

## ENG 203: Medieval Drama

Scott O'Neil, ABD

Course Times: TR 3:25-4:40

Course Location: Meliora 205

Office Hours: Thursday 6-8 PM and by appointment

Office Location: Robbins Library

### Description and Objectives

What did drama look and feel like in the Middle Ages? How much can we know about performances that took place well over 600 years ago? We have two main goals ahead of us in this course: to read the major extant works of drama in Middle English, and to stage a medieval play. Along the way, we will discuss the texts themselves, the manuscript history of the surviving plays, their performance history, their relation to drama on the Continent, the religious opposition to them, sixteenth-century attempts to de-Catholicize them, their ultimate suppression after the Reformation, and their revival in twentieth-century England and North America.

We will be exploring the five major “M”s of Medieval Drama: Mummings, Morality Plays, Miracle Plays, Mystery Cycles, and Modern Interpretations. All of these forms of Medieval Drama share an important trait: They were all communal performances, performed not by trained professional actors, but by craftsmen and children, clerics and musicians, students and teachers, all of whom would come together to celebrate—and become—characters representing highly religious and highly demonic characters (with the latter being rather more fun and popular). Were you in a medieval audience, you might have seen the carpenter who fixed your roof creating the universe, your neighborhood butcher playing Pilate, or your favorite uncle becoming Lucifer. This sense of community—both in terms of communal worship and communal theater—will be a guiding focus of our work this semester.

### Required Texts:

- *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*, ed. Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian

All other texts (namely the Digby Mary Magdalene and some secondary readings) will be available through our course Blackboard page or (in the case of several videos) linked to our class page on my professional website.

The following texts are on Course Reserve in the Robbins Library:

- *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*
- *The N-Town Plays* (Ed. Douglas Sugano)
- *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Ed. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King)

## Assignments and Grading

Your final grade in the course will be calculated as follows:

- Participation: 15%
- Middle English Reading: 10%
- 4 Short Responses: 25%
- “Conference” Paper (6-8 pages): 25%
- Performance and Artists’ Statement (7-8 pages): 25%
- Final Exam: Optional

### *Reading and Participation*

The reading for each day is listed below on the syllabus next to the appropriate dates; please read, annotate, and think about the reading before the start of class. I would encourage you to bring notes or thoughts with you to facilitate discussion.

In order for us to have fruitful class discussions, all students are expected to come to class willing and eager to engage with each other and the course material. Continued failure to do so may affect your final grade in the course. Good discussion can come in many forms, but everyone should be prepared to ask anything (without hand-raising) and anyone can answer. Classroom discussions often can have one focus—the professor—but in the spirit of Medieval Drama, I want us to be a community of multiple voices and conversations, so that we can all learn from each other.

### *Middle English Reading*

Since we will engage with some of these plays in their original language, it is important for you to become comfortable with Middle English. You will be responsible for preparing and reading a passage (about 30 lines) from one of the plays in Middle English that we read for class. You may choose to hand in a recording of yourself reading or you may come to read during class or my office hours, whichever is easiest and more comfortable for you. There are a wide variety of resources to help support your Middle English reading for free online and on Blackboard: you may, of course, also seek out your professor!

### *Short Responses*

Short responses should be about two typed pages in length. Responses might expand on a class discussion; they might branch off and consider questions we did not have time to consider in class; they might consider a key image or passage that shapes your view of the work as a whole. Each response should focus on specific passages (or in some cases, one work) read for the course.

Because these responses are fairly short, you are not expected to fully develop and defend a complex thesis. This is your chance to further explore something that confused you or intrigued you about the reading in question – in a focused way. A good short response will lead to an interesting

discussion in class. You will write four of these short responses over the course of the semester. There are no set due dates for these responses, however you can only submit one short response in any given week. Over the course of the semester, you must respond to at least one primary and one secondary reading.

### *Paper*

Successful papers will develop an argument driven by your interests and connected to the themes of the course. Because we are engaging with drama, we will also work in groups to adapt and perform a small portion of a play, and you will do some writing in preparation for and response to this performance. More information on these assignments will be forthcoming.

## **Policies**

### *Contacting Your Instructor*

I will be delighted to discuss your suggestions, ideas, and concerns about this course with you. You should feel free to drop by during my office hours. If those times are inconvenient, please e-mail me. I'm happy to make other arrangements. Please e-mail me in advance if you need to cancel an appointment.

The best way to contact me is via e-mail; I can be reached at [soneil4@ur.rochester.edu](mailto:soneil4@ur.rochester.edu). **I will respond to all e-mails within 24 hours**, and I request that you show me the same courtesy. However, I am not permanently attached to my computer. **I do not generally check my e-mail between 10 PM and 10 AM.** Please plan your electronic communications accordingly.

