the term if you have missed **three** consecutive class session during the first week of the term and have not contacted me with alternate plans. However, you should not assume that you will be automatically dropped from the course due to non-attendance.

Grading Criteria as Defined by the English Department, CSUB

An “A” paper—unusually competent

1. Avoids the obvious and thus gains insights on an analytical level that are illuminating and stimulating to an educated reader.
2. Develops ideas effectively and purposefully with appropriate evidence, examples, and illustrations.
3. Progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages with paragraphs that are coherent and unified.
4. Uses a variety of punctuation conventionally and purposefully.
5. Has sentences which are skillfully constructed, concise, forceful, effective, and varied.
6. Demonstrates a concern with the right words and a willingness to be inventive with words and structures in order to produce a clearly identifiable style, even though at times the efforts may be too deliberate or fall short of the writer’s intentions.

A “B” paper—demonstrably competent

1. Usually avoids the obvious and offers interesting interpretations, but lacks the imaginative insights of the A paper.
2. Develops an idea with a clear and effective sense of order.
3. Progresses by ordered stages with paragraphs that are coherent and unified.
4. Uses mechanics and punctuation to help communicate the meaning and effect of the prose.
5. Has sentences which are correctly constructed with efficient use of coordination and subordination; demonstrates an understanding of variety.
6. Draws upon words adequate to express the writer’s own thoughts and feelings and demonstrates an understanding of alternate ways of expression as a means of making stylistic choices possible.

A “C” paper—competent
1. Functions on the literal level, often depending on the self-evident.
2. Develops ideas minimally, often leaving the reader with unanswered questions.
3. Has a discernible, if mechanical organization.
4. Conforms to conventional grammar, mechanics, and punctuation.
5. Has sentences which are correctly constructed, though perhaps tending toward repetitious patterns with minimal or mechanical use of coordination and subordination.
6. Works with a limited range of words and thus becomes dependent on the cliches and colloquialisms most available; is also generally unaware of choices that affect style and thus is unable to control the effects a writer may seek.

A “D” paper—lacking competence
1. Exploits the obvious either because of a lack of understanding, an inability to read, a failure to grapple with a topic, or, in many cases, a lack of interest.
2. Wanders aimlessly because of a lack of overall conception or, in some instances, has a semblance of form without the development that makes the parts a whole.
3. Has a plan or method that is characterized by irrelevancy, redundancy, or inconsistency.
4. Frequently lacks careful mechanical and grammatical distinctions although some papers contain correct (if simple) sentences.
5. Has sentences which are not correctly constructed or which are monotonous or repetitious.
6. Is characterized by convoluted sentences that are close to the rapid associations of thought or by “safe” words (ones the writer ordinarily speaks or can spell) and by excessively simple sentence structures.

An “F” paper—incompetent
1. Doesn’t fulfill the assignment; is unclear overall.
2. Lacks specific development; tends to wander aimlessly
3. Lacks logical and coherent progression.
4. Consistently lacks conventional grammar and mechanics so that communication is unclear.
Schedule

Fall 2004

January
6  Introduction, Philology, Paleography, History, and Metre of Cotton
   Nero A X
8   Pearl 1-120
13  Pearl 121-360
15  Finch’s “Introduction” in textbook and Derick Brewer’s
   “Introduction” to A Companion to the Gawain Poet (on reserve)
20  Pearl 361-780
22  Pearl 781-1212
27  Cleanness 1-605
29  Cleanness 606-1168

February
3    Cleanness 1169-1812
5     Midterm
10   Patience 1-531
12   Spearing article “Poetic Identity” (on reserve) Blanch and
     Wasserman article (on reserve) etc...
17   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1-490
19   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 491-1125
24   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1126-1997
26   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1998-2530 (Final day to make
     passage selection)

March 2
5    Socis
9    Final Paper due
11   Jonassen article (on reserve)
16   Review
18   Final Exam