

**ENGLISH 312: Medieval Drama
Course Syllabus**



Detail from "Adoration of the Shepherds." *The Hours Bonaparte Ghislien*, ca. 1500.
BL MS Yates Thompson 29, f. 15 v.

Instructor: C. Fee

Meeting Time: MWF 1:10-2:00 PM

Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 303

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Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00 AM, and by appointment

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<http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/courses/English312/Medieval Drama Homepage.html>

Required Texts:

Beadle, Richard, and Alan J. Fletcher. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Bevington, David, ed. *Medieval Drama*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1975.

Course Objectives and Structure:

Medieval Drama: the dinner-theater of late Medieval Europe! Once considered merely the poor (and distant!) relation of Shakespearean Theater, Medieval drama has now emerged as a vibrant field of study in its own right. We will explore conflicting theories concerning the origin and development of Medieval drama, examine its social roles, discuss issues of text and performance, and compare the relative merits of "good literature" and "good drama." We will read examples drawn from a variety of genres of drama, and we will view recorded performances of several plays. This course will combine classroom lecture and discussion, independent research, a great deal of collaborative work, and the production of a Medieval play. We will stage our own versions of the *Chester Nativity Play* and *Play of the Shepherds* during the final week of the term; our Christmas pageant in the College Chapel will combine religious reverence with fun folklore, silly humor, and biting social commentary; sacred meets secular as you've never seen before! Merry Medieval!! Book your tickets now!!!

Course Requirements and Assignments:

Daily Preparation & Participation:	10%
Group Presentation & Individual Paper:	10%
Thematic Paper:	10%
Dramaturgical Exercises and Paper:	15%
Participation in Production:	20%
Midterm Exam:	15%
Final Exam:	<u>20%</u>
	100%

ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.

Preparation & Participation:

You are expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable. You need not be a big talker to do well in this class (although it usually doesn't hurt!), but you **do** need to be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This class also requires a great deal of group work and the collaborative class activity of putting on a play; full participation in all required activities is presupposed.

Group Presentation & Papers:

We all will participate in the final production of our play at the end of the term, but rehearsals and performances make up only a part of the work that goes into any theatrical production. In order to tackle successfully the task of producing a Medieval play, we will divide into a number of groups, each of which will be responsible for a particular set of preliminary activities and functions. These groups will include the following: 1) Scenery/Staging and Final Video production and posting; 2) Props and Costumes and Webpage Construction; 3) Translation and Filming of Final Production; 4) Direction and Final Editing of Video in preparation for internet posting. These groups will be responsible for researching and implementing their aspects of the production, and each member will write a short (2000-word) paper describing his or her personal portion of the research and final product. Individual papers are due the day after the presentation is given. Each group also will give a detailed report to the class; this report should take the form of a slideshow or webpage, complete with pictures and suitable for inclusion on our course webpage.

Thematic Paper:

Any critical examination concerning depictions of the Christmas Season—depictions which often seem to blend spiritual and humanitarian concerns regarding social justice with crass and shameless materialism—raises a number of fruitful thematic questions, both about Medieval drama and audiences and about our own 21st century perceptions of these issues. How have the stories of Christmas been re-interpreted in movies and television, for example? In what ways do modern renderings of the Holiday Season stray from the letter and spirit of the source materials? In what ways might such re-tellings honor and celebrate their sources? Drawing such imperfect parallels is a process fraught with perils, to be sure, but it is important that we attempt to identify that Medieval material which speaks most eloquently to Modern concerns.

To this end, you are to research and to write a 2500-word paper comparing and contrasting the concerns and approach of the Chester *Nativity Play* and/or the *Play of the Shepherds* with any recent film or documentary which seems to you to deal with similar themes. Considering the propensity of Medieval playwrights to go for the cheap yuck while exploring a serious theme, *Scrooged* might be as good a choice as a documentary on Christmas traditions. This paper should draw upon several (3-5) published reviews and critiques of your chosen film from major news sources, as well as a like number (that is, another 3-5) of critical articles on Medieval Drama in general and/or on the Chester plays in particular. We'll discuss appropriate sources in class. No more than a third of this essay should comprise necessary plot summary; the balance should represent a serious attempt to find common ground between Medieval and Modern concerns. Critical analysis calls for sensitivity, to be sure, but it also demands a rigorous attempt to interrogate our own preconceptions, as well as those of others; take this opportunity to say something substantial about the subtexts (Medieval and Modern) of dramatic attempts to deal with larger moral issues.

