

Medieval Literature Syllabus 2017-2018

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What We're Doing

We're reading, discussing, and responding to literature from the Medieval world. Genre covered will include imaginative philosophy (yes, that's a thing), poetry, folk tales, epic poetry, legend, and drama. We will do all this as Christians. And what that means will become clearer as the year progresses I hope.

Q1 (26 days, College Tour!) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (Pt. 1)• Dante's <i>Inferno</i>	Assessments (350 pts) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summer reading essay test (50 pts)• <i>Consolation</i> test (50 pts)• <i>Inferno</i> test (100 pts)• Graded discussions (50 pts)• Quizzes (~100 pts)
Q2 (27 days, Busch Gardens!) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> (Pt. 2)• Chaucer's <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	Assessments (350 pts) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> test (50 pts)• <i>Canterbury</i> test (100 pts)• <i>Canterbury</i> short stories (50 pts)• Graded discussions (50 pts)• Quizzes (~100 pts)
Q3 (32 days, Spring Break!) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> (Pt. 3)• Malory's <i>Le Morte d'Arthur</i>	Assessments (400 pts) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> test (25 pts)• <i>Morte</i> tests (100 pts)• <i>Morte</i> essays (2-3 pgs, 100 pts)• Graded discussions (50 pts)• Quizzes (~100 pts)
Q4 (32 days, Summer!) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> (Pt. 4)• Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> and <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Assessments (400 pts) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Consolation</i> test (100 pts)• <i>Macbeth</i> essay (100 pts)• <i>Midsummer</i> creative (50 pts)• Graded discussions (50 pts)• Quizzes (~100 pts)

Why We're Doing It

Notes Outline

I. To maximize our capacity for joy and delight

II. To strengthen our kindness muscle

III. To grow closer to God

The Theory of Everything (ToE)

Believe it or not there are a lot of physicists out there who are trying pretty hard to develop a theory of everything. This is an all-encompassing framework that would explain all physical phenomena in the universe. Phew. No one knows when or if such a theory will ever be developed, and any attempt I've ever heard to explain the pursuit of it boggles my mind. However, the hunger of the human mind to get down to the very bottom of reality, to find a system for understand all knowledge is something I find fascinating. It is something I can relate to. I find the same desire in myself to get to the very bottom of things, but my interest is not in the physical world so much; it's more what you would call a spiritual theory of everything.

This year we will explore a proposed Spiritual Theory of Everything (SToE). It starts with figuring out just what happened in the Garden of Eden when our parents Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were cast out from paradise. We need to know what paradise was like, what was lost, and why it was lost. We also need to know how it could be regained and by what means.

We will flesh out this theory over the course of the year, but here are the main points of it.

1. Paradise exists when faith is the active principle for all relationships.
2. Paradise is destroyed by betrayal or suspicion of betrayal, which is breaking faith/trust.
3. Paradise can only be regained by reestablishing faith, which consists in the responses of human beings to changes commonly attributed to Fortune, Fate, and Providence.

To start, it might be objected that pride, not a lack of faith, was the root cause of the Fall. I disagree. Eve's desire to be like God was not in itself a corruption of her nature. That desire was good and may very well have been satisfied if she had resisted temptation. The psalmist says that God has made us "a little while lower than the angels." This implies that in the long run we will be higher than the angels—that is, god-like. But the only way to this glorified state of existence is through a life lived by faith.

There are other readings we will encounter this year and other topics we will discuss. However, I hope through it all to continue reflecting on the SToE. This will come up in class and also on various tests and writing assignments.

Grading

I will be using a true points system for grading this class. This means there is one big pool of points. Every point on every assessment (test, quiz, writing, etc.) is just simple one point. You can see from the overview, however, that quizzes and discussion will constitute about 40% of your overall grade. The rest will come from major tests, essays, and other projects.

The Perfect Storm

This also happens every year. Your fellow teachers and I will try to avoid it, but at some point you will almost certainly feel overwhelmed. And at the point where you think you can't take it anymore, I'm sure to announce that there will be a quiz, test, or some well-meaning creative assignment right on top of everything else. So what to do?

To begin, I will try to announce major tests, essays, etc. well in advance, giving you a chance to look at your calendars and see what else is due around the same time. However, I know that this doesn't always work. So if a pile up occurs, please come to me as soon as you feel it. I am usually very willing to renegotiate deadlines, test dates, and the like to help you manage the load.

That said, please do me the courtesy of speaking respectfully about these things. Avoid sarcasm and any accusatory tone. I'm not trying to make you miserable (well, most of the time anyway), so let's assume the best of each other, and I think we can work things out amicably in most cases.

Verbal Sensitivity

Most of us know to avoid profanity and vulgarity, but the issue of controlling the tongue goes much farther than this. In fact, some of the most hurtful words imaginably wouldn't contain a single expletive. Managing the "raging fire" of our words is always important, but it's especially important for us in this class. There are two reasons. First, as followers of Christ we have taken on the role of representatives. After all, the term "Christian" literally means "little Christ." So what we say and do will always represent Christ to onlookers. Second, we will be talking a lot in this class, and since the chance of messing up with words increases with the number of them used, we should exercise extra vigilance in what we say.

In every culture and every era of history, there are issues that are more sensitive than others. With that in mind, I want to encourage you to be especially careful how you talk about any of the following topics, which are especially sensitive in our time and culture.

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Other religions, agnosticism, or atheism

This doesn't mean we have to hide our opinions or avoid confrontation. On the contrary, if Christ is our example, then certainly we should be willing to say hard things. However, we should always say them in love with a view to building up fellow believers and drawing unbelievers to the truth. The point here is not to sugar coat the truth or to hide our convictions, but rather "to speak the truth in love" so that our words never erect an "obstacle to the gospel of Christ."

Cheating

Any and all forms of cheating will be punished. This may include a significant penalty in the grade book as well as other disciplinary actions. Cheating includes any form of representing work done by someone else as your own. This includes plagiarism of sources in writing, even when it's unintentional. It includes comparing your answers on a quiz or test with someone else's, even when you don't change your answer. It even includes copying someone else's homework.

Don't let the stress of getting good grades cause you to compromise your integrity. I'm not going to say grades aren't important. That's naive. But any harm you would incur from a low grade will pale in comparison to the damage you do to your immortal soul by cheating, even if you're not caught. Now, cheer up and let's have fun.