



Epics and Ethics of the Middle Ages

ENGL 2602H • Spring 2024

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Meeting Info: T/Th, 11:50 am – 1:05 pm in LX 314
Office Hours: By appointment via Calendly in LX 701

Course Description

The literature of the Middle Ages, roughly marked as a period of European history from the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century to the fall of Constantinople in the 15th century, is unlike any other period of literary history. Crafted during an epoch of commodious circulation and exchange—of goods and resources, as well as peoples, languages, and beliefs—the poetry, epics, prose, and dramas of the medieval period are as rich and diverse as the cultures from which they emanated. In seeking to understand when and how English literature began, we will survey works in translation, originally composed in a variety of languages from Europe, North Africa, and the Near and Middle East, such as *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Tale of Genji*, and *The Thousand and One Nights*. Visual art, music, architecture, cultural trends, and socio-political developments of the period will enhance our interactions with texts from a pre-modern past. As we explore emergent genres and thematic concerns of the period, we will also consider to what extent literary discourse from before 1500 carries over into contemporary notions of power/polity, gender equality, civic responsibility, religious freedom, and integrated diversity. Taught under the auspices of the English department and the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, this course will feature occasional guest lectures by affiliated humanities faculty.

Course Materials

- *The Norton Anthology World Literature*, Vol. B, 4th edition, ed. Martin Puchner, et. al. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018. [978-0-393-60282-1]
- All other required readings, scholarly articles, excerpted chapters, and viewings will be shared on Canvas, including but not limited to portions of the following works:
 - *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives*, Marshall Gregory
 - *The History of the Medieval World: From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade*, Susan Wise Bauer
 - *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, Rémi Brague, trans. Lydia Cochrane
 - *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, C.S. Lewis
 - *Levinas and Medieval Literature*, Ed. Ann W. Astell and J.A. Jackson

Course Requirements & Grading

It is English Department policy that grades on student written work are based not on effort but rather on the quality of the work produced by the student. Although we tend to think of writing as an expression of self, please keep in mind that grades on essays are not evaluations of you as a person or even as a writer and are not based on effort, personal investment, or degree of improvement; they simply reflect the quality of the writing and the degree to which a given essay does or does not achieve the assigned objectives and meet rubric criteria (and they are not negotiable). Grades serve you best when they initiate self-reflection and conversation with your instructor and your craft, and I am always happy to discuss ways to strengthen your skills moving forward. Specific guidelines and grading criteria will be made available throughout the course and posted to Canvas. All essays and drafts must be typed and submitted to Canvas/Turnitin.com.

Below is a breakdown of your final grade for this class:

Attendance/Active Participation: 10%

Reading Quizzes: 10%

Reflective Responses: 20% (4 total, 5% each)

Close-Reading Essay: 15%

Midterm: 20%

Research Essay: 25%

Specific guidelines and grading criteria for all assignments will be provided in class and on Canvas; the lowest scores will be dropped. Late assignments will be penalized at a reduction of 1/3 letter grade for each day late. After one week past the due date, papers will not be accepted and receive 0%. Along with prior notification of missing a due date, you may be asked to provide medical/legal documentation. Make-ups for missed in-class work are granted at the instructor's discretion. It is your responsibility, and a good idea, to back up your work and keep a copy of all drafts.

Policies for Attendance and Active Participation

Although *attendance and participation* count for 10% of your grade in the course, active and collective engagement is essential for a successful learning experience. Understandably, life happens, and should you need to miss class you are responsible for making up what you miss by obtaining any materials and notes generated in your absence. Zoom will not be an option. Up to two unexcused absences are allowed, but after that you must have documentation (i.e., medical emergency), to avoid your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade. In the event of an emergency of some kind, I will do my best to support your continued progress in our class. Of course, attendance and participation are not the same thing. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the assigned materials, and explicitly draw on that preparation to propel conversations by posing and responding to questions and stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Participation will make our sessions more productive and will ensure that you develop a "habit" of thinking and communicating creatively and critically at an educated level. For *scheduled remote instruction* classes over Zoom, keep your camera on to make our learning environment as rich and engaging as possible (and not be marked absent).

