

MEDIEVAL STUDIES PROGRAM

First-Year Writing Seminars

Spring 2010

MEDVL 1101 ASPECTS OF MEDIEVAL CULTURE:

Section 101 Encountering Nature in Medieval England

Medieval England was filled with bustling villages, cities, and manors. But vast stretches of forest and fen --not to mention a roaring sea--surrounded these civilized spots. Terrible monsters terrorized the sloping highlands, sea creatures slid through the waters, and elves, outlaws, and devils lurked beneath the greenwood leaves. This class questions what the wilderness meant to medieval people. In a series of formal and informal writing exercises, we will probe the boundaries between human and beast, civilization and wilderness, natural and supernatural, coming to a closer understanding of how it felt to live surrounded by a natural world much less tame than ours. Texts include *Beowulf*, parts of the *Canterbury Tales*, romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Robin Hood ballads, and more.

TR 11:40-12:55

Sarah Harlan-Haughey

26077

Section 102 Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Modern American life challenges our will to live ethically and to imagine a world ruled by love and justice. A late medieval version of this crisis haunted the Italian poet Dante, whose obsession with love and justice governs his vision of the afterlife. The poem recounting this vision remains unmatched for its intellectual and imaginative force, spiritual audacity, and political rage. Through selected readings, we will encounter these aspects of the poem as well as Dante's distinctive treatment of topics including courtly love, Christian theology, and intellectual history. The course will also emphasize the ways in which Dante's poetic prowess persuades readers to believe his insistence on the truth of his vision. Writing will improve through close reading, five essays, and class discussions.

TR 8:40-9:55

Ashleigh Imus

26083

Section 103 *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon World

Beowulf is a monument of English literature, long admired for its gritty plot, its lyrical poetry, and its sheer awesomeness. This class will focus on situating *Beowulf* in its social context as one great piece of literature among many--we will have the opportunity to explore a wide range of Old English literature, as well as some of the more memorable Icelandic sagas. Expect monsters and mayhem, blood and boasts and (if you're good) Angelina Jolie in high heels. We will write several papers over the course of the semester, all of them aimed to improve basic analytical skills and teach you to write with passion as well as precision. If you love dead languages, ancient history, or monsters, this is the class for you.

TR 1:25-2:40

Ben Weber

26085

Section 104 Gender and Friendship in Pre-Modern Times

Many of us take for granted friendships between men and women, but did such friendships exist in pre-modern times? If so, what sorts of friendships were they? This course explores evidence in the letters of St. Jerome, a central Christian figure who was remarkable for his correspondence with women. We will also read the controversial 12th-century letters of Abelard and Heloise in order to question what sort of

friendship remains after love has gone tragically wrong. Other readings include letters of St. Catherine of Siena to her mentor Raymond of Capua, and excerpts from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a 14th-century text claiming to offer friendly advice to women in need. Writing and critical analysis will develop through close reading, discussions, six essays and additional written exercises.

TR 10:10-11:25

Ashleigh Imus

27050

Section 105 The Fair and the Foul in the Middle Ages

Purity and filth are important contrasting terms in a wide range of medieval literary texts. In this course, we will explore this contrast in selections from Leviticus, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *Piers Plowman*, saints' lives and selected medieval and Celtic romances. We hope to contrast the tradition of medieval bawdry and the medieval aspiration to unearthly purity, a series of contrasts that will illumine the medieval world view. Assignments will include formal essays and in-class writing exercises.

TR 2:55-4:10

Amanda Mita

26101

MEDVL 1102 LITERATURE OF CHIVALRY:

Section 101 Get Lai'd: Barbarian Roots of Courtly Romance

Whence did medieval courtly romance come? (And what the heck does "whence" mean?) This course aims to expose students to the literature of the "barbarian fringe." We will consider its impact on what is deemed more "courtly" literature. Students will examine the reworking of traditional material in medieval literature with special attention paid to the usage and effect of archaic language in modern translations of these texts. Assigned readings include *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Lais* of Marie de France, *Saga of the Volsungs*, and various selections of the Irish Ulster and Finn cycles. The texts feature topics ranging from love and war to shape-shifting and genealogies. Students will be responsible for a weekly reading journal, short response papers, and longer expository essays.

MW 7:30-8:45p

Matthew Hanson

26102

Also of Interest:

ENGL 1185 WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE:

Seminar 112 Medieval Supernatural

What supernatural "other worlds" did medieval people imagine as parallel to their world of ordinary experience? In this class we will examine a range of medieval literary texts that depict and complicate the boundary between humans and their supernatural counterparts. As we analyze the worlds these texts construct (spiritual realms, dream worlds, and magical kingdoms), our writing and discussion will address whether and how they conflict, as well as what they reveal about human identity, the tension between individuals and communities, and the desire to connect with something beyond what is seen. Readings may include Arthurian legends, Breton *lais*, dream visions, saints' lives, the Norse epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, and mystical texts of the great medieval spiritual writers.

TR 2:55-4:10

Corey Wronski-Mayersak

26384

Note: all Writing Seminars are 3 credits.