

Dr. Passmore's Upper-Level Courses Described:

History of the English Language (Taught Every Fall Semester):

This course will introduce you to the ways in which the English language has developed over time, from its origin as Anglo-Saxon to the multiple kinds of English used throughout the world today. For context, we will begin with a discussion of the Proto-Indo-European language (PIE) and significant sound laws (ex. Grimm's Law). In the course of the semester, we will consider the various historical events and cultural influences that have contributed to changes in the English language. Visual and audio media will help to demonstrate the use of spoken and written English in different periods and cultures, clarifying the process of linguistic change. We will discuss issues of post-colonialism by examining the interplay between language and multiculturalism in the United States and abroad. Lectures on historical and literary context will supplement class discussions, group work, student presentations, and formal debates. The course has several broad goals. First, you will consider the question of why a knowledge of linguistic history might be valid and useful for you. Second, you will come to understand how cultural, literary, and historical forces have interacted with linguistic change in the past. Finally, you will become more aware of how, in the present day, English is a rich living language which continues to borrow from other languages and to transform itself in response to various cultural influences.

Chaucer (Taught in Fall 2005; Offered in Spring 2008):

This course revolves around a selection of Chaucer's works, including short poems, long poems, and selections from the *Canterbury Tales*. We will spend some time at the beginning of the semester discussing the language of Chaucer's London. We will also consider the cultural environment of the late fourteenth century, in particular the political and social issues in relation to the literature of Richard II's court. We will discuss the development of Chaucer's literary interests, including his periods of French and Italian influence. The order in which the *Canterbury Tales* will be read reflects the fragmentary nature of this collection and should encourage you to consider the interactions which occur between the pilgrims in the context of the tale-groups. You will also consider why the tales exist in the fragments as they do and how or whether the meaning of the collection changes when tales are grouped differently (e.g., the so-called 'Marriage Group'). Some literary readings will be supplemented with current scholarship, usually in the form of articles obtainable on-line.

Medieval Courtly Literature (Taught in Spring 2007):

The final decades of the fourteenth century in England were an exciting and dangerous time, and the literature of the period explores and reflects themes both political and social. King Richard II came to the throne in 1377 as a young boy after the untimely deaths of his grandfather (King Edward III) and his father (the Black Prince, heir to the English throne). The Black Death of 1348 was long over, but its devastation of one-third of Europe's population caused long-term changes in demographics. The Revolt of 1381, during which the boy king Richard showed his political savvy (not to the advantage of the rebels!), was only one of the indications of a changed and changing culture. In this course, we will explore some of the most famous literary and historical texts of the period, while we also become familiar with aspects of the social culture and daily life that will help us better imagine this slice of the medieval world. Texts to be studied (in whole or in part) include the anonymous poems "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and "Pearl" (by the same unknown author), John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Geoffrey Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," an anonymous political poem ("Richard the Redeless"), Froissart's *Chronicles*, and Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*. These narratives date roughly from 1350 to 1400, and they reflect multiple areas of interest during the period, ranging from considerations of kingship and counsel to reflections on travel, war, courtly love, and the life of the court. Most will be read in modern English translations, though we'll take the opportunity to hear and see the original Middle English.

Survey of Grammars (Taught in Spring 2007):

In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (called the Four C's), adopted a resolution on language known as the "Students' Right to Their Own Language." In November of 2003, the 4 C's voted to reaffirm and uphold this resolution. The idea behind the resolution is a noble one, founded on the belief that

diversity in language should be embraced as wholly as should be diversity in culture and race. The effect of this resolution has, however, virtually eliminated attention to improving students abilities to write using "standards" of "traditional" grammar. Although, over the years, my own students have increasingly seemed disturbed by their lack of finesse with standard grammar rules, teachers have become more and more reluctant to address such "surface features" of writing. The question of teaching traditional grammar has become a deeply political issue in the past thirty years, usually regarded quite negatively—as if reflective of an intolerant viewpoint on the part of the teacher. In this course, we will be exploring the ideas behind the 4 C's resolution and the implications of its use as a rallying cry for avoiding teaching standard grammar. At the same time, we will examine multiple approaches to grammar, both prescriptive (traditional "school-book" grammar) and descriptive (structuralist and transformational-generative grammars).

