

## Medieval Studies Student Association, UNM Spring 2012 Student Colloquium

Session 1: 11:30 – 12:30

### **“Bisclavret”: a Rereading of Little Red Riding Hood - Doaa Omran**

Jan Ziolkowski argues that the folktale which is nowadays known as “Little Red Riding Hood” had been in circulation since the first quarter of the eleventh century. The text was in existence under the title of “De Puella a Lupellis Seruta.” In that medieval text, the little girl is helplessly seduced by a wolf (an anti-patriarchal figure), similar in many aspects to the male protagonist in Marie de France’s *Bisclavret*. This paper explores how Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* is nothing but a feminist reading of the Medieval Latin folktale in circulation then. A well-educated lady such as Marie de France, I would argue, well-versed in Latin as well as being interested in fairytales who undertook the decision to write her version of them rendering them a feminine/feminist turn would have been doubtlessly familiar with the tale. Over time myths and legends dissolve into folk and fairytales, and *Bisclavret* is no exception. However, unlike the gullible girl of the Egbert of Liege (and later on of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm) version, Marie de France (like her feminist followers such as Anne Sexton, James Thurber’s “The Little Girl and the Wolf” and Roald Dahl’s *Revoltin’ Rhymes*) was so much ahead of her time as she attempts a *pre-reading* of the folktale where the damsel tries—by hook or by crook—to save her life from the fangs of the wolf.

### **The New National Hero: Ælfric’s *Maccabees* as an Activity in Nation Building**

Kevin Jackson

Ælfric of Eynsham’s letter to Sigeward is important not only as a vernacular treatise on the entire Bible, but also as a glimpse into Ælfric’s personal interpretation of the Old Testament and its worth to Christianity. His own homily on *Maccabees*, however, does not fall in line with his Christological interpretation. Careful examination of Ælfric’s variations from his source (Ælfric worked exclusively from the Vulgate for his homily, which is largely a paraphrase translation of the two apocryphal books) reveals Ælfric’s nation building agenda. Although the end of the homily has been interpreted by some<sup>1</sup> as a condemnation of violence, Ælfric’s *Maccabees* cannot be read as such. My paper interprets the changes Ælfric made to the Biblical text as Ælfric’s own exercise in nation building, and reacts against those who have posited that Ælfric wrote the text as a condemnation of violent rebellion. His changes to the text show that he is not setting up Judas Maccabeus as a type for Christ, as was to be expected not only by the original text but also by Ælfric’s own interpretation of the Old Testament, but that he is creating a warrior role model for a struggling English nation.

### **From Lyric Poetry to Arthurian Romance: The Influence of the Troubadour Tradition on the Works of Chrétien de Troyes - Emilee J. Howland-Davis**

The themes of Arthurian literature are ubiquitous and it would be difficult to find anyone in the modern industrialized world who is not familiar with the idea of the Holy Grail, Lancelot, and the realm destroying relationship between Guenivere and Lancelot, even if they are unaware of the vast history of the genre. Arthurian legend as we know it began with much less romantic themes. How exactly did the ideas of courtly love become so imbedded in a tale of military conquest over Romans and/or Anglo Saxon invaders? The answer to this question lies within the troubadour tradition which first began in the southern parts of France in the second half of the eleventh century. The troubadour tradition would become instrumental in advancing the ideas of courtly love. This rich tradition would reach its pinnacle at the court of Champagne and the poets who were a part of it. It is at this critical location that Arthurian legend receives its first dose of romantic treatment. Chrétien de Troyes is regarded as the creator of the Arthurian romance and it is his position within the court of Champagne that would help introduce romance into the militaristic origins of Arthurian legend. I will argue that Arthurian literature owes much of its famous elements to Chrétien de Troyes and the Court of Champagne he was a part of. The role of Marie de Champagne is important and I believe that Arthurian literature would not be what it is today without the influence of courtly love's greatest patron. Through an analysis of Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian and non-Arthurian works we can clearly see the migration from southern France troubadour lyrics to the romance that is as fundamental to modern ideas of Camelot as the characters of Arthur, Guinevere or Lancelot.

### **“Sir Marty-Stu”: Lancelot and *Le Morte D'Arthur* as Self-Insert Fan-Fiction**

Megan Abrahamson – MSSA Secretary

We know unfortunately little about the author behind *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Speculating beyond the little we do know about Malory is “living dangerously” as P.J.C. Field puts it. Equally dangerous is comparing Sir Thomas Malory to 21st-century fourteen-year-old girls typing up a world in which Legolas or Dean Winchester professes his love to a “self-insert” character that represents the author. I make neither claim so strongly, but I do hypothesize that, a. we can know something about Malory, and b. that the Lancelot of *Le Morte* has elements of a self-insert of Malory. With these premises in mind we might be able to learn a little more about Malory through the character of Lancelot.

The Lancelot of *Le Morte* is a borrowing from French romances, and is introduced for the first time of any note into the English corpus by Malory. He is a knight, as Malory was, and he experiences the fragmentation of the Round Table as Malory might have experienced the in the Wars of the Roses. Malory may have imparted his own experiences of being charged with *raptus* to Lancelot's adulterous relationship with Guinevere. And we must not neglect the possibility that Malory made the rookie move of the self-insert in writing a Lancelot who “passed all other knights.” I hope to show that fan-fiction theory is a highly viable lens through which we can view Malory and his magnum opus, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, bringing both into sharper focus.

