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720 FREN 848 Histoire, Politique et Société

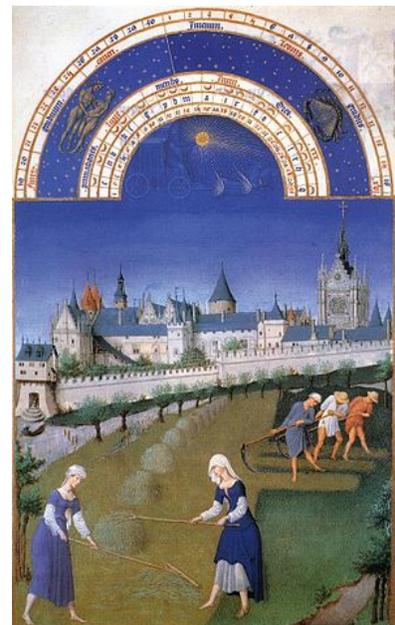
MCU 9.30-10.45 2066 Wescoe

This course aims to set major works and genres of the High Middle Ages in their politico-historical and social context. We will survey the panorama of medieval literary genres, looking at how a selection of texts reflects the changing climate of the medieval Francophone environment (Northern France, Occitania, England) and the contemporary ideas that shaped it.

We will begin with a brief overview the history of France and feudalism, and the of the emergence of medieval French literature in the 9th-10th centuries

*(hagiography and epic being the first genres attested in the vernacular), reading the *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100, the first extensive work in OF, reflective of the mind-set of the Crusades). As a further example of an early reflection on feudal society, we will read the *Roman de Thebes* (c. 1150), a Norman verse adaption of Statius's *Thebaid* (c. AD 45-96) that recounts the tale of Oedipus and the conflict between his sons Polyneice and Eteocle about an equitable succession. This work provides a fascinating insight into contemporary court culture, war tactics and feudal politics – and mirrors the strife-ridden dynastic ambitions of twelfth-century kings and seigneurs. The *Chevalier de la Charrette* introduces Lancelot to literary history: penned by Chrétien de Troyes around 1177-81, this story exemplifies the *matière de Bretagne* as a flattering, fantasy mirror of contemporary knighthood – reflecting the importance of the *chevalier* in an era defined by feudal *seigneurie*. Chrétien was at the beginning of a trend for chivalric romances that persisted into the 13th c.*

*If the epic and romance give a picture of aristocratic life, then the *fabliaux* show us a world opening up to the existence of other classes, and a more urban sensibility: we will look at a selection of *fabliaux* that portray other sectors of society and their values. We will also look at the court poetry of the High and later Middle Ages (using works on both the MA and PhD lists) and read the *Lais* and *Testament* of François Villon (1431- disappears in 1463), the first great urban poet of Paris.*



Thus, we will look at history and social change from the beginnings of OF literature to the dawn of the Renaissance — through close reading, and a variety critical and theoretical approaches, you should develop a general and particular understanding of historical context, genres, and specific works, and have a framework for understanding the Middle Ages as it relates to subsequent periods.