

Preliminary Web Course Description

*Please note: This is a preliminary web course description only. The department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.

School of English and Theatre Studies

Course Code: ENGL*4240	Course Title: Medieval and Early Modern Literatures	Date of Offering: FALL 2018
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Course Instructor: S. D. Powell	Course Format: Seminar
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Brief Course Synopsis: FROM SIN TO ETERNITY

A paramount medieval goal, surely, was to reach the eternal heavenly bliss promised by the Bible. Sin stood in the way of that goal, but was not an insurmountable obstacle, nor one that wasn't interesting—even fun—to think about. Indeed, medieval authors wrote a lot about sin, taking great pains and sometimes pleasure in providing guidance on recognizing sin, classifying it, overcoming it, punishing it.

This seminar will consider some of the ways sin is represented by these authors, specifically those writing in fourteenth-century England, in the years leading up to the Protestant Reformation.

We will be seeking to understand that representation in terms of a variety of competing motivations: Christian religious belief, dissatisfaction with the church hierarchy, human nature, desire and bodily appetites, narrative appeal, didacticism, social commentary, contact with other religions. To focus that examination, we will concentrate on the four poems by the author known today as the Gawain-poet or the Pearl-poet. These four poems (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*), each in a different way preoccupied by sin, will be read in the original Middle English (and thus somewhat slowly—because this is harder Middle English for us than Chaucer's). They will form a jumping-off point for various kinds of examinations—of medieval understanding of religious doctrine, of the medieval social context, of medieval views of human nature, and so forth—which in turn will deepen our engagement with the literary texts we are reading.

To reach interesting conclusions, we will examine both the Gawain-poet's texts as well as materials—treatises, legal documents, histories, and other literary productions—that help us understand medieval sin more precisely.

Methods of Evaluation and Weight:

translation quizzes (weekly for the first half of the term or so) – 20%
in-class writing assignments (short, daily for most of the term) – 10%
response to readings (450 words) – 5%
proposal for an oral presentation (450 words) – 5%

oral presentation (written out, 1500 words) – 20%
proposal for a seminar paper (450 words) – 10%
final seminar paper (3000 words) – 30%

Texts and/or Resources Required (e.g. Internet access, specific textbook title, lab kit, etc.)

Andrew and Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (5th ed.)

Other information that you wish share about the course (optional):

List the distribution requirements that this course fulfills: Medieval/Early Modern