

ENGLISH 312: Medieval Drama Course Syllabus



Detail from the Holkham Bible: England, second quarter of the 14th century. London, British Library MS Addit. 47682, f. 4r.
(Image Credit: Fitzgerald, Christina Marie, and John T. Sebastian. *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*. Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2012.)

Instructor: C. Fee

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

Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 307

Additional Rehearsal Times and Places by arrangement

Office: Breidenbaugh 314 E

Office Hours: MTU 2:00-4:00 PM, W 2:00-3:00 PM, and by appointment

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Peer Learning Associate: C. Walton

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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 video performances of several plays. 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 *You're Outta Here: The Story of Adam and Eve!* Combining the comic gender politics of the Anglo-Norman *Play of Adam* with the sweeping Creation elements of the Chester *Adam and Eve* and the crass humor of the Wakefield *Killing of Abel*, our version of the Medieval view of *Genesis* will touch upon serious themes concerning the creation of the world, original sin, and the first murder, but with a twist: It will highlight the ridiculous nature of sin, tempering serious theology with a spoonful of the Comedy of Evil. It's like a low-brow *Paradise Lost*, but with yucks! 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 Dissemination of Video; 2) Props and Costumes, Social Media Advertising, and Webpage Construction; 3) Translation and Filming of Final Production on Digital Video; 4) Direction and Final Editing of Digital Video in Preparation for Dissemination. 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 creation of the world, the fall from grace, sibling rivalry and the first murder 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 are such themes depicted in movies, for example? 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 our production with any recent film or documentary which seems to you to deal with similar themes. Considering the propensity of Medievals to go for the cheap yuck while exploring a serious theme, a schlock-fest horror movie or a cheezy comedy might be as good a choice as a documentary. 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 plays we are using 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 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. 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 what dramaturgy is, how dramaturgy was 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 exceed the hours necessary for the Fourth Credit Hour.** 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.

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 1/21: Introduction to Course. Discuss Syllabus & Assignments.
- W 1/23: Introduction to Medieval languages; how to read Middle English. **Bevington** xvii-xxii.
- F 1/25: Introduction to Medieval Drama: **Bevington** 3-8; Plays A1-A8.
- M 1/28: Tenth-Century Versions of the Visit to the Sepulchre: **Bevington** 21-24; Plays B9-B12. **Beadle** Chapter 1: Introduction.
- W 1/30: Early Easter Drama: **Bevington** 31-33; Plays C13-C16. VIDEO: *Quem Queritis?*
- F 2/1: The Evolution of Christmas Drama: **Bevington** 51-55; Plays D17-D19.
- M 2/4: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 75-80; Play 1 (*Adam*). **Beadle** Chapter 2: Theatricality.
- W 2/6: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 137-138; Play 3 (*Daniel*).
- F 2/8: Twelfth-Century Church Drama: **Bevington** 202-203; Play 8 (*Passion*).
- M 2/11: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 227-241; Play *The Banns* (N Town). **Beadle** Chapter 6: The N-Town Plays.
- W 2/13: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 274-275; Play *The Killing of Abel* (Wakefield).
- F 2/15: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 308; Play *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Brome). VIDEO: *Abraham and Isaac*.
- M 2/18: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 383-384; Play *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). **Beadle** Chapter 5: The Towneley Cycle.
- W 2/20: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Play** *The Second Shepherds' Pageant* (Wakefield). VIDEO: *The Second Shepherds' Pageant*.
- F 2/22: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 409; Play *The Offering of the Magi* (Wakefield).
- M 2/25: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 437; Play *Herod the Great* (Wakefield).
- W 2/27: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 569; Play *The Crucifixion of Christ* (York). **Beadle** Chapter 3: The York Cycle.
- F 3/1: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 580; Play *Christ's Death and Burial* (York). VIDEO: From *The Passion*.
- M 3/4: The Corpus Christi Cycle: **Bevington** 637-638; Play *The Last Judgment* (Wakefield).
- W 3/6: **Play** *Noah* (Wakefield). VIDEO: GB 1999 *Noah*. Watch Toronto *Noah* video on reserve.
- F 3/8: Morality Plays: **Bevington** 791-795 & 796-799; Play *The Castle of Perseverance*. **Beadle** Chapter 9: Morality Plays.
- M 3/11-F 3/15: **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**
- M 3/18: **MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE**. Read-through: Relevant extracts of Medieval *Adam & Eve* plays.
- W 3/20: Read-through: Relevant extracts of Medieval *Adam & Eve* plays.
- F 3/22: **SCRIPT DUE FROM TRANSLATION GROUP**: Read-through: Script. **FULL OUT-OF-CLASS REHEARSALS BEGIN**.
- M 3/25: **THEMATIC PAPER DUE**. Read-through: Script.
- W 3/27: Saints' Plays: **Bevington** 661-665; Play *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby).
- F 3/29: Saints' Plays: **Play** *The Conversion of St. Paul* (Digby). **Beadle** Chapter 10: Saints' Plays.
- M 4/1: **Beadle** Chapter 11: Modern Productions; Xerox Peter Meredith.
- W 4/3: Xerox Readings TBA by Translation Group.
- F 4/5: **PRESENTATION**: Translation Group.
- M 4/8: Xerox Readings TBA by Direction Group.

W 4/10: PRESENTATION: Direction Group.
F 4/12: Xerox Readings TBA by Staging Group.
M 4/15: PRESENTATION: Staging Group.
W 4/17: Xerox Readings TBA by Costuming Group. **T-SHIRTS DUE.**
F 4/19: PRESENTATION: Costuming Group. **SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING & WEBPAGE DUE.**
M 4/22: IN-CLASS REHEARSAL. **NEWSPAPER ARTICLE DUE.**
W 4/24: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
F 4/26: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL. **PRODUCTION PROGRAMS DUE.**
M 4/29: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
W 5/1: IN-CLASS DRESS REHEARSAL.
F 5/3: **NO CLASS: FINAL PRODUCTION (CELEBRATION 2013 PERFORMANCE)**

DRAMATURGICAL PAPER DUE THE MONDAY AFTER THE PRODUCTION



FINAL EXAMINATION IN DESIGNATED SLOT