

Desire and Deception in Medieval Erotic Literature

Course ID and 7-digit Number: COML 0087-301/ GSWS 0087-301/ ITAL 0087-301

Instructor: Francesco Marco Aresu (faresu@sas.upenn.edu)

Course Description

In this course, we will investigate the ideology, content, and material forms of love literature from Chrétien de Troyes to Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca. Through close readings of such texts as Chrétien's *Lancelot* (ca. 1180), Dante's *Vita nova* (ca. 1295), Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1353), and Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (often referred to as the poetry book par excellence: *il canzoniere*, ca. 1374), we will unveil the literary and fictitious nature of medieval erotic literature. We will explore the origins of love poetry in medieval France and its subsequent interpretation and rewriting in Italian courts and municipalities. We will inquire into the cultural constructions of the medieval notion of lyrical self and how it still has an impact on our own notion of consciousness. We will study the forms, themes, and characters that populate 'love stories' in the Middle Ages. We analyze the dynamics of composition, circulation, and reception in manuscript culture. Our close analysis of the texts as they have been preserved in manuscript form will help us gauge the differences between medieval and contemporary ways of writing, reading, and loving.

The course is conducted in English. No previous knowledge of Italian (or French) is required.

Class Structure for Spring 2024

Students will attend class TR 12:00 PM – 1:29 PM.

Students will complete activities and assignments as indicated in the syllabus (forthcoming).

Students' progress will be evaluated through a combination of assignments and assessments (in-class tasks, analytical papers, midterm exam, oral presentation, final project).

Out-of-class Activities

Weekly reading of primary and secondary sources (see below under "Essential Course Policies")

Library 'excavations'

One-on-one meeting(s) with the instructor

Outline of Assignments and Assessments

Course Citizenship: Preparation, Attendance, Participation (20%)

Oral Presentation (10%)

Midterm Exam (10%)

Three (short) analytical essays (30%)

Final project (30%)

Essential Course Policies

Attendance is strictly mandatory and will be enforced.

All course materials will be provided by the instructor. Students are expected to read and re-read the texts, make notes, underline and circle words and phrases, bring their reading notes to class, and arrive with a handful of points for discussion. They are expected, in short, to be active readers.

Students needing accommodations of any kind should let the instructor know as soon as they are able.