Spring 2019 Course Descriptions

Instructor: David Wilton
Course: ENGL 313.500
Title: Medieval Literature

Description: This course is a survey of medieval British literature exclusive of Chaucer (although we will be reading some Chaucer here and there). The medieval period spans roughly a thousand years between the fall of the Roman Empire, c. 500 C.E., and the beginning of the Renaissance in England, c. 1500 C.E. The idea of a period called the medieval was a product of later thinkers who contrasted the creativity and cultural transformation of the Renaissance with the seemingly subdued work of earlier centuries, and as a result saw this earlier period as less intellectually and culturally valuable than the products of that later period. But in actuality, the medieval period was one of flourishing artistic, literary, and philosophical thought that has had a profound influence on our current culture. While medieval literature may seem alien and intimidating at first, deeper examination reveals that shares much in common with the literature of today.

Texts covered in this course will include Old English elegies, heroic poetry and Arthurian legends, beast fables, bawdy fabliaux, and deeply religious, devotional poetry, homilies, and hagiographies. We will identify and examine the forms, genres, literary conventions, and topics of concern that are typical of medieval British literature. Because of the expansive nature of the literature of the period, not only due to its chronological breadth, but also because the literature was multilingual, written in Old English, Middle English, French, and Latin, the course is organized according to literary genre, so we can see the development of form and convention within each genre, regardless of the language it is written in. We will be reading Old English, French, and Latin texts in translation, but we will read Middle English in the original.

Proposed Readings: Texts we will be reading include:
The Old English “Judith”
Exeter Book elegies
"The Travels of Sir John Mandeville"
Chaucer’s “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”
“The Fox and the Wolf”
“Dame Sirith”
“Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”
“The Dream of the Rood”
“Mankind”
“The Croxton Play of the Sacrament"