



# Medieval French Literature: Mysteries, Marvels, & Monsters

## Course Details

**Course Designator & Number: MONT 3021W**

**Number of Credits: 3**

**Language of Instruction: French**

**Contact Hours: 5**

**Instructor: Paul Rodgers, PhD**

## Course Description

The focus of this course is an exploration of the creative work of a period of history that remains to this day shrouded in mystery. There are strong parallels between the Medieval era and the present day: It is a time when many live in fear. Power, often wielded tyrannically, lies in the hands of a fortunate few, and those at the bottom of the social pyramid are cowed into submission. The Church, seeking to expand its social control, reinforces that terror through cryptic and troubling iconography. Just as in the present day, fear drives superstitions about marvels and monsters to society's surface. Yet at the same time, a developing curiosity for the world but also a desire for conquest emerges and encounter the Other. Understanding the context and forces at work in this period will provide students with tools to analyze contemporary societal shifts; in other words, exploring the myths of the past will shed a light on those that govern the present. During the semester, students will discover the mysteries, marvels, and monsters of this period through literature and visual media. The goal will be to study these works from diverse perspectives, but also to see how this imagery and these legends have persisted through the ages to the present day (for example Victor Hugo's 19th-Century romantic poetry and Alexandre Astier's popular 21st-Century series *Kaamelott*). Students will explore changes in the literature from the past to the present (theater, poetry, prose) as well as architecture and the arts in an attempt to access a deeper comprehension of this often misunderstood time that can inform our understanding of the present. This is a writing-intensive course, offering a broad introduction to the critical methods, standards of scholarship, and body of knowledge specific to the discipline of French and francophone studies. The course will train students to understand and analyze texts and visual media,

including sculpture, painting, manuscript illuminations, and film. Since it is writing intensive, particular attention is given to the content, style, and format of written assignments..

## Course Objectives

- Improve your grammatical and lexical accuracy in French; increase your vocabulary and your ability to develop and structure complex ideas in speaking and writing,
- Improve your analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Use problem-solving techniques to seek out meaning and interpret creative works, applying the methodological tools we will discover during the semester.
- Improve digital literacy by learning how to exploit the digital research tools available in the humanities.
- Develop a thorough understanding of the literary tradition, culture, and mindsets of France in the 11th–13th centuries, and in so doing, acquire an understanding of the rich cultural diversity that constitutes the backdrop of a work of art, be it from the 12th Century or the 21st . For the period in question, we will explore how cultural exchanges throughout the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Scandinavian, and Celtic worlds forged the creative works of the era.

## French 3101

French 3101 presents four distinct areas of inquiry and the modes of analysis proper to them. The areas of inquiry/modes of analysis are:

- **Language and codes:** Studying the language of a work includes the codes that operate within both the words and visual signs that constitute it.
- **Literature and literary studies:** This course will also provide an introduction to methods of literary analysis and explore aspects of literature that can provide insights into cultural mindsets and contexts. Some of the theories could include those that examine a work from the perspective of genre, gender, structure, narrative, historicism, and psychoanalysis.
- **Subjects and cultures:** Students will gain an understanding of how culture creates a space for the subject or the self.
- **Visual media:** This course will also introduce students to some of the theories of the visual arts that consider art as anthropological artifacts or cultural phenomena, rather than simply focusing on the works themselves or even the artists.

## Writing Intensive

MONT 3021W is approved for the Writing Intensive Requirement at the University of Minnesota.

- It is paramount that students acquire strong writing skills in order to effectively analyze cultural artifacts/documents within the framework of the French studies curriculum. Writing is at the core of the academic experience and is the responsibility of every member of the academic community. By participating in the production and

interrogation of the discourse in the field of French studies, students progress in their understanding of the discipline.

- Over the course of the semester, students will complete a variety of writing assignments, including at least four short reaction-type essays, three or four 1-3 page analytical essays or dissertations, and finally one 8-10 page final research/analysis paper/dossier. The instructor will provide the students with regular feedback, focusing on essay structure, grammar and stylistics.
- Students will be required to correct at least three of their assignments taking into account the instructor's feedback on their first version, and hand in corrected versions to thereby improve their grade. The student's initial version will include commentary and suggestions for structural/ analytical changes as well as indicate grammatical and stylistic errors.

## Methodology

A presentation of the cultural, historical, and social context for the selected works will serve to frame the readings and discussion. PowerPoint presentations, in-class analysis of reading passages and works of art, and outside readings will provide students with background information that they will be able to draw upon in their essays and presentations. Over the course of the semester, students will write three 1-3 page papers and at least four ½-page reaction/brief analysis essays. One of the 1-3 page papers will be an in-class essay/dissertation. Students will correct at least three of their written assignments to improve their grade. The students' final research project (an 8-10 page paper and 15-20 minute presentation on a topic of their choice related to the course) will further enrich their learning experience.

## Course Prerequisites

Intermediate French: equivalent to 4 semesters of college-level French (FREN 1004 at the University of Minnesota). This course may be approved for FREN 3101W for students who have completed FREN 3016. Email the FRIT Director of Undergraduate Studies for approval (frenstds@umn.edu).

