

Humanities Seminar: Masterpieces of Medieval Literature

Instructor: Dr. Albrecht Classen, University Distinguished Professor of German Studies

Fall 2023

Course Objectives: This seminar will examine a range of literary masterpieces from the Middle Ages, focusing on some of the very best literary pearls that carry profound meaning also for us today, although they are often not studied enough. We will read relatively short texts from the ninth through the fifteenth century to gain a sense of the true glory of what pre-modern poets could achieve and what they can tell us until today. There always will be the literary elephant in the room, casting its shadow on our text selection. But *Beowulf*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Dante's *Divina Commedia*, or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are both too extensive for our purposes and too well known in many circles. This course will, instead, open our eyes toward true but short masterpieces that you can read easily and then enjoy profoundly.

Course Outline:

Oct. 31: Introduction, outline, and our first reading: "Hildebrandslied"

Nov. 7: The Song of Waltharius

Nov. 14: Hartmann von Aue, "Lord Henry"

Nov. 28: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Dec. 5: Heinrich Kaufringer, tales

Dec. 12: Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*

Reading List:

You can find some of these texts online, but then mostly truncated and in a poor English translation. I only ask you to purchase *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies*, in whatever recent translation. I will make the other texts available as PDFs online.