Because much of our course information will be communicated during class discussions, demos, and workshops rather than lectures, students sometimes mistakenly believe that this knowledge is not "important." Indeed, you will likely find it very difficult to get caught up or be successful without active class participation.

Failure to complete work assigned for a particular class should not prevent you from attending that class; while it is always best to turn in your assignments on time, it is better to have you without your assignment than neither you nor your assignment. You are responsible for keeping track of assignment due dates as they appear on the syllabus and posted on Canvas. Though some modifications to the syllabus might be made during the term to match our progress through the material, these changes will be announced at the beginning of class and posted on Canvas.

Lastly, we all need to tend carefully to keeping lines of communication open. I will work to challenge you as much as I can without overwhelming you. To support your progress throughout the course, I plan to check in throughout the semester, not only to make sure you're keeping up with the reading and writing but to make sure that you are doing well. And when you're not, to help you find the support you need. Patience— with oneself and with others— is critical for a successful learning experience.

Classroom Standards and Expectations

In addition to compliance with Yeshiva University's Code of Conduct, in this course, students will be expected to:

- ***Come to discussions prepared***, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- ***Initiate and participate effectively*** in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with your peers, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- ***Tech-Free Learning Environment***. No cell phones, mobile devices, or laptops may not used during class unless you have an accommodation letter. You will need to have hard copies of the reading materials in class and take notes by hand. All course materials, slides, and handouts will be available on Canvas and copies will be distributed.
- ***Demonstrate considerate classroom conduct*** to enhance your academic experience and that of your colleagues. In particular, you are asked to contribute to the learning environment by being prompt and courteous, not eating during class, and not walking in and out or talking inappropriately or out of turn.
- ***Respect our time together***. At a research university such as YU, instructors have many responsibilities and demands on their time in addition to teaching, and they are not available to students at all times. Here are some methods of respecting your instructor's time outside of class:
 - Bring focused questions when you attend office hours and be sure to contact your instructor in a timely fashion if you will not be able to keep a scheduled appointment.
 - When writing an email, be succinct and present your questions as clearly as possible; always use an appropriate tone, sign your name, and proofread your emails.
 - Avoid emailing your instructor about matters that can be addressed in person before or after class.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at Yeshiva University. Cheating, forgery, dishonest conduct, and plagiarism erode YU's educational, research, and social standards. They devalue the learning experience and its legitimacy not only for the perpetrators but for the entire community. It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with YU's [Academic Integrity Statement](#) along with this syllabus. It is essential that all members of our academic community subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work. Since plagiarism is a serious transgression of ethics, any instances of plagiarism will be pursued through the appropriate disciplinary channels; all instances of plagiarism are reported to the Dean and may become a part of your permanent file. Penalties for plagiarism range from receiving a failing grade on the essay to receiving a failing grade for the course, loss of honors, suspension, or even expulsion from school.

Plagiarism means misrepresenting someone else's words or ideas (or the words or ideas produced by A.I. like GPT) as your own. Plagiarism can be an act of deliberate fraud, such as turning in work wholly or partially cut-and-pasted from the internet as your own, misuse of artificial intelligence (A.I.) technology like ChatGPT (details below), or it may be an inadvertent error, such as forgetting to cite a source whose ideas you paraphrased or meant to quote. Although all instances may not receive the same penalty, these are all forms of plagiarism, and you are expected to know and take responsibility for your writing and use of outside sources.

With regard to the use of A.I. assistance for papers, this course follows Yeshiva University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). The use of artificial intelligence to *generate* writing for your papers is prohibited; the use of *assistive* artificial intelligence—including grammar checkers, spell checkers, and digital thesauruses—is allowed. Pre-approved assistive AI platforms include spell checkers and grammar checkers in Microsoft Word and Google Documents, Grammarly, and Hemmingway. Any platform not listed above is not approved for use. If you are unsure whether a platform or technology is allowed, please ask me.