## Required Reading / Materials

- Le Mystère d'Adam
- La Vie de Saint-Alexis
- La Chanson de la croisade albigeoise (extraits)
- Les Lais de Marie de France ● Odes et Ballades (extraits) de Victor Hugo
- Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion ● Le Roman de Renart (extraits)
- Trilby, ou le lutin d'Argail de Charles Nodier

## Course Bibliography

- Baschet, Jérôme. L'iconographie médiévale. Paris: Gallimard, 2008.
- Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. London: Penguin Classics, 1972.

- Ferlampin-Archer, Christine et Catalina Girbea. *Matières à débat: La notion de matière littéraire dans la littérature médiévale*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017.
- Girard, René. *La violence et le sacré*. Paris: Fayard/Pluriel, 2011.
- Huys, Viviane et Denis Vernant. *Histoire de l'art: Théories, méthodes et outils*. Paris: Hachette, 2019.
- Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990. (extraits)
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Tolman, Rolf et al. *L'art roman: Architecture, peinture, sculpture*. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005. (excerpts)
- Tolman, Rolf et al. *L'art gothique: Architecture, peinture, sculpture*. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005. (excerpts)
- Zink, Michel. *Les troubadours: Une histoire poétique*. Paris: Editions Perrin, 2017.

# Grading

## Grading Rubric

| Letter Grade | Score or Percentage | Description  |
|--------------|---------------------|--|
| A            | 93–100              | Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.   |
| A-           | 90–92               | Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.   |
| B+           | 87–89               |  |
| B            | 83–86               |  |
| B-           | 80–82               | Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.   |
| C+           | 77–79               |  |
| C            | 73–76               |  |
| C-           | 70–72               | Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.   |
| D+           | 67–69               |  |
| D            | 60–66               |  |
| F            | 0–59                | Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I. |

## Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

| Assignments        | Percentage of Grade |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Essays             | 45%                 |
| Exposés            | 15%                 |
| Participation      | 10%                 |
| Final presentation | 15%                 |
| Overall grade      | 100%                |

## Assessment Details

### Essays

Students will complete 8 written essays (each written assignment will be between 1-4 pages in length), on topics drawn from course material provided by the instructor. The topics of these assignments will be directly related to the readings of the current unit being studied. An example might be a critical literary analysis of a passage or a topos in one of the works studied. Written assignments should aim to include an average of 3 citations per page. For the longer written assignments (3-4 pages) students will be asked to include references (the nature and number of these references will vary depending on the type of assignment, 3-4 sources is a rough estimate). Students will be required to correct at least three of their essays taking into account the instructor's feedback on their first version, and hand in corrected versions to thereby improve their grade. The student's initial version will include commentary and suggestions for structural/ analytical changes as well as indicate grammatical and stylistic errors.

### Exposés

Students will complete between 1 and 2 oral presentations over the course of the semester. Presentations should last between 5 and 7 minutes and provide a springboard for class discussion. Students will be asked to present their analytical work to the rest of the class; an example might be a critical analysis of one of the lais of Marie de France. Students will be asked to include references (the nature and number of these references will vary depending on the type of assignment, 3-4 sources is a rough estimate).

## **Participation**

Attendance and active participation in class is very important to your success in this course. Students should be present at all classes and come prepared to discuss the readings as outlined in the syllabus.

## **Final written paper**

Each student will write an 8-10 page research paper, to be handed in during the last class meeting. The student should choose a topic related to the course material that they wish to explore in greater detail and share with the rest of the class. Sample topics include: a critical literary analysis of the texts studied over the course of the semester, a critical, historical, and analytical exploration of some of the contemporaneous events, noteworthy individuals, societal paradigms, or artistic creations (i.e. Romanesque architecture or sculpture) that were the backdrop for the creation of the literary works studied during the semester, or a sociocultural analysis of the works (i.e. women's voices in the 12th century, problematic representations of the Other, etc.) By the halfway point of the semester, students should begin to have an idea of the approach they would like to take and consult with the instructor to narrow down their topic. Students should include roughly an average of 3-4 citations per page and use between 6 and 9 outside sources (this is an estimate and will depend upon the topic chosen).

## **Final presentation**

During the final class meeting, students will present the research they undertook for their final written paper to the class. The goal of the presentation is to introduce the class to the research in as interesting a manner as possible. To that end, students are encouraged to use slideshows and handouts, and should avoid simply reading their paper. At the end of their presentation, the student should have questions prepared to involve the listeners and be prepared to organize and moderate the group's discussion. (15-20 min.)

# Course Content

## Unit 1

- **Topics:** Course Introduction—the origins of French vernacular literature, Medieval mentalities, the Medieval conception of space and time; an introduction to Romanesque art and architecture. Paleographic examples taken from the Serment de Strasbourg.
- **Assigned reading:** La Vie de Saint-Alexis (11th–12th centuries).

