

Writing the Female Body in Medieval France

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Course Description: This course examines the place of the female body in medieval France. We choose the female body—rather than the female voice, point of view, mind, or even political status—as point of departure in analyzing women’s roles in medieval France because it is by far the most talked-about aspect of a woman in medieval French literature. We will spend a great deal of time talking about why this might be, and what other information we can glean about woman’s place in society and in literature through a close examination of her (described and ascribed) corporality.

In examining these texts, it will be important to keep in mind that many of these works of literature are absolutely foundational to the Western literary canon. In other words, when reading the letters exchanged between Peter Abélard and Héloïse d’Argenteuil, for example, we would do well to remember that Rousseau used these letters as essential building blocks to his own work, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* some seven centuries later. Beyond the literary canon, however, the course aims to interrogate to what extent our own modern attitudes towards the female body are shaped and defined by those of medieval thinkers and writers and their close successors. To this end, we will read a number of more philosophical and political texts spanning the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries in interrogating the extent to which First and Second-Wave Feminism were influenced by, echo, and depart from the writings of their distant and not-so-distant predecessors.

Aims and Objectives: This course is designed to be taken following FREN 104 or FREN 150, and to provide students with the basic frameworks, methods, and vocabularies necessary for the interpretation of literature in French. *The course is conducted entirely in French.*

By the end of this course, students will have been introduced to

- several female-authored canonical works from pre-modern France (LO 2)
- basic methods of literary analysis, frameworks and implementations of the interpretation of literature (LO 4)
- modes of interaction of literary texts with historical, political, and social frameworks (LO 3)

By the end of this course, students should be able to

- understand and implement basic concepts of literary analysis in describing and interpreting texts (LO 4)
- think critically about how authors interpret the world around them in their works (LO 3)
- construct written and oral arguments about how texts are put together (LO 4)
- conduct detailed and rigorous research on a given topic in the literary world (LO 5)

Additionally, students should be able to

- apply their understandings of the specific texts we have studied to current debates, problems, and attitudes (LO 6)

- think critically about how, where and when the heteronormative principles that structure our society were established (LO 6)

Required Texts:

Les Lettres d'Abélard et Héloïse

Marie de France, *Lais*

Jean d'Arras, *Méhusine*, trad. Jean-Jacques Vincensini (Lettres Gothiques, 2003)

Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*

Christine de Pizan et al., *Le Débat du Roman de la rose*

Louise Labé, *Œuvres* [selections]

Olympe de Gouges, *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* [selections]

Monique Wittig, Article dans *Libération* le 17 juin 1999 et "On ne naît pas femme," *Questions féministes*, 1980

French and Francophone Studies Program Learning Outcomes (LO):

Majors in our program will be able to:

1. Speak, read, write, and understand French at an “Advanced-Low” level as defined by the proficiency criteria of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the major Francophone writers from the Middle Ages through the Twenty-First Century, and with major trends in Francophone literatures and cultures.
3. Demonstrate cultural competency in French-Francophone civilizations, including familiarity with attitudes, lifestyles, conceptions of society, social and political structures from historical, anthropological, and symbolic perspectives.
4. Demonstrate competency in written and oral communication through the production of persuasive texts and presentations supported by structured arguments using appropriate forms of textual, cultural and visual analysis and evidence. Such texts and oral presentations will respect disciplinary norms for evidence and citation.
5. Demonstrate research competency in French-Francophone literature and culture, including familiarity with major journals, critical approaches, academic research and methodology, current news from the target countries, bibliographical and other sources related to coursework, contemporary cultural sources, and interactive communicative sites.
6. Demonstrate the ability to synthesize learning from within and outside French and Francophone studies in order to develop a global view of the discipline and how the knowledge and skills it promotes can be applied beyond Bucknell.