Dramaturgical Exercises and Paper:

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2001) defines a *dramaturg* as "a literary advisor" for a theatrical production. In this class, *dramaturgy* refers to the attempt to understand the world of the original play so that our version of that play remains true to its essential spirit. Simply put, *dramaturgy* concerns researching the context of a dramatic work and implementing such knowledge of context to inform and enliven a production of that work. In other words, we have to have a sense of what a play meant and how it worked for its original audience in order to be able to understand how best to mount a version of that play for a contemporary audience. Each Friday we will dedicate 10-15 minutes to the study and application of dramaturgy, under the tutelage of our extremely able PLA and various guest speakers. The purpose of these sessions will be to help us to understand the process and function of dramaturgy so that we can bring such knowledge and skills to bear upon our own 21st century adaptation of a Medieval play. Thus, although we will necessarily update the play to make it pertinent and engaging for our audience, we must do so in a way which is true to the spirit of the original play. The final paper for this course will be a 2000-word assessment of how the dramaturgical exercises worked, how they related to our production, and how our production showed specific evidence of thoughtful dramaturgical reflection.

Participation in the Production and Out-of-Class Rehearsals:

Participation in the production is a fundamental component of the course. **The time spent in formal, scheduled, out-of-class rehearsals attended by the instructor and PLA will far exceed the hours necessary for the Fourth Credit Hour.** This participation should be interesting and engaging, but it also requires extracurricular commitment in the form of rehearsal time, personal time devoted to memorizing lines, time and energy spent tracking down props and costume parts, etc. This class will be a lot of fun, but don't take it if you can't commit the extra time and energy.

Exams:

There will be two exams, each of which will combine short-answer identification of key terms and concepts with essay questions. The purpose of the exams is to give you an opportunity to display how well you have absorbed the reading and discussion material. I will distribute extremely detailed review guidelines closer to the dates of the exams.

Learning Goals:

This course is designed with a wide range of specific learning goals: In addition to mastering general knowledge of and gaining conversance with Medieval Drama, students in this course will develop a substantial understanding of the practical realities of staging a theatrical

production. Within the outline of such broad strokes students will develop some detailed knowledge of the relevant literary, historical, social, religious, and philosophical context of Medieval Europe, as well as a good functional knowledge of dramaturgy and the importance of being cognizant of anachronism.

Thus this course is of special interest to those with an affinity for the Medieval period, specifically the history of the theater in the British Isles, as well as to those who study religion or theater, or to those who wish to explore the confluence between text and production. Most importantly, this course is especially appropriate for anyone who would care to plumb the depths of the relationship between the Medieval and the modern.

Moreover, the experiential component of this course affords a rich opportunity not just to learn but to put into action: Not incidentally, this course is designed to enrich and to be enriched by potential opportunities to put theoretical knowledge to practical use, to test the ideas of the classroom in the crucible of the stage.

Outcomes and Assessment:

How will we know that students in this course have achieved the course objectives? Students will demonstrate their growing mastery of the material in a number of ways: Literary and historical knowledge will be cultivated and illustrated through class participation; retention and synthesis of the major themes of the course will be facilitated and manifested in the successful completion of the written work and exams. A successful production at the end of the term will both provide a fitting experiential “lab component” for the theoretical underpinnings of the course and offer a unique opportunity for students to illustrate their grasp of the convergence and divergence of Medieval and modern ideas. Since video recordings of such productions are widely disseminated via the internet, my colleagues at other institutions regularly offer feedback in this regard. A much more significant measure of the success of this course, however, would be evidence of abiding student interest in and conversance with the development of Medieval Drama, and most especially knowledge of and engagement with the religious, philosophical, and historical background of later drama in English, perhaps most notably that of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. This course will have been successful if students—perhaps long after the present semester— are empowered and inspired to choose to seek out and to attempt to contextualize dramatic literature and theatrical productions with thematic roots in the Middle Ages. If it results in or enriches subsequent forays into the theater, and most especially the early modern English theater most closely related to Medieval Drama, this course will have been amply successful.

Curricular Concerns:

This course has curricular connections to majors and minors in Religion and in Theatre Arts, and is recommended for students seeking Secondary Certification in English.