Shakespeare in (Medieval) Cultural Context (Taught in Spring 2006):

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the medieval and Renaissance cultural contexts in which Shakespeare created his works, to familiarize you with the ways Shakespeare's writings grow out of their cultural milieu as they expand on and develop themes and traditions popular in medieval and Tudor literature and drama. This course will focus on a small selection of the Shakespearean plays that draw on medieval legend or history or have medieval analogues (of Shakespeare's plays, at least half fit into this category, so we will be studying a mere droplet of the possible choices). We will be not only reading Shakespearean plays, but also a variety of selections from medieval and Tudor drama, history, and literature, in addition to scholarly texts on the subject of Shakespeare's work, culture, and medieval influences. The course will devote a segment to the study of medieval influences on Shakespeare's sonnets and his "A Lover's Complaint," which concludes the sonnet sequence. Whereas a literary survey covers a smorgasbord of texts, providing the opportunity for students to dip into a large number of writings as an introductory overview, this course is selective in its contents so that you can become experts in the in-depth study of a few representative texts, at the same time honing your research and critical-thinking skills.

Literature of the Middle Ages (TBA):

This course will explore a broad range of medieval literary genres including lyrics, romance, ballads, drama, letters, treatises, and devotional literatures. As the semester unfolds, we will consider how concepts of honor, spirituality, and love connect the medieval world to our own as well as how aspects of medieval culture relate to modern political institutions, social customs, and religious conflicts. While acknowledging the significant differences between medieval and modern cultures, we will use various medieval narratives as tools with which to delve into a distant culture that initially may seem quite foreign. Some coursework will be devoted to language study of the original medieval texts, with English narratives read, for the most part, in Middle English and overviews given of the grammar and pronunciation of texts in other medieval vernacular languages such as Old Irish, Old Icelandic, Old French, Anglo-Norman, and Middle High German. Multi-media materials including illuminated manuscripts and original-language CDs will enhance students' understanding of the reception of these narratives within the cultures in which they originated.

Medieval World Literature (TBA):

This course thematically surveys medieval literatures and cultures from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Overviews of relevant historical information, presentation of multi-media materials, and class discussion will form the basis of each class. All texts will be read in translation, and the medieval texts assigned in this class will illustrate the diversity of cultures from which they arose. While conventional terms for medieval European literature, such as chivalry and courtly love, and even the term "medieval" itself, are not always associated with the literature of China, India, Japan, and the Middle East, examining these cultures alongside those of medieval Europe (including England, France, Italy, and Germany) reveals that multiple literary traditions existed during the Middle Ages. This comparative approach highlights the fact that all cultures, both past and present, have been interested in such concepts as love, honor, and betrayal. Examining diverse medieval traditions will allow students to see how those cultures still influence modern literature and culture. Readings will be organized by theme and genre, including topics such as chivalry, courtly love, social critique, biography, and lyric poetry.

Medieval Arthurian Narrative (TBA):

Every historical period for the past thousand or so years has created its own King Arthur. Our own period, with T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (and Disney's knock-off movie!), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and innumerable fantasy lore spin-offs, is no different. King Arthur (and the people, places, and objects associated with him) is extremely popular. But did he ever exist? And, if so, who was he? If King Arthur did exist at one time, it would have been during the upheavals in Britain of the fifth century, as the Roman legions pulled out and the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes crowded in. The original warrior, Arthur, would have had far more in common with the early medieval warrior Beowulf (as described in the Anglo-Saxon poem of the same name) than with the gracious king of the stone-turreted castles our media conjures for us. Yet, as the medieval years passed, poets, priests, and even kings helped to reshape the image of Arthur and his knights to suit the world in which they lived—an ever-changing Arthur transformed with each generation as the needs of culture and society required. In this course, we will study that ever-changing Arthurian legend and lore from its beginnings to the end of the Middle Ages. We will explore claims of King Arthur's existence in "historical" chronicles (treatises), tales of Arthurian adventures in romance narratives and ballads, and other poetic and prose texts which create an Arthurian world sometimes familiar to us and sometimes quite surprising. A well of medieval Arthurian literature and culture (including art) awaits to attract and inspire your imagination and introduce you to other cultures diverse in time but perhaps not completely foreign in spirit (or challenges) to our own. No prior knowledge of Middle English is necessary. Texts include translations from Latin, French, German, Welsh, and English, with works by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chretien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Sir Thomas Malory, among others both named and anonymous.

Medieval Romance (TBA):

This course in medieval romance offers a sampling of one of the Middle Ages' most popular literary genres. Texts will be read either in Middle English or in translation and will be drawn predominantly from England, Iceland, Ireland, and France. The course is organized around student discussions and overviews of the genre's cultural contexts. Multi-media materials including illuminated manuscripts and original-language audiotapes will enhance students' understanding of the reception of these romances within the cultures in which they originated. The romance genre was popular throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, and its popularity bears an analogous relationship to modern entertainment such as television sitcoms and movie sequels. Thinking of romance as medieval pop culture, we will consider how concepts of honor, friendship, and love connect the medieval world to our own. We will also consider how medieval culture relates to modern political institutions, social customs, and religious conflicts. While acknowledging the significant differences between medieval and modern cultures, we will use medieval romance as a tool with which to approach a distant culture that initially may seem quite foreign.