

Autour de la table du Moyen Âge au 18^e siècle :
A Survey of French Literature through Food



Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry – Janvier, c. 1410

Course Description:

Many stories begin with the telling of a story around a communal table – a narrative frame that we find reflected in the setting of our classroom discussions of texts and cultural objects. This course will engage with literary representations of food and the meal in their symbolic, material, and social dimensions, guiding students towards increased awareness of the significance of food and communal eating in their own lives, as well as in the constitution and imagination of gender and community. Focus will be placed on developing foundational techniques such as close reading and textual analysis, alongside methodological strategies for navigating the gulf between representation and real-world behaviors, between literature and anthropology. To complete coursework, students will write analytical papers while also learning to use new information technologies, including social media and research presentation websites.

Assignments:

- Reading & reading questions for each class
- Presentations of 5-10 minutes throughout the semester
- 3 essays (2 pages / 3-4 pages / 6-8 pages) & revisions of second essay
- Research presentation using the website Storify (visual/textual), related to second essay

Course Objectives

This is French literature survey course. You are required to have completed a full program of language study (typically 4-6 semesters) before taking this course. However, you are still learning French, and improvement of language skills is a major goal in this course. Our objectives this semester are:

1. to gain increased oral and written competency and fluency in French
2. to write analytical essays in French
3. to become acquainted with a wide variety of French texts
4. to learn to read and analyze literary language, images, and style
5. to learn to familiarize ourselves with the cultural and historical context of literary texts
6. to learn to effectively present our ideas to others

Schedule (biweekly, 14 weeks):

- **Course 1a:** Introduction: Why food?
- **Course 1b:** Meals and stories: Chrétien de Troyes – selections of *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*
- **Course 2a:** Animal and human: Chrétien cont. – *Yvain*
 - <http://expositions.bnf.fr/arthur/livres/yvain/index.htm>
- **Course 2b:** Sacred food: The Grail: Chrétien – selections of *Perceval*

- **Course 3a:** Fast and feast: life of Marie d'Oignies; fabliau, "Le prêtre qui menga mûres"
- **Course 4a:** Women, bodies, and food:
 - Fabliau – "The Partridges"; Caroline Walker Bynum – "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (1985), pp. 1-25
- **Course 4b:** Food scarcity and theft: Marie de France, fables
- **Course 5a:** Pastoral and anti-pastoral – virtuous and hedonic tables:
 - François Villon – selections of *Le Testament Villon* (1461-1462), "Les contre-dicz de Franc-Gontier"; Pierre d'Ailly "Combien est misérable"; Phillipe de Vitry, "Le dit de Franc-Gontier"
- **Course 5b:** François Villon, cont. "Ballade des pendus"
- **Course 6a:** From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: Rupture or Continuity?:
 - Montaigne - "De l'expérience" (III:13)
- **Course 6b:** Moderation, excess, education 1: Montaigne, cont.
- **Course 7a:** Moderation, excess, education 2: Rabelais – *Gargantua*
- **Course 7b:** Food, politics, satire: Rabelais – *Gargantua* cont.
- **Course 8a:** Bacchus, poetry, moderation: Pierre de Ronsard – "À son page," and Joachim du Bellay – "D'un vigneron à Bacchus"
- **Course 8b:** Bacchus, poetry, and the blason: Rémi Belleau – "La Cerise"
- **Course 9a:** De la Renaissance aux 17^e et 18^e siècles – new forms and standards for language:
 - In class: discussion of frontispieces from contemporary publications: the *Cuisinier françois* (1651, 1698), *Délices de la campagne* (1656), *L'art de bien traiter* (1674)
 - Patrick Rambourg, *Histoire de la cuisine*, VI, "Une nouvelle ère culinaire"
- **Course 9b:** "Taste" and social class:
 - Rambourg, X, "Vers un art de la table"; Molière – *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670)
- **Course 10a:** "Taste" and social class: Molière – *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, cont.
- **Course 10b:** Staging the table: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, performed by la Comédie française
- **Course 11a:** Senses, knowledge, and *gourmandise* 1:
 - Selections of *Le Traité des sensations*, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac
 - Image: *Les premiers convives de la société du Caveau*
- **Course 11b:** Senses 2
 - Condillac, cont.
 - Images: *Les Attributs de la Bonne Chère*; *Le Déjeuner d'huîtres*
- **Course 12a:** Food and Enlightenment(s) 1: Voltaire – *Candide*
- **Course 12b:** Food and Enlightenment(s) 2: Voltaire – *Candide*, cont.
- **Course 13a:** Food and Enlightenment(s) 3: *L'encyclopédie*; "Le dessert"; "Cuisine"
- **Course 13b:** Food and Enlightenment(s) 4: *L'encyclopédie* – "Goût"; "Gourmandise"
- **Course 14a:** Food, decadence, and revolution: Casanova – *Histoire de ma vie*; Epicurean episodes; <http://expositions.bnf.fr/casanova/>
- **Course 14b:** Reinterpretation in a modern context: *Marie Antoinette* (2006), Sofia Coppola