Fall 2020 Course Description

Instructor: Nancy Warren
Course: ENGL 390
Title: Studies in British Literature: Heroes and Villains in Medieval Literature

Description: In this course, we will examine constructions of heroes and villains in a variety of medieval literary works of different genres (epic, drama, romance, religious writing, comedy). We will explore how the categories of “hero” and “villain” are shaped by generic expectations, by gender, and by other cultural forces. We will consider how heroes and villains make meaning in different medieval cultures, interrogating the social desires and anxieties that they manifest. Our study of literature will attend closely to historical, political, and cultural environments.

Proposed Readings: Beowulf, The Dream of the Rood, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, The Lais of Marie de France, various saints' lives (including Chaucer's Life of St. Cecelia, the anonymous Life of Katherine of Alexandria, and the poem St. Erkenwald), The Book of Margery Kempe, Christine de Pizan's Book of the City of Ladies, selections from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, The Second Shepherds' Play, Croxton Play of the Sacrament