## Unit 2

- **Topics:** Discussion of La Vie de Saint-Alexis. Hagiography and the function of saints in Medieval French society. Exploring how the concept of the bouc-émissaire intersects with literature and myth (René Girard). Romanesque representations of sin, the role of relics, and analysis of 11th- and early 12th-Century abbey façades, capitals, and tympana.
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion—“Mentalités, le ciel, la terre, le paradis.”
- **Assigned reading:** Le Mystère d'Adam. (12th Century); Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art roman: Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 3

- **Topics:** Discussion of liturgical theater and the Mystère d'Adam. The didactic role of theater in the Church, fighting against paganism and superstition, and the esthetics of Romanesque architecture. Understanding superstition and belief systems. Medieval France: Layered and Intersecting Cultures.
- **Activities:** Debate and analysis of le Mystère d'Adam; PowerPoint and discussion—“La Représentation du péché.”
- **Assigned reading:** Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art roman : Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 4

- **Topics:** Preparation of excursion to the Châteaux cathares. Discussion of the Cathar heresy and the divergent viewpoints within La Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise. Crusading mindsets and the chansons de geste.
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion: “Le Catharisme: Châteaux d'hérétiques—le refuge et la sauvegarde dans l'isolement » ; Reading troubadour and trouvère poetry—Guillaume de Poitiers/Bernard de Ventadour. Discussion of excerpts from Michel Zink's work, Les Troubadours.
- **Assigned reading:** Les Lais de Marie de France (12th Century) Guigemar, Equitan, Le Fresne, Lanval; Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art roman : Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.



## Unit 5

- **Topics:** Introduction to la littérature courtoise. Eleanor of Aquitaine as patron of the arts, courtly mindsets, la chevalerie, la fin'amor, and the troubadours. Les origines de la matière arthurienne / la matière de Bretagne. Comprendre la notion de "matière."
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion: "Aliénor d'Aquitaine: mécène des arts."
- **Assigned reading:** Les Lais de Marie de France (12th Century) Yonec, Laüstic, Milun, Eliduc; Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art gothique : Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 6

- **Topics:** Discussion of the Lais de Marie de France. Presentation and analysis of themes and topoi of courtly romance. Mini-exposés by students.
- **Activities:** Powerpoint "Beatus de Liébana: Commentaire de l'Apocalypse (~780) manuscrits illuminés du Xe et XIe siècles–La Peur avant l'an mil »
- **Assigned reading:** Le lai anonyme de Tydorel et Les Mille et une Nuits: interculturalités. Les Lais de Marie de France (12th Century) Bisclavret, Les Deus Amanz, Chevrefoil, Chaitivel; Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art gothique: Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 7

- **Topics:** Le Romantisme médiéval: Persistent myths, motifs and forms. Exploring 19th-Century visions of the Medieval period in literature and the arts I.
- **Assigned reading:** Charles Nodier, Trilby ou le lutin d'Argail.

## Unit 8

- **Topics:** Le Romantisme médiéval: Persistent myths, motifs and forms. Exploring 19th-Century visions of the Medieval period in literature and the arts II. Introduction to versification.
- **Assigned reading:** Victor Hugo's Odes et ballades (poésies choisies: "La fiancée du timbalier," "La chasse du Burgrave," "La Ronde du sabbat," "Aux ruines de Montfort-l'Amaury," and "Une fée").

## Unit 9

- **Topics:** Continuation of analysis of the themes and topoi of courtly romance, introduction to bestiaries, lapidaries, and herbals. Exploring scientific exchanges between the Arab-Muslim world and the Occident: the example of the geographer Al-Idrîsî.
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion «Introduction à l'architecture gothique» Comprendre l'importance d'une approche formaliste de l'art (Huys et Vernant).

- **Assigned reading:** Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion de Chrétien de Troyes; Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art gothique: Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 10

- **Topics:** Discussion of Chrétien de Troyes's Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion. Analysis of themes and symbolism. Celtic origins of the legend. Introduction to gothic architecture.
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion «Introduction au merveilleux: créatures et monstres du monde oriental»
- **Assigned reading:** Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion de Chrétien de Troyes; Selected readings from: Tolman, Rolf et al. L'art gothique: Architecture, peinture, sculpture. Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, 2005.

## Unit 11

- **Topics:** Discussion of Chrétien de Troyes's Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion. The Arthurian legend in Old French literature. Gothic architecture as “static theater.” Exploring 21st-Century visions of the Medieval period.
- **Activities:** Powerpoint and discussion «La matière de Bretagne. Le merveilleux/le miraculeux»
- **Assigned reading:** Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion de Chrétien de Troyes; Extraits de la série Kaamelott—parodie et evolution de la légende arthurienne. Les débuts—Dies irae; une selection d'épisodes de la Saison 1.

## Unit 12

- **Topics:** Discussion of Chrétien de Troyes's Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion. La matière de Bretagne. Symbolism and gothic architecture continued. Exploring 21st-Century visions of the Medieval period.
- **Activities:** PowerPoint and discussion «Représentations iconographiques de la Vierge à l'Enfant (XIe- XVe)» ; Extraits de la série Kaamelott—un genre transformé.
- **Assigned reading:** Excerpts from Le Roman de Renart.

## Unit 13

- **Topics and activities:** Student presentations and discussion. Excerpts from Le Roman de Renart—voices of dissent, social commentary, and parody

# Policies

## Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

## University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

### Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).