

**FIELD II: Medieval literature**  
**Revised: December 2018**  
**Effective: January 2020**

**STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS**

Lists, especially those of secondary literature, should be supplemented by other works chosen by students, in consultation with medievalist faculty members, and considering their other interests or aims for the dissertation.

Within the following list, read with attention to connections between texts; make comparisons between texts in a single genre and across genres. On the exam, respond to questions directly, precisely, and thoughtfully. Make sure you have a thesis and a structured argument with supporting examples. Make connections between multiple primary texts and incorporate relevant criticism in a way that indicates your familiarity with a variety of critical perspectives. The Medieval literature exam requires that you show mastery of a thousand years' worth of primary texts plus more than a century of scholarly discourse; display your awareness of historical and cultural background to these texts, adding appropriate background reading to the texts listed here. The introductions to primary texts, and their suggested bibliography, are an excellent starting point for such background.

## READING LIST

### I. Old English

This list contains the bare minimum you should read. The more you read the better prepared you will be for your exams. As you work your way through the primary texts, be sure to read the introduction and notes of the editions you are using. In addition, read one or two recent articles specific to each primary text.

#### A. Primary

##### Poetry:

*The Dream of the Rood, Genesis B, Christ II, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Maxims I, Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, any 8–10 riddles from the Exeter Book, The Wife's Lament, Beowulf, Judith, The Battle of Maldon, Cædmon's Hymn, The Battle of Brunanburh*

##### Prose:

OE translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*: The story of Cædmon  
*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Cynewulf and Cyneheard  
Wulfstan: *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*  
Ælfric: any two homilies or saints' lives  
King Alfred: Preface to Gregory's *Pastoral Care*

#### B. Secondary

Begin with a general history of Anglo-Saxon England such as Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* or James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*.

Read one or two histories of OE literature. Recommended: Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*; Malcom Godden and Michael Lapidge, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*; and R. D. Fulk and Christopher Cain, eds., *A History of Old English Literature*.

Read around in some essay collections. Remember that the quality of these essays will vary. Be certain to read most of *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles. Other collections include:  
Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr, eds., *Companion to Old English Poetry*  
Helen Damico and Alexandra H. Olsen, eds., *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*  
Martin Green, ed., *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*  
R. M. Liuzza, ed., *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*  
Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores W. Frese, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*  
Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*  
Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*  
Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*

## II. Middle English

Apart from Chaucer, the place to start for introductions to Middle English literature and criticism of it is the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* (ed. Sievers and Hartung; now up to 11 volumes). *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* is an excellent resource for overviews of periods and topics, but it does not, in general, focus on individual works or authors. There are a variety of *Companions* that are useful, such as *A Companion to Middle English Prose* (ed. A. S. G. Edwards).

Anthologies such as Burrow and Turville-Petre's *A Book of Middle English* and Bennett and Smithers' *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* will give a sense of the range of Middle English genres, but should not substitute for extensive reading of primary texts.

Some reading in medieval history (broadly defined) is strongly advised, and should be chosen in consultation with medievalist faculty. You might begin with George Holmes, *The Later Middle Ages, 1272-1485*, or Horrox and Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500*.

### A. Chaucer

#### 1. Primary

*Canterbury Tales*: Fragment I (General Prologue; Knight's, Miller's, Reeve's, Cook's Tales); Fragment III (Wife of Bath's, Friar's, Summoner's Tales); Fragment IV (Clerk's, Merchant's Tales); Fragment V (Squire's, Franklin's Tales); also the Pardoner's Tale and Nun's Priest's Tale. (Include prologues, epilogues and links, wherever these appear).

*Troilus and Criseyde*.

At least one of the dream visions (*Book of the Duchess, Parliament of Fowls, House of Fame, Legend of Good Women*)

#### 2. Secondary

The following list, in chronological order, is chosen to represent a range of approaches since the beginning of the twentieth century, rather than going for "the best" criticism. Kittredge published in 1916; Robertson in 1962—some ideas will be dated, but criticism builds on previous ideas, so it is useful to have a sense of the history of critical approaches to Chaucer.

George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry*

D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*

E. T. Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer*

John Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*

Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*

Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Estates Satire*

David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*

James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his French Contemporaries*

John Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland*  
Steve Ellis, ed., *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*

## B. Romance

### 1. Primary

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

*Sir Orfeo* and 1–2 other “Breton lays”

At least one Arthurian work besides SGGK, chosen from among Thomas Malory, *Morte Darthur*; the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*; the *Stanzaic Morte Arthure*; *Arthour and Merlin*; *Ywain and Gawain*; the “popular” Arthurian romances at the TEAMS website: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text-online>

Some “historical” romance: *King Horn*, the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, etc.

### 2. Secondary

Derek Brewer, *Arthurian Romance*

Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*

Radulescu, Raluca, and Cory Rushton, eds., *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*

## C. Religious Writings

### 1. Primary

William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (B-version)

At least one of the Middle English mystics: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Julian of Norwich’s *Showings*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Richard Rolle’s *Fire of Love*, Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*

2-3 saints’ lives, preferably from different periods: for example, Life of Kenelm from *The South English Legendary* (13<sup>th</sup> century) and Life of Katherine from the Auchinleck Manuscript (14<sup>th</sup> century)

A work from the “Wooing Group”: *Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meidhad*, lives of St Margaret and St Katherine

### 2. Secondary

David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*.

Anne Clarke Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature*.

Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse*.

To browse: *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*.

## D. Drama

### 1. Primary

*Second Shepherds' Play* (Wakefield)

Browse the plays of a single cycle (York, Wakefield, N-Town)

Students intending to study early modern drama should read more extensively in medieval drama, including *Everyman*.

### 2. Secondary

Clifford Davidson, *Deliver us from Evil*

David Klausner and Karen Marsalek, eds, "*Bring Furth the Pagants*": *Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*

## E. Shorter Works

### 1. Primary

A selection of lyrics; a debate poem such as *The Owl and the Nightingale*; selections from *The Peterborough Chronicle* (especially if you are interested in the transition from Old to Middle English); a few Paston letters

### 2. Secondary

Duncan, Thomas, ed., *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*.