

EN 35418
Winter 2015
Tuesday /Thursday 12 noon to 1:20 pm
Saieh Hall of Economics 103

Julie Orlemanski
julieorlemanski@uchicago.edu
Office: Rosenwald 415a
Office hours: Wednesdays 2 to 4 pm



Figura, Persona, Vox: Prosopopoeia in the Middle Ages

In this class, we'll consider fictional persons, tropes of anthropomorphism and vivification, and personificational allegory in the theory and practice of medieval imaginative writing. In addition, we'll place these instances of prosopopoeia within ongoing scholarly conversations about lyric voice, literary character, affect, the ontology of fiction, and the relation of speech to writing. The project of the course responds to historical shortsightedness in our conceptual tools for studying personification (broadly understood). The dependence of "character" on the realist novel has produced blind-spots; focus on the Romantic lyric has narrowed rhetorical analysis of prosopopoeia. Within the literary history of medieval writing, debates about allegory have overshadowed more heterogeneous practices of literary *persona*-making in the period. We face the challenge of pursuing our project on three fronts: recent and contemporary literary theory, the Latin Middle Ages, and Middle English poetry. The course aims to be a laboratory of sorts, developing new ways to understand the medieval figuration of animate, agential, sentient, speaking, or otherwise embodied figures.

Texts

Required

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts, revised ed. (New York: Penguin, 1999)

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* vol. 1, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1971)

Alan of Lille, *Literary Works*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge: Dumbarton Oaks, 2013)

William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. Mícheál F. Vaughan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2011)

Suggested

The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

A few texts that we really ought to be reading but don't have time to (listed in descending order of the alarmingness of their omission): Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Plato's *Timaeus*, and Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*.

Nota bene: Syllabus very much subject to change!

Assignments

20% Engaged participation

20% Short paper #1 (due by email Sunday, January 25)

20% Short paper #2 (due by email Sunday, February 22)

40% Final paper (due by email Thursday, March 19; abstract due by email Sunday March 1)

Engaged participation: Attendance and informed participation in discussions is expected. The assigned texts will demand a variety of reading speeds. Some days we'll have hundreds of pages of literary criticism; for other meetings, just a couple of hundred lines of poetry. Developing different reading practices, to manage and produce different kinds of understanding, is one of the skills the class aims to develop.

Try to contribute aloud to class discussion at least once per class.

I prefer that you not use laptops in class, but I leave it to your discretion. In any case, please bring your full and vibrant attention to our discussion.

I am committed to making our class a safe space, one where we all feel welcome to speak, respond, and share ideas. I've found this essential to cultivating collective practices of experimentation, risk, play, and invention.

Participation also entails a number of **reading responses (250-500 words)**, to be turned in by email no later than 6 am on the day of class. I will start the email thread, with a number of questions (although you are welcome to write on any aspect of the readings); to turn in your response, REPLY ALL to the thread. You can read one another's responses, or not, as you like. I've found email less cumbersome than Chalk postings & blog postings, but if someone has another idea, let me know!!

Short paper 1: Literary-critical conversation (5-7 double-spaced pages) This assignment has two parts. The first part is descriptive and analytical: give an account of what concepts or questions are at stake in the cluster of literary-theoretical texts you choose to read. (Some of the readings are more closely related than others; all are deeply, densely thoughtful and all have something to say to one or more themes of the course.) The second part is more creative and speculative: bring one or more of the essays together with either Chaucer's "Physician's Tale" or Lydgate's "Dance of Death," to suggest a new direction for interpreting the literary work, or suggest an adjustment to the theory in response to the literature. (I will pass out slightly more detailed instructions closer to the due-date.)

CHOOSE ONE CLUSTER:

Allegorical desire: Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire"; Gordon Teskey, "Personification and Capture: Francesca da Rimini"

Literary characters: Alex Woloch, "Prologue" and "Introduction" to *The One vs. The Many*; Aaron Kunin, "Characters Lounge"; Candace Vogler, "The Moral of the Story"

"The Body of the Letter": Jacques Rancière, "The Body of the Letter: Bible, Epic, Novel"; Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar" and "Figura"

Lyric Prosopoeia: Paul de Man, "Hypogram and Inscription"; Michael Riffaterre, "Prosopoeia"

Short paper 2: Theory and phenomenology of personification (5-7 double-spaced pages)

Overarching theories of literary phenomena like personification and character, despite their claims to generality, tend to take shape in relation to the particular examples used to illustrate and support them. (This is one of the reasons why I'd claim that medieval literature, being often neglected by theorists, has the potential to spark new concepts.) For the purposes of this paper, let's embrace the bombast of exploding the particular into the general. So: do a reading of (some part of) either Chaucer's *House of Fame* or Langland's *Piers Plowman* in support of ambitious (sweeping! grand!) answers to such questions as "What is prosopopeia? What is it for? How does it work?" (I will pass out slightly more detailed instructions closer to the due-date.)

Final paper: This should be modeled on a typical twenty-minute conference paper; that is, it should be between eight and ten double-spaced pages, written for oral delivery. The topic is up to you, though I expect it to have something to do with the theoretical, literary-historical, or interpretive questions raised over the course of the quarter. You will turn in an abstract in advance. **PhD students may choose to write a longer seminar paper (25+ pages), as per program requirements.**

SCHEDULE

1/6 **Introduction**

1/8 **Person-making & unmaking I**

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Physician's Tale* and Introduction to the *Pardoner's Tale*
+ source text: *Roman de la Rose* lines 5589-5658

1/13 **Theoretical Introduction**

Amelie Rorty, "Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals,"
from *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), 301-323.

Barbara Johnson, "Toys R Us," from *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard
UP, 2008), 3-23.

James Paxson, "A History of Personification Theory," from *The Poetics of
Personification* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1994), 8-34.

Thomas G. Pavel, "Fictional Beings," from *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard
UP, 1986), 11-42.

Barbara Newman, "God and the Goddesses," from *God and the Goddesses: Vision,
Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: U Penn P, 2005), 1-50.

Murray Smith, "On the Twofoldness of Character," *New Literary History* 42
(2011): 277-294.

1/15 **Foundations of medieval personification allegory**

Martianus Capella, from *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. William
Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson (New York: Columbia UP 1977): I.1-5, all of
Book II; III.221-222; IIX.803-810; IX.997-1000.

Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, trans. H. J. Thomson (Cambridge: Loeb Classical
Library, 1949).

Nota bene: Syllabus very much subject to change!

2/26 *Plaint of Nature*
+ selected literary-critical essays

****Abstract for final paper** is due to me by email on Sunday, March 1.**

3/3 **Agents**
Chaucer, "Knight's Tale," parts 1-3

3/5 **Fiction, figure, ontology, & force** [posted reading response]
Knight's Tale, part 4
+ Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*
+ Augustine, selection from *The City of God*
+ Jean Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*

3/10 **The "dramatic hypothesis"**
Chaucer, General Prologue & Miller's Prologue
+ literary criticism on the "dramatic hypothesis" (Lawton, Spearing)

****Final paper** is due to me by email on Thursday, March 19.**