Writing an essay about Old and Middle English Literature: some additional style sheet notes and other pointers

When drawing up your reading list, use relevant course bibliographies as well as the usual databases, e.g. *International Medieval Bibliography* (http://cpps.brepolis.net/bmb/), and *Literature Online* (https://literature.proquest.com).

Other useful online resources:

- Middle English Dictionary: quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/
- Old English Dictionaries:
  - Bosworth-Toller dictionary (complete): https://bosworthtoller.com
  - Toronto Dictionary of Old English (A-I): https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/
- York Medieval Romances Database: www.middleenglishromance.org.uk
- Luminarium: www.luminarium.org
- TEAMS medieval texts online: d.lib.rochester.edu/teams
- Digital *Index of Middle English Verse* (*DIMEV*): https://www.dimev.net
- Digital Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English (LALME): http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme_frames.html

NB. BA and MA theses do not count as reliable secondary literature. Please only use peer-reviewed, high quality articles and books to support your argument.

Quoting in the original

Please always quote in Old or Middle English. In the case of Old English or Early Middle English, please provide a translation for your quotation as a footnote. When quoting Middle English, translations are only necessary for difficult words, and should be inserted in [brackets] just after the word. Here is an example:

"The beginning of the "General Prologue" of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* creates in the audience an expectation that what follows will be a romance, by immediately foregrounding the setting of the action in spring, the traditional time for romances: "What that Aprill with his shoures soote [sweet showers] / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote" (General Prologue, ll. 1-2).

As in the above example, be careful to provide a reference that your reader will easily be able to find even in another edition (i.e. indicating book, chapter, and line number rather than page number) when quoting an edited primary source such as *Beowulf* or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Do not indicate as a reference the editor of the text, but rather a version of the title of your work. For instance:

> The author of the *Wanderer* uses anaphora (repetition of the first elements of a sequence) to foreground the transience of all earthly things, as evident in: "Hwær

cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?" (*The Wanderer*, l. 92).[1]

Finding the correct letters

Please use Æ/æ (ash), Þ/þ (thorn), Ð/ð (eth), and Ʒ/ʒ (yogh) wherever they are used in your primary source. The following link explains how to find these letters on your keyboard:

http://www.csun.edu/~sk36711/WWW/Style%20Guide/fonts.html

Referencing manuscripts

For manuscripts, adopt the following format: Place-name, name of library, MS shelfmark, folio numbers
e.g.:
London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A XV, f. 105r
Exeter, Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, ff. 100r-205v

In-Text Quotations

Quoting from Old or Middle English is rather similar to quoting from poetry. Editions of Old or Middle English literature usually include numbered lines which must be referenced when quoting, and it is important to retain the structure of the text.

When quoting up to three lines of Old or Middle English poetry or prose, use in-text quotations. Indicate the line breaks when you are quoting more than one line by inserting a **slash** (with a space on either side of it) between the quoted lines.

In the dispute between the Owl and the Nightingale, the latter tells the former to "schild þine svikeldom vram þe liʒte, / & hud þat woʒe amon þe riʒte!" (lines 163– 164), implying that the treachery and wickedness of the owl are inherent traits that can only be hidden, rather than worked on or improved.

The same also applies to Modern English translations of Old and Middle English texts, if the editions include numbered lines. Otherwise, refer to the page number. When quoting from Old English poetry, indicate a caesura by adding three spaces in the middle of the line.

NB Due to time constraints, translations are not necessary during in-class essays. Additionally, it is acceptable to paraphrase parts of the text as long as you quote the specific words or phrases that you wish to analyze.

Block Quotations

When quoting more than three lines of Old or Middle English poetry or prose, block quotations become necessary. The same rules apply as for Modern English poetry or prose,

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[1] "Where is the horse gone? Where the rider? Where the giver of treasure?"

though as with the in-text quotations, be sure to include special characters, reproduce the spelling faithfully, reference the line numbers, and include translations where appropriate.

Some things to think about (not necessarily all relevant to all theses or papers)

Philology is the study of words. We do **not** expect you to know all the details of phonological, orthographical, or dialectal developments during the medieval period. But we do ask you to be a little bit of a 'word nerd', to look *at* words, to look *up* words, and to consider where they have come from and how their meanings may have developed. When we study medieval literature, we have only the written word, but we should remember that the spoken word was at least as important as the written, and that even words that had been recorded on the page were often read aloud. So we should consider the sound of a text.

 We should also remember that texts were not circulated in uniform, printed editions approved and controlled by an author; rather texts were copied into manuscripts and often abbreviated or expanded, altered and adapted, in the process: the *mise-en-page* might also change, and texts also appeared alongside different texts or images in each manuscript, so the 'reading contexts' were hugely variable. So we should pay attention to the physical form in which a text was preserved. The form in which you encounter texts now (in standardised printed editions, or online, under the name of an author) may be very different to the form in which a medieval reader met a text, and this may contribute to very different 'readings'.

 As Swiss students, you have the advantage of living in a multilingual society and being familiar with both Romance and Germanic languages: Medieval England was also a multilingual society, and English is a fusion of French and Germanic elements. For this reason, you are likely to be better at English philology than native English speakers!

 Your BA thesis in Philology should focus on primary texts. You should devise a project that enables you to look in detail at selected passages of your chosen texts. You should cite these passages **in Old or Middle English** and discuss the language of these passages in detail. Do not simply explain 'what the writer means', but explore *how* the writer communicates -- why does she choose a particular word or phrase? Does he use Latinate or Germanic words and if so does this create a particular effect? If the medieval English words look like Modern English equivalents, might the meaning have shifted slightly, and need some explanation? (Use the Middle English Dictionary or an Etymological Dictionary that shows the diachronic development of a word). Is the text in prose or verse and if in verse what sort, to what effect? Is the text a translation or adaptation and if so how does it relate to its original? Does the writer foreground herself through direct address to the reader? Does s/he draw attention to cited 'authorities' and if so which ones, and why? (These are examples: not all of these questions will be relevant to all texts, and there are plenty of other questions...).

 The more historically remote a period is, the more tempting it is to fall into generalizations, such as 'in medieval times, everyone believed in God'. Avoid these! Question your assumptions! How could we possibly *know* what everyone believes *now*, let alone then? Try to think what might be a more reasonable statement, e.g. 'In the medieval world, the Church had great power and influence, and religion is an important concern of many medieval texts'. Use secondary sources to back up these statements about the context in which the texts you discuss were created.