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change

ENGLISH 312: Medieval Drama Course Schedule

Reading assignments are in **Bold Face**

Reading Assignments should be completed **before** the class period for which they are listed.

- M 9/1: Introduction to Course. Discuss Syllabus & Assignments.
W 9/3: Introduction to Medieval languages; how to read Middle English. **Bevington** xvii-xxii.
F 9/5: Introduction to Medieval Drama: **Bevington** 3-8; Plays A1-A8.
M 9/8: Tenth-Century Versions of the Visit to the Sepulchre: **Bevington** 21-24; Plays B9-B12. **Beadle** Chapter 1: Introduction.
W 9/10: Early Easter Drama: **Bevington** 31-33; Plays C13-C16. VIDEO: *Quem Queritis?*
F 9/12: The Evolution of Christmas Drama: **Bevington** 51-55; Plays D17-D19.
M 9/15: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 75-80; Play 1 (*Adam*). **Beadle** Chapter 2: Theatricality.
W 9/17: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 137-138; Play 3 (*Daniel*).
F 9/19: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 202-203; Play 8 (*Passion*).
M 9/22: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 227-241; Play *The Banns* (N Town). **Beadle** Chapter 7: The N-Town Plays.
W 9/24: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 274-275; Play *The Killing of Abel* (Wakefield).
F 9/26: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 308; Play *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Brome).
VIDEO: *Abraham and Isaac*.
M 9/29: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 383-384; Play *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). **Beadle** Chapter 6: The Towneley Cycle.
W 10/1: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Play** *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). VIDEO: *The Second Shepherds' Pageant*.
F 10/3: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 409; Play *The Offering of the Magi* (Wakefield).
M 10/6: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 437; Play *Herod the Great* (Wakefield).
W 10/8: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 569; Play *The Crucifixion of Christ* (York). **Beadle** Chapter 4: The York Cycle.
F 10/10: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 580; Play *Christ's Death and Burial* (York).
VIDEO: From *The Passion*.

M 10/13: READING DAY: NO CLASS

- W 10/15: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 637-638; Play *The Last Judgment* (Wakefield). VIDEO: GB 2010 *Judgment is Good*.
F 10/17: **Play** *Noah* (Wakefield). VIDEO: GB 1999 *Noah*. Watch Toronto *Noah* video on reserve.
M 10/20: Morality Plays: **Bevington** 791-795 & 796-799; Play *The Castle of Perseverance*.
W 10/22: Morality Plays: **Play** *The Castle of Perseverance*. VIDEO: GB 2008 *Fast Times at Morality High*. **Beadle** Chapter 9: Morality Plays.
F 10/24: **MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE**. Read-through: *The Chester Nativity*.
M 10/27: Read-through: *The Chester Play of the Shepherds*.
W 10/29: **SCRIPT DUE FROM TRANSLATION GROUP**: Read-through: Script. **FULL OUT-OF-CLASS REHEARSALS BEGIN**.
F 10/31: **THEMATIC PAPER DUE**. Read-through: Script.
M 11/3: Saints' Plays: **Bevington** 661-665; Play *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby).
W 11/5: Saints' Plays: **Play** *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby). **Beadle** Chapter 10: Saints' Plays.
F 11/7: **Beadle** Chapter 11: Modern Productions; Xerox Peter Meredith.

M 11/10: Xerox Readings TBA by Translation Group.
W 11/12: PRESENTATION: Translation Group.
F 11/14: Xerox Readings TBA by Direction Group.
M 11/17: PRESENTATION: Direction Group.
W 11/19: Xerox Readings TBA by Staging Group.
F 11/21: PRESENTATION: Staging Group.
M 11/24: Xerox Readings TBA by Costuming Group. T-SHIRTS DUE.

W-F 11/26-11/28: THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS

M 12/1: PRESENTATION: Costuming Group.
W 12/3: IN-CLASS REHEARSAL. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE DUE.
F 12/5: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
M 12/8: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL. PRODUCTION PROGRAMS DUE.
W 12/10: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
F 12/12: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL. **FINAL PRODUCTION**

DRAMATURGICAL PAPER DUE THE MONDAY AFTER THE PRODUCTION

FINAL EXAMINATION IN DESIGNATED SLOT