

**BRIEF ENCOUNTERS: MEDIEVAL SHORT NARRATIVES, MICHAELMAS 2018**

**Description**

Short narrative forms have been much less studied than their longer counterparts (the *roman* or *chanson de geste*, for example), but are the locus for significant experimentation with and development of storytelling practice. This course considers a range of genres, in both verse and prose, to explore modes of storytelling, and the specificities of their brevity, across *lais*, *fabliaux*, exemplary literature (including fables and miracles), and *nouvelles*. You will also study the presentation and circulation of tales in manuscript compilations.

**Organisation**

5 one-hour seminars (with some time to discuss previous essays before or after)  
4 essays (2000-3000 words each)

The course offers the opportunity to examine a range of French short narratives from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. In consultation with the tutors, students will determine the topics that most interest them from the options listed below. More detailed bibliographies for each topic are available from the tutors.

The Special Subjects are taught in the first two terms of the course. You will normally meet your Special Subject Tutor four times during the term and will write a number of essays which your Tutor will read, mark, and discuss with you. You will then select what you and your Tutor think are the best essays, and submit clean copies of the final versions as a portfolio for examination. Special Subject submissions may comprise one or two essays to a total maximum word length of between 5,000 and 7,000 words (the word count includes footnotes, but excludes bibliography). You are required to submit the final version of the portfolio according to the instructions set out in the MSt course handbook by noon on Thursday week 10 of the term in which the Special Subject was taken.

**Topics**

- *Fabliaux*
- *Fables*
- *Lais* and 'nouvelles courtoises'
- *Exempla* and 'contes moraux'
- Miracle stories and saints' lives
- Prose *nouvelles* and shorter *dits*
- Manuscript transmission

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### Useful Websites

- Studying medieval French at Oxford, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~fmml0059/OFOx1.htm>
- Les Archives de Littérature du Moyen Âge (ARLIMA), <https://www.arlima.net>
- Also see the medieval tutors' resources on WebLearn (undergraduate site, Paper VI)

### Preparatory reading

Croizy-Naquet, Catherine, Harf-Lancner, Laurence, and Szkilnik, Michelle, *Faire court: l'esthétique de la brièveté dans la littérature du moyen âge*, ed. (Paris: Presse de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 2011)

Labère, Nelly, *Défricher le jeune plant: étude du genre de la nouvelle au moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 2006)

Zumthor, Paul, 'Classes and genres in medieval literature', in *A Medieval French Miscellany: Papers of the 1970 Kansas Conference on Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, Humanistic Studies 42 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1972), pp. 27-36