Session 3:

1:30 – 2:30

### **Land Disputes before the Real Audiencia of Castile, 1371-1492 - James Dory-Garduno**

The Castilian *Real Audiencia* was the first *Audiencia* or high tribunal in the medieval kingdom of Castile. It provided a venue for disputes between individuals, villages, towns, and cities. The *Audiencia* decided civil suits, primarily those regarding questions of land title involving the various types of commons used by Castilian villages, towns, and cities. These disputes, the subject of this presentation, illustrate how title to common lands was understood by litigants and the judges of the *Audiencia*. They could be held by municipalities in the form of *ejidos* (multipurpose commons), *dehesas* (enclosed commons), *pastos* (common grazing lands), or *montes* (common woodlands), but title was often disputed. The adjudication of these cases suggest that Castilian land law had largely crystallized prior to 1492 and the close of the Middle Ages; thus, it was plausibly transmitted as a corpus of law to the New World and may assist in understanding Spanish era land grants in the Americas. Based on research conducted in the *Real Audiencia*'s archive in Valladolid, Spain in 2011, this presentation attempts to identify more clearly the law applied by the *Audiencia* in settling disputes and establishing stability in the land holding system of late-medieval Castile.

### **Environmental Meaning and Action in *Beowulf* and Felix's *Life of Guthlac* - Lisa Myers**

In the early Middle Ages, long before they were drained to produce farmland, the fens of East Anglia presented a dark and foreboding landscape to the Anglo-Saxons. Such a place became a powerful force in the imagination of the people and even though the marshes were important economic sources for salt making, peat production and fishing, they oftentimes came to be associated with a dark and foreboding Other. These marginal landscapes were viewed as a borderland between civilization and wilderness, man and monster, good and evil. Grendel's mere from *Beowulf* and the island of Crowland from Felix's *Life of Guthlac* both employ this setting to create an aura of suspense, fear and mystery. The title characters travel into the fens and battle demonic creatures, but the outcome of each hero's struggle is strikingly different. Beowulf accomplishes his heroic deeds, saving the community, and quickly returns to the world of humans, always viewing the wetlands as foreign and dangerous, an expression of the Other that must be controlled to preserve civilization. Guthlac, on the other hand, relates to the fenland environment in a different manner. He also defeats the dangers of the marshes. Unlike Beowulf, though, he does not leave, but remains in the wetlands becoming a part of his new home and communing with the natural world. There is an ecological explanation for this difference that goes beyond mere genre conventions. This paper will examine the two works in regards to their use of the fenland environment as well as the differences in the actions of the two main characters in demonstrating the meaning that they assign to the natural world around them.

Session 4:

2:30 – 3:30

**‘Here the Spear Tore My Flesh’: The Performative Depiction of Christ and the Virgin in the Lauds of Jacopone da Todi - Justin Brock**

Any extensive examination in English on the life and works of the Italian mystic and poet, Iacopone da Todi, lament the lack of scholarship on the figure. As a result of Iacopone's position within the field of medieval Italian literature, his works are consistently sidelined for authors such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Overall, Iacopone da Todi's interweaving of poetry, religious scenes, and mysticism in his Lauds presents some dynamic representations of biblical characters and events. While Donna de Paradiso, one of many of da Todi's lauds, is seen as the hallmark of Iacopone's poetry exhibiting dramatic elements that influenced the development of the medieval Passion plays, many others show a similar tendency, while not as obvious. Drawing on performance theory, I claim that concentrating on Donna de Paradiso as the sole dramatic laud is limiting and that by further examining the elements of performance and drama, two other da Todi poems come out as highly performative. As a focus, I will examine the depictions of Christ in Omo, de te me lamento (Laud XXVI), Mary and Christ within Donna de Paradiso (Laud XCIII), as well as the Body and the Soul in Audite un 'ntenzione (Laud III). Ultimately, the performative elements intermix with their characterizations, especially through an emphasis on the body and physicality, as well as participation within affective devotion and emotion.

**Modern Arthurian Matriarchs - Megan Chatterton – MSSA Vice President**

Without a doubt, the roles of women in modern Arthurian legend are far more complex than in their medieval predecessors, starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain in the twelfth century. Recently, literature and popular culture has seen a revival of Arthurian motifs and often, complete retellings of the legend featuring female characters in new and expanded roles. One only needs to watch the BBC's Merlin to notice the evolution of the female character in contemporary Arthuriana. Lady Morgana, played by Katie McGrath in the televised Merlin, started the show out as the charge of Uther Pendragon. No mention of her relation to the family was made until the third season, allowing plenty of character development outside the bounds of existing legend. Instead of starting out as an evil sorceress, her character became a young woman caught in a web of forbidden magic that would turn her friends against her and drive her to attack the very people she once loved. This is a far cry from the medieval Morgan Le Fay, the conniving enchantress whose sole purpose was to wreak havoc in Camelot through extravagant, often sexual, power play. I will examine the roles of several key Arthurian women from medieval to modern.