

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES
AUTUMN 2011
ENG9HA MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN LITERATURE
Module Conveners and Tutors: Stephen Penn

The late Middle Ages and Renaissance (1200–1660) in Britain were highly sophisticated times of transition, rupture and innovation. The period saw many radical changes: printed books took over from manuscripts; the theatre became professionalized and commercialized; social relations were in flux as the urban bourgeoisie rose to prominence; new markets emerged; the Reformation of the 1530s transformed religion and private devotion; the language shifted, from Middle English to Modern English; women increasingly demanded their place and voice within literary culture. In medieval and early modern writing, Christian Europe played out its conflicted encounters with its others: Jews and Muslims. New technologies proliferated: clocks, printing, microscopes. Poets from the Troubadours to Philip Sidney hymned the cruel and remote lady of ‘courtly love’. In the twelfth-century *lais* of Marie de France we see the beginnings of a modern subjectivity that becomes fully-fledged in *Hamlet* and which finds its counterpart in the scientific gaze on the body’s interior that marks the Renaissance ‘culture of dissection’. But alongside these beginnings of what we now recognise as the modern is a radical alterity: the omnipresence of death, animals on trial, monstrous bodies. We will explore the different ways in which the middle ages and Renaissance complicate our narratives of the origins of the modern world.

The aims of the module will be to introduce students to the kinds of problems and questions that reading texts from this era raise: (i) historical distance and difference, of language and culture (ii) establishing categories and genres (iii) ‘authorship’ and ‘authority’ (iv) the relations between ‘text’ and ‘world’ (v) representing ‘identity’ and subjectivity (vi) reading and interpretation.

Methods of Teaching and Learning

One weekly lecture and one one-hour seminar.

Assessment

The module will be assessed by two essays.

Set Texts [to buy before the module begins]

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol. 1, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., eighth edition (London: W.W. Norton, 2006)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. T.J.B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 2005)

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Colin Burrow (London: Shakespeare, 2006)

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. and trans. James Winney (London: Broadview, 1992)

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Barry Windeatt (London: Penguin, 2003)