### *Written Work*

All writing assignments should be typed and double spaced with one-inch margins. Please use 12 point Times New Roman font. All writing will be handed in electronically via email; **All assignments must be in .doc or .docx format, or I will not be able to open them.**

If you would like to work more on your writing, I encourage you to visit the Writing, Speaking, and Argument Center, located in Rush Rhees G-121. Through that office, you can make appointments with writing consultants. Please do not hesitate to use these resources; the Writing Center employs trained readers who can provide you with valuable additional feedback on your writing.

Please know that this classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and that I invite you to talk with me about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully. Undergraduates requiring academic accommodations should speak with an access coordinator at the CETL Disability Resources in Dewey Hall (585-275-9049). Information about the University's accommodation processes can be found at [www.rochester.edu/disability](http://www.rochester.edu/disability)

## *Academic Honesty*

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. More information is available at: [www.rochester.edu/college/honesty](http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty)

**Please note! This syllabus constitutes a contract for this class.** I will follow all of the policies I have set out in the syllabus. If you are still enrolled in this class by the end of the add/drop period, I will assume you have agreed to these terms and conditions.

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## Schedule

8/30 Introductions, Liturgical Beginnings, and the *Quem Quaeritis*

9/4 **MUMMINGS:** Chambers' "Normalized Text," Helm's "Problems and Attitudes," and Lydgate's "The Legend of St. George."

9/6 **MUMMINGS:** Chambers' "Plough Play," and Folk Play Research text of your choice. Watch Fermanagh Mummers videos.

9/11 **MORALITY:** *Mankind* (in Broadview), Bevington introductions to Morality plays and *Mankind*.

9/13 **MORALITY:** *Everyman* (the 2012 Portland Community College production), Bevington introduction.

9/18 **MIRACLE:** Digby Mary Magdalene (Part 1—pp. 1-15 of PDF), Bevington introductions to Saints Plays and the Digby MM.

9/20 **MIRACLE:** Digby Mary Magdalene (Part 2—pp. 16-31 of PDF).

9/25 **MIRACLE:** *Guibor* and Marian Intercession plays. Bevington on the Croxton Play of the Sacrament.

9/27 **MIRACLE:** Overflow discussion on *Guibor*. Introduce major Mystery cycles. Bevington on Corpus Christi Cycles.

10/2 **MYSTERY:** Read: Kathleen Ashley, "Cultural Approaches to Medieval Drama" (in Emmerson 57-66) and Martin Stevens, "Medieval Drama: Genres, Misconceptions, and Approaches" (in Emmerson 36-49)  
In Class: *Medieval Drama: From Sanctuary to Stage*

10/4 **MYSTERY:** N-Town (Banns, Play 1, 2, and 4)

10/9 **MYSTERY:** N-Town (Passion Plays—26-29, 32-34)

10/11 **MYSTERY:** N-Town (Harrowing of Hell to Last Judgment, Plays 35-42)

10/16: **No Class. Fall Break**

10/18 **MYSTERY:** York Cycle (Broadview 77-96)

10/23 **MYSTERY:** York Cycle (Broadview 97-110)

10/25 **MYSTERY:** York Cycle (Broadview 111-139)

10/30 **MYSTERY:** Character Analysis—Pilate: (N-Town Plays 30 and 31, York Plays 30 and 33)

11/1 **MYSTERY:** Towneley Plays: The Creation and the Second Shepherd's Play (Broadview 140-148 and 158-173). Also, watch the clip of the 1954 performance in the Cloisters (on Youtube—link on Blackboard)

11/6 **MYSTERY:** Towneley Plays: Herod and The Judgment (Broadview 175-185 and 187-205)

11/8 **MYSTERY:** Chester Plays: Play of Adam and Eve and Play of Noah's Flood (Broadview 206-226)

11/13 **MYSTERY:** Cycles on Film: The Chester Plays

11/15 **MYSTERY:** Cycles on Film: The York Cycle. Read the Wagon Route for York Cycle and browse the program for the 2014 York Cycle.

11/20 **MODERNS:** Transition from Medieval to Modern. Read Bevington "Humanist Drama," Claire Sponsler's "Performative Historiographies," and the excerpt from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and watch the clip from *MSND*. Highlight Sight and Sound Theatres and the Theodora Photos (on Blackboard)

11/22: **No Class. Thanksgiving Break**

11/27 **MODERNS:** Oberammergau Passion Play. Read Shapiro on Oberammergau, Friedman on Oberammergau, and the "What Viewers Should Know" pamphlet

11/29 **MODERNS:** Pop Culture and Influence of Medieval Drama. Watch *FullMetal Alchemist* "Sin" (three parts—linked on Blackboard)

12/4 **MODERNS:** South African Mysteries part 1

12/6 **MODERNS:** South African Mysteries part 2

12/11 Performances/Presentations (Reflections/Artist's Statements due before class)

**\*Last Day to hand in Short Responses\***

Exam TBD