

**MODULE CODE:** CSEN7031  
**TITLE:** Medieval Poetry of Dream and Debate  
**DATED:** 27/02/2012

**MODULE CO-ORDINATOR:** Dr William Marx  
**LEVEL:** 7  
**CREDITS:** 20

**TEACHING METHODS:** Seminars 10%  
Directed Learning 90%

**JACS CODE:** Q320

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### AIM(S)

- To explore the literary strategies and cultural contexts of one of the central genres of writing from the Middle Ages, the dream-poem or dream-vision.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding of the historical development of the use of dreams and debates as literary devices;
- show a sophisticated understanding of the different functions of these types of poems, in the two major traditions of medieval verse-making;
- demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding of medieval understandings of human psychology as exemplified dream poem;
- demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the influence of *The Romance of the Rose* upon subsequent dream poems in English in the Medieval period;
- demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the role of Chaucer within the development of the dream-poem in English in the Medieval period.

### CONTENT

- This module explores the literary strategies of one of the central genres of writing from the Middle Ages. The popularity of the dream-poem or dream-vision rivalled that of romance in the medieval period. The world revealed in dream poetry is the world of the human mind, and more so than any other medieval genre, dream-poems explore human psychology and the conflicts in human feeling and reactions. The dream poem liberated the medieval poet to develop other-worldly and surrealistic landscapes and to bring human figures into confrontation with imaginary authority-figures. One purpose of the dream-poem was revelation but another equally important purpose was the exploration of different states of mind and different points of view. Hence, many dream-poems include dialogues or debates, in which the dreamer may be instructed in higher truth or witness the clash of conflicting arguments.
- Since the thirteenth-century French love-vision *The Romance of the Rose* exercised a massive influence over dream-poetry, the module will begin with this text,

reading it in a modern English translation, and examining how medieval manuscript illuminators visualized it.

- Chaucer's first major works as a poet were in the genre of the dream-poem, and the module critically examines Chaucer's development through *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*. Chaucer's contributions to the genre found imitators, and texts such as Sir John Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* and the anonymous *Flower and the Leaf*, which takes for its setting the world of courtly ritual, will also be examined.
- Running parallel to the verse-making tradition exemplified by Chaucer is the alliterative tradition, and the module will also consider works such as *Winner and Waster* (a topical poem on the economic and social conditions of mid-fourteenth-century England) and *Pearl*, a marvellously artful poem of revelation which survives uniquely in the same manuscript as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

## ASSESSMENT

### Course work (100%)

One Assignment (5,000 words).

The topic of the assignment is chosen by the student in consultation with the module tutor but must be related to the content of the module

[Sample assignment: 'It has been argued that the dream-poem gave medieval poets the means to explore the complexities of human psychology. Referring to a range of the texts set for the module, what evidence do you find that medieval poets understood human psychology as complex?']

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Essential

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### Recommended

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