Dr. Jerry Denno  

**English 402: Medieval Literature Survey**  
Spring 2005  
TR 9:25-10:40 (Section 1)  
TR 1:10-2:25 (Section 2)  
Office: G 489  
Office Hours: MW 8:30-9:30; R 2:40-4 and by appt.  
Phone: 389-2644 (w) / 241-3772 (h)

**Course Description:**

Our primary readings sample broadly from representative British and European texts, emphasizing the larger European and Mediterranean context out of which English medieval and Renaissance literature arises. As opposed to a lecture, our class will be a hybrid of lecture and seminar, with students responsible to attend, contribute, and react to the readings and to each other’s formal and informal arguments. To this end, you will need to record your responses to each of the readings, and to come to class prepared to comment. Because of this seminar approach, your regular attendance and conscientious preparations are crucial. The objectives of the course are:

1) to provide you with an introduction to representative British and European medieval texts in their cultural and historical contexts;  

2) to sharpen your critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through discussion, analysis, and argumentation of issues in the readings;  

3) to prompt you to reexamine your assumptions about medieval culture and to expand your experiences beyond traditional, Anglo-centric models.

**Required Texts and Materials:**


5. *Secondary readings on e-reserve*

7. Pocket folder for journal entries

**Grade Guidelines:**

Each student will write two presentation papers of two double-spaced pages on given issues in the readings (30%), a midterm (30%) a final examination (30%), and each will keep a journal of informal, weekly responses to journal prompts (10%).

**Presentation Papers:**

Each of you will be assigned to a presentation “group” (A, B, C, or D), meaning only that the members of each group independently prepare formal papers for the same class date. These very short papers (one page, single-spaced) are to be written, presented, and then submitted for a grade, on the dates designated. Each student will write two, each addressing an audience of fellow scholars who are familiar with the readings. The brevity of the assignment dictates a bare-bones argument. In most cases, you will begin by setting forth a sharp critical position on the given issue, and follow with selected textual evidence in support of your position, and a brief conclusion. The thesis should be as pointed and controversial as your conviction. I will evaluate these papers for their aptness for oral presentation, as well as for the incisiveness of the analysis. Of course, all formal criteria for essays also apply.

**Response Journals:**

Journal entries, always due on Tuesdays, must respond critically and thoughtfully to the journal prompt for the week. Entries should be approximately one double-spaced, word-processed page of writing in which you engage with the given prompt critically and substantively. Be sure to bring journal responses to class; you will be asked to share them aloud. Toward the end of term, I’ll assign grades, based on your apparent level of critical engagement and conscientiousness in responding to prompts.
Characterizations:

All students will be asked to volunteer to characterize assigned readings; that is, you will be responsible to 1) very briefly distill the thesis or key points of the day’s reading; 2) assert your own critical response to that thesis; 3) relate the reading to our class discussion. Be responsible to volunteer at least once or twice during the term. These are to be informal and very brief synopses, intended only to provide the class with a quick introduction to the text in question.

- Please be sure to keep all drafts, peer comments, and returned work in a safe place; also, keep copies/back-up files of all formal writing.

- By the second week of class, formally designate one of your classmates as your contact person; this is the person who will be responsible to supply you with any missed notes, announcements, assignments, or handouts.

- Please notify me as soon as possible about any special accommodations you require,

- Feel free to contact me with questions; take advantage of my office hours (see above).

- Ours is a Blackboard-linked course; you will need to read your Naz e-mail to keep up on course communications.

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Reading / Writing Schedule

Week 1:
T 1/11 Introduction
R 1/13 Norton, Introduction to the Middle Ages (1-21)

Week 2:
T 1/18 Norton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Introduction); Bede and Caedmon’s Hymn; *The Dream of the Rood*
R 1/20 *The Wanderer*, *The Battle of Maldon*

Week 3:
T 1/25 *Beowulf*, Introduction to line 835; Presentation A: Liminality in early English poetry
R 1/27 *Beowulf*, to 1250

Week 4:
T 2/1 *Beowulf*, ll. 1798; Michael Alexander, “Beowulf”*
R 2/3 Presentation B: Cultural anxiety in *Beowulf*; Overing, “The Voice of Wealhtheow: Peace-Weaver in a Double Bind”*

