Waterloo Region Record

Project aims to make French literature more accessible

Research project: A University of Waterloo project, dubbed MARGOT, makes French literature -- including the influential Roman de la rose, the medieval French poem that teaches about the art of love -- more accessible to the world.

Researchers: Christine McWebb and Delbert Russell, professors of French studies at UW are directors and principal researchers of MARGOT, or Moyen Age et Renaissance Groupe de Recherche -- Ordinateurs et Textes.

Project focus: The bilingual research project offers a treasure trove of French medieval studies on the internet for experts and the public. It seeks to make French literature more accessible to experts, students and the public.

The project explores text in its broadest sense, embracing not only written material but iconography as well.

Based at UW, the project focuses on a niche in French medieval studies where there is a lack of available resources. It offers a reliable encyclopedia, with contributors undergoing a form of peer-review by experts in the area.

It publishes fully searchable editions of either generally inaccessible texts from the French Middle Ages and the Early Modern period (the Ancien RÃgime) or of texts in connection with a specific project from the same time period.

MARGOT presents electronic editions of medieval saints' lives written in the French of medieval England, French women writers from the Ancien rÃgime and excerpts from the influential Roman de la rose (1236-1278), complete with about 80 images from 20 manuscripts dating from the 14th and 15th centuries.

The Roman de la rose is a medieval French poem that entertains and teaches others about the art of love.

Such medieval manuscripts frequently encompass written text and iconographic image with miniatures, illustrations and illuminations and rubrication (all part of the medieval process of manuscript making) as textual markers.

The graphic and electronic conceptualization of the medieval manuscript provides narrative, symbolic and pictorial expressions where the image is integrated into the text.

For example, the Debating the Roman de la rose in Text and Image project represents an expandable digital multimedia and multi-faceted teaching and research resource that can be used in a course on medieval literature and culture or in other areas of cultural studies.

The e-manuscript mimics the medieval commentary tradition, where text, gloss, miniature and marginalia form the composite book-space containing a diverse array of information.

The multi-faceted nature of the MARGOT project is attractive to literary scholars and art historians, graduate students and undergraduates, as well as people interested in medieval iconography. Its success relies on collaborative efforts involving researchers at UW and colleagues from elsewhere in Canada, the United States and Britain.

Website: The website (in English and French) can be viewed at http://margot.uwaterloo.ca.

Published: The Roman de la rose in Text and Image: a Multimedia Teaching and Research Tool is published online by MARGOT.

Source: University of Waterloo communications and public affairs department.