

**ENGLISH 312: Medieval Drama
Course Syllabus**



Detail from the Wenhaston Doom Painting in Saint Peter's Church in Suffolk (ca.1500)
(Image Credit: The Suffolk Churches Site (www.suffolkchurches.co.uk), Simon Knott, 2005)

Instructor: C. Fee

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

Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 303

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Required Texts:

Beadle, Richard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

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

Course Objectives and Structure:

Medieval Drama: the summer-stock 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 performances of several plays on videotape and DVD. This course will combine classroom lecture and discussion, independent research, a great deal of collaborative work, and the staging of a Medieval play. As they were generally held outdoors, Medieval productions were staged at Whitsuntide (read: "around midsummer"), both because the weather was nicer and due to the length of the day. We will continue in this tradition by staging our own version of a side-splitting yet thought-provoking production during the final week of the term; this year's hilarious theme is *memento mori!* The Wakefield *Last*

Judgment is a play about serious themes concerning the end of the world and the punishment of sin, but with a twist: It contrasts Christ the Judge with hilarious and disgusting devils, tempering serious theology with a spoonful of the Comedy of Evil . It's an apocalyptic vision like you've never seen before! 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 DVD production and copying; 2) Props and Costumes and Webpage Construction; 3) Translation and Filming of Final Production on Digital Video; 4) Direction and Final Editing of Digital Video in preparation for DVD production. 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 examination concerning the end of the world, judgment, and apocalyptic visions raises a number of fruitful thematic questions, both about Medieval drama and audiences and about our own 21st century perceptions of these issues. How often is Armageddon depicted in movies, for example? And in such settings don't those who really deserve it often get their comeuppance in spectacular style? The end of days is rich fodder for cinematic genres ranging from that of a nuclear holocaust to that of a world pandemic, with zombies wandering everywhere in between. These fictional depictions both mask and highlight our

fears of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and new and frightening diseases, as recent H1N1 concerns underscored. 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 Wakefield *Last Judgment* with any recent film or documentary which seems to you to deal with similar themes. Considering the propensity of the Wakefield Master to go for the cheap yuck while exploring a serious theme, *Shaun of the Dead* might be as good a choice as a documentary on global warming. 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 Wakefield *Last Judgment* 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. 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:

Participation in the production is a fundamental component of the course. This participation should be interesting and fun, 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.

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.

- F 1/15: Introduction to Course. Discuss Syllabus & Assignments.
- M 1/18: Introduction to Medieval languages; how to read Middle English. **Bevington** xvii-xxii.
- W 1/20: Introduction to Medieval Drama: **Bevington** 3-8; Plays A1-A8.
- F 1/22: Tenth-Century Versions of the Visit to the Sepulchre: **Bevington** 21-24; Plays B9-B12. **Beadle** Chapter 1: Introduction.
- M 1/25: Early Easter Drama: **Bevington** 31-33; Plays C13-C16. VIDEO: *Quem Queritis?*
- W 1/27: The Evolution of Christmas Drama: **Bevington** 51-55; Plays D17-D19.
- F 1/29: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 75-80; Play 1 (*Adam*). **Beadle** Chapter 2: Theatricality.
- M 2/1: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 137-138; Play 3 (*Daniel*).
- W 2/3: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 202-203; Play 8 (*Passion*).
- F 2/5: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 227-241; Play *The Banns* (N Town). **Beadle** Chapter 6: The N-Town Plays.
- M 2/8: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 274-275; Play *The Killing of Abel* (Wakefield).
- W 2/10: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 308; Play *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Brome). VIDEO: *Abraham and Isaac*.
- F 2/12: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 383-384; Play *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). **Beadle** Chapter 5: The Towneley Cycle.
- M 2/15: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Play** *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). VIDEO: *The Second Shepherds' Pageant*.
- W 2/17: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 409; Play *The Offering of the Magi* (Wakefield). TODAY IS ASH WEDNESDAY: THE FIRST DAY OF LENT. *Memento Mori!* What better day?
- F 2/19: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 437; Play *Herod the Great* (Wakefield).
- M 2/22: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 569; Play *The Crucifixion of Christ* (York). **Beadle** Chapter 3: The York Cycle.
- W 2/24: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 580; Play *Christ's Death and Burial* (York). VIDEO: From *The Passion*.
- F 2/26: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 637-638; Play *The Last Judgment* (Wakefield).
- M 3/1: **Play** *Noah* (Wakefield). VIDEO: GB 1999 *Noah*. Watch Toronto *Noah* video on reserve.
- W 3/3: Morality Plays: **Bevington** 791-795 & 796-799; Play *The Castle of Perseverance*.
- F 3/5: Morality Plays: **Play** *The Castle of Perseverance*. **Beadle** Chapter 9: Morality Plays.
- M 3/6-F 3/14: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**
- M 3/15: **MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE**. Read-through: *The Last Judgment*.
- W 3/17: Read-through: *The Last Judgment*.
- F 3/19: SCRIPT DUE FROM TRANSLATION GROUP: Read-through: Script. FULL OUT-OF-CLASS REHEARSALS BEGIN.
- M 3/22: **THEMATIC PAPER DUE**. Read-through: Script.
- W 3/24: Saints' Plays: **Bevington** 661-665; Play *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby).
- F 3/26: Saints' Plays: **Play** *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby). **Beadle** Chapter 10: Saints' Plays.
- M 3/29: **Beadle** Chapter 11: Modern Productions; Xerox Peter Meredith.
- W 3/31: Xerox Readings TBA by Translation Group.

F 4/2-M 4/5: **NO CLASS: EASTER BREAK**
W 4/7: PRESENTATION: Translation Group.
TH 4/8 (FOLLOWS MONDAY SCHEDULE): Xerox Readings TBA by Direction Group.
F 4/9: PRESENTATION: Direction Group.
M 4/12: Xerox Readings TBA by Staging Group.
W 4/14: PRESENTATION: Staging Group.
F 4/16: Xerox Readings TBA by Costuming Group. T-SHIRTS DUE.
M 4/19: PRESENTATION: Costuming Group.
W 4/21: IN-CLASS REHEARSAL. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE DUE.
F 4/23: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
M 4/26: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL. PRODUCTION PROGRAMS DUE.
W 4/28: **(MONDAY SCHEDULE)** IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
F 4/30: **NO CLASS: FINAL PRODUCTION**
S 5/1: **CELEBRATION 2010 PERFORMANCE**

DRAMATURGICAL PAPER DUE THE MONDAY AFTER THE PRODUCTION

FINAL EXAMINATION IN DESIGNATED SLOT