Week 5:
T 2/8 *Beowulf*, conclude; Clark, “Chapter 14: The Hero and the Theme”*
R 2/10 *The Song of Roland*, laisses 11-52; Merwin, Introduction to *The Song of Roland”*

Week 6:
T 2/15 *Roland*, laisses 53-135; Vance, “Heroic Character and Roland’s dispute with Ganelon”*

Week 7:
T 2/22  Roland, conclude; Presentation C: The death of heroism in *The Song of Roland*

R 2/24  Nelson, “Christian-Muslim Relations in Eleventh-Century Spain”; review to date; journals due

Week 8:

T 3/1  **Midterm Examination**

R 3/3  Merwin, “Introduction” to *The Poem of the Cid* and First Cantar, to section 35; Hodgett, “Economic Growth in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries”*

Week 9:

T 3/8  *The Cid* First Cantar; Holmes, “The Expansion of Late Christianity: Spain—a Frontier Society”*

R 3/10  *The Cid*, Second Cantar; Duggan, “Economy and Gift-Giving”*

Week 10:

T 3/15  *The Cid*, Third Cantar; Dunn, “Levels of Meaning in The Poema de mio Cid”*

R 3/17  Presentation D: Heroism, imperialism, and terrorism in *The Cid***Spring Break***

Week 11:

T 3/29  *The Decameron*, Author’s Preface and Introduction and through p. 37


Week 12:

T 4/5  *The Decameron*, pp.79-116

R 4/7  The Decameron, pp.116-147; Presentation B: Plague as trope in *The Decameron*
Week 13:

*In The Norton Anthology:*

T 4/12 Julian of Norwich from *The Book of Showings*, pp.355-366; *from The Book of Margery Kempe*, 366-379

R 4/14 “Mystery Plays,” 379-380; *The Chester Play of Noah’s Flood:*
Presentation C: The body/spirit duality in late medieval texts

Week 14:

T 4/19 *The Wakefield Second Shepherds’ Play*

R 4/21 Presentation D: Transgression and social unrest in late medieval drama

T 4/26 Last Class: Journals due
Week 1: Define as best you can each of these terms: classical, medieval, middle ages, Renaissance. What historical and interpretive biases might be implied by such terms? What popular associations does each term evoke, and why?

Week 2: What are its most prominent themes, concerns, images of Anglo-Saxon poetry? What sort of culture does the poetry suggest?

Week 3: What anxieties or tensions can you sense in the early going in Beowulf? Is there some deeper concern in the court of Charlemagne? Explain.

Week 4: Look closely at the text’s representation of the monstrous: What do the monsters suggest about cultural tensions? Can it be read as a shadow of the heroic? Explain.

Week 5: Compare the opening of The Song of Roland with the opening of Beowulf: Aside form obvious culture differences, how would you compare the cultures? The texts?

Week 6: Analyze the representations of Christian and Muslim in Roland: Are Muslims always Other? What evidence can you find of propaganda for the Crusades?

Week 7: What would you predict for the future of Charlemagne’s Frankish empire? Does the poem’s conclusion affirm or indict the heroic ethic?

Week 8: Compare the tensions in Charlemagne’s and Alfonso’s courts: How do you account for the recurrent themes of treachery and betrayal? Does this tension point toward some larger political change?

Week 9: Compare the Cid to Roland: What larger cultural, political, and historical changes can you infer from their differences?

Week 10: How might The Song of Roland and The Poem of the Cid offer insight into twenty-first century cultural tensions, for instance, between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? Between East and West?
Week 11: What do you understand by the term Renaissance in its relevance to our readings? What popular associations does the term carry? How would you apply the term to The Decameron and other course readings? When does Western culture stop being medieval?

Week 12: Compare the texts of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe: How does their spirituality differ? What do these texts say about conceptions of the woman’s body in late medieval England?

Week 13: Look for evidence of social and political unrest in Noah’s Flood and in The Second Shepherds’ Pageant. How does theater lend itself to transgressive speech and behavior? What social tensions are evident in the plays?

Week 14: Reread your first journal entry from week 1. Has your conception of medieval literature undergone any change in the course of your readings? Would your answer to the week #1 journal prompt be any different now?