In addition to being careful to properly attribute proprietary ideas, be aware of the difference between proofreading and plagiarism: a proofreader points out mistakes and typographical errors that you are capable of detecting but have missed through carelessness. It becomes plagiarism when your reader rewrites your essay or corrects your mistakes for you. Since this course will require research work and the use of secondary material, you must be aware of your intellectual obligations and take care to document your work diligently. We will discuss the problem of plagiarism and how and why to avoid it in

class. If you are unclear in any way about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me. In general, one good rule to follow is "when in doubt, cite your source."

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the beginning of the semester. The office is located in 215 Lexington Ave, Suite 505. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

The Yeshiva University Libraries

Get all the support you need with research for your courses. The Yeshiva University Libraries (library.yu.edu) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Skilled information-seekers succeed academically and in the workplace. You can drop, [schedule an appointment](#), [email](#) a librarian, or [Live Chat](#) for assistance. Librarians are always happy to help you!

Peer Tutoring

The Peer Tutoring Center provides one-to-one tutoring in a wide range of STEM fields as a service to the students of Stern College to help them achieve their academic goals. If applicable to your discipline, feel free to direct your students to use this resource. Students can book advisement appointments on this website: <https://yu2.mywconline.com/>.

The Beren Writing Center at Stern

The Beren Campus Writing Center offers free, confidential tutoring that can support your writing for this course. Find out more and make an appointment [here](https://www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren) (<https://www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren>). I highly recommend booking well in advance.

The Office of Academic Support

Academic support is available to you. If you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait online here: yu2.mywconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Schedules" and scroll down to "Learning Success Center."

Out of Class Assistance

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your progress in the course and address any individual questions/concerns you might have. You are always welcome to email me to set up an appointment.

Syllabus

This class schedule is a "living" document that will be modified as needs dictate throughout the semester. Readings and due dates will be available on Canvas, and any alterations will be posted and announced in class. Exact reading sections of the plays and supplementary readings will be posted to Canvas.

Dates	Course Materials
Week 0: Thursday, 1/18	Course Introduction
Week 1: Tuesday 1/23 & Thursday 1/25	Beowulf Beowulf Reading Quiz
Week 2: Tuesday 1/30 & Thursday 2/1	Beowulf cont., Song of Roland Roland Reading Quiz Reflective Response 1

Week 3: Tuesday 2/6 & Thursday 2/8	Song of Roland Reflective Response 2
Week 4: Tuesday 2/13 & Thursday 2/15	Medieval Lyrics (selections from Yehuda HaLevi, Ibn Ezra, etc), Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Morgan Library Visit (tentative) Gawain Reading Quiz Close-Reading Essay due
Week 5: Tuesday 2/20 & Thursday 2/22	Gawain cont., The Thousand and One Nights Reflective Response 3
Week 6: Tuesday 2/27 & Thursday 2/29	Nights cont., The Tale of Genji Nights Reading Quiz Reflective Response 4
Week 7: Tuesday 3/5 & Thursday 3/7	Genji cont Midterm 3/7
Week 8: Tuesday 3/12 & Thursday 3/14	The Divine Comedy Comedy Reading Quiz
Week 9: Tuesday 3/19 No Class Thursday, 3/21 Purim	Comedy cont. Reflective Response 5
Week 10: Tuesday 3/26 & Thursday 3/28	Marie de France De France Reading Quiz
Week 11: Tuesday 4/2 & Thursday 4/4	Decameron Reflective Response 6
Week 12: Tuesday 4/9 & Thursday 4/11	Decameron cont., Christine de Pizan Pizan Reading Quiz
Week 13: Tuesday 4/16 & Thursday 4/18	The Canterbury Tales Canterbury Tales Reading Quiz
Pesach Break 4/19 – 5/1	
Week 14: Thursday 5/2	Canterbury Tales cont. Reflective Response 7
Week 15: Tuesday 5/7	Course Wrap Up Course Evaluation. No Final Exam. Research Essay due to Canvas 5/19