

Introduction to Medieval English Literature and Culture

B.Eng.601 / M.EP.02c

Term:	Summer 2026	Instructor:	Dr P. S. Langeslag
Time:	Wed 10–12	Office:	SEP 2.306
Room:	VG 1.101	Office hours:	(send me an email)
Prerequisites:	None	E-mail:	planges@uni-goettingen.de

Course Description

This course introduces students to the corpus and culture of Old and Middle English literature and trains them to read, translate, and interpret prose and verse texts from these traditions. Given the differences between Modern English and Old English in particular, the central intellectual challenge will be to come to grips with the grammar and vocabulary of at least one entirely new language. To accomplish this task, a considerable amount of class time will be spent becoming acquainted with the grammar and the translation of early English. In addition, students will learn to analyze medieval texts in their formal, literary, and cultural aspects.

Aims

Students will

- Learn to read and translate Old English;
- Become accustomed to the reading of Middle English;
- Learn to analyze medieval narrative;
- Hone their skills writing close commentaries.

Assessment

Written exam (90 minutes; details [here](#)). The associated lecture course will be assessed in a separate exam to be administered by its convenor; you'll want to register separately for each of the two exams. Students are also expected to write a close commentary (details [here](#)), which will not be marked but whose completion is a prerequisite for taking the exam.

Required Texts and Resources

Please get hold of either of the following works:

Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson. *A Guide to Old English*. 8th ed. Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2012.

(Earlier editions are equally admissible; the SEP library *Lehrbuchsammlung* has 29 copies of the 7th ed.)

Peter S. Baker. *Introduction to Old English*. 3rd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley–Blackwell, 2012.

(Earlier editions *not* admissible because they lack a key text. The SEP library has the 3rd ed. in its *Lehrbuchsammlung*.)

Additional materials will be provided on [Stud.IP](#).

Schedule

Anytime you miss a session, make sure to watch that week's optional video(s) (if applicable), which will help you understand the next week's grammar readings, theory, and/or background. However, the most important thing is to keep up with translation work and literary analysis, and to get feedback on them (through regular attendance)!

Wk	Date	Topic (links are optional videos)	Reading/Translation
1	15 Apr	Basics and Nominals (Introducing Old English (43m); Pronouns (24m); Nouns (34m))	
2	22 Apr	Sound Laws (30m) and Verbs (50m)	Mitchell & Robinson §§1–81 <i>or</i> Baker chs 1–6, 8; Basic Sentences (Stud.IP)
3	29 Apr	Adverbs, Syntax, Translation Strategies (48m) (Prepositions (17m))	M&R §§87–134 <i>or</i> Baker ch. 7 plus M&R §§96–109; Alfred's Preface to the <i>Pastoral Care</i> (M&R #5/Baker #6) (Baker stc 1–15 / M&R ll. 1–27)
4	6 May	The Corpus of Old English (27m) and Dictionaries (14m) (Numerals (26m))	M&R §§135–147, 213–214 <i>or</i> Baker chs. 10–12; Alfred's Preface to the <i>Pastoral Care</i> (Baker stc 16–22 / M&R ll. 28–47)
5	13 May	The Close Commentary Format (12m)	M&R §§82–86 <i>or</i> Baker ch. 9; Alfred's Preface to the <i>Pastoral Care</i> (Baker stc 23–28 / M&R ll. 48–63)
6	20 May	Poetics (29m)	<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (M&R #14/Baker #13) (ll. 1–20a)
7	27 May	READING WEEK	NO CLASS
8	3 June	The Exam Format	<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (ll. 20b–45)
9	10 June		<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (ll. 46–74) MIDTERM COMMENTARY: <i>Dream of the Rood</i> ll. 63–74
10	17 June		<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (ll. 75–109)
11	24 June		<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (ll. 110–156)
12	1 July	Middle English (12m)	<i>The Franklin's Prologue and Tale</i> (Stud.IP) (ll. 709–1011)
13	8 July	Chaucer (25m)	<i>The Franklin's Tale</i> (ll. 1012–1345)
14	15 July	The Corpus of Middle English (10m)	<i>The Franklin's Tale</i> (ll. 1346–1624)
15	22 July	EXAM 10AM SHARP IN ROOM TBD	

Diversity Statement

This course is run with the understanding that students bring a variety of backgrounds into the classroom in such domains as socioeconomics, appearance, culture, religion, ability, prior knowledge, gender, age, home/family situation, and sexual identity. With different backgrounds come different needs and sensitivities. If you feel your needs or those of a fellow student require special attention or are being compromised, please feel free to make this known to me by whatever channel seems most appropriate. (For more serious concerns, the University has an **independent office**.) I will treat all requests seriously and with confidentiality, and will seek to make accommodations within my abilities and reason. At the same time, you too owe it to your fellow students to treat them with respect regardless of their background and identity. Do not stand in the way of anyone's well-being.