

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM

The Medieval Quest as a Model for Us Today Fall 2013

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Schedule: MONDAYS 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m.
September 30 until December 16, 2013 (note: not every Monday!)

Course Concept: One of the most intriguing aspects about the European Middle Ages might well be the overarching desire dominating the entire long period to establish an understanding of the own self in relationship with God, the world, and people. I call it simply “THE QUEST.” Of course, the Middle Ages were not a uniform and unchanging epoch between antiquity and the early modern world. The early Middle Ages with its strong emphasis on heroism were supplanted by the high Middle Ages in which the courtly values, feudalism, and love were the most critical features. And the late Middle Ages witnessed the emergence of a more urban, bourgeois society in which individualism, marriage, social and ethical issues, and a growing awareness about the natural environment gained in dominance. Nevertheless, the QUEST was shared throughout the entire time period, perhaps more than ever since. This course will explore, philosophically speaking to what extent we could say that all human life is determined by the desire for knowledge, meaning, and relevance. Hence the concept of the QUEST. Looking at the Middle Ages, we are suddenly gazing through a historical telescope, backward but also forward, and might find ourselves. The idea of this course is to gain insight into our own QUEST by way of studying how people in the past pursued that goal and what that might mean for us today.

Reading Material: We will use a new text anthology that I have put together only recently, and which students in a variety of classes have already enjoyed greatly. The feedback has been very positive, and the 2nd rev. edition that we will use offers even more texts and improvements. They represent fields such as philosophy, literature, religion, and politics. You can buy the book at the UA bookstore on campus, but it would be much easier and affordable to buy it directly from the publisher who will ship it to you:

Albrecht Classen, *Medieval Answers to Modern Problems*. 2nd revised edition (San Diego: University Readers/Cognella, 2013). Go online and log on to: <https://students.universityreaders.com/store/>. You need to establish an account with them (free of charge) and follow the online instructions, which are very simple and straightforward. But let me know right away if you have a problem.

I have developed and written this book to provide you with the best learning experience. Having relied on a variety of other textbooks in the past, I decided in 2012 to move ahead and create my own to reflect the most modern scholarship and approach to the Middle Ages. I very much hope that you will enjoy the readings for our class, which will represent only a selection of the entire

anthology. The book is fairly thin, but very dense and filled with highly thought-provoking texts from the entire period. I can well imagine that you might read also those texts that we cannot cover in class. Enjoy.

Syllabus:

Please read the Introduction and scan the dateline as a preparation for this course. We can discuss details in class as you see fit.

- Sept. 30:** Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* (questions the nature of fortune/misfortune, the properties of true happiness, and the path toward that goal which everyone must take)
- Oct. 7:** anonymous, *The Nibelungenlied* (an epic poem exploring the nature of hatred and violence, examining the catastrophic consequences of revenge)
- Oct. 14:** Gautier de Coinci, *Our Lady's Tumbler* (in a very religious context, the quest for the self finds a powerful answer, revealing the very nature of human spirituality and the need to go on a quest individually); Marie de France, "Bisclavret" (the noble spirit in us)
- Oct. 21:** Marie de France, "The Two Lovers," "Eliduc," Dante's *Inferno* (who are we both in this and in the afterlife? How do we pursue our true goals and what do they consist of?)
- Oct. 28:** Caesarius of Heisterbach (what are miracles, how do they fit into human life, and do they even exist?)
- Nov. 4:** Saint Francis of Assisi (through humility and fervent belief finding the path toward God)
- Nov. 18:** Hartmann von Aue, *The Unfortunate Lord Heinrich* (sickness, death, and self-discovery, leading to true health, and spiritual enlightenment)
- Dec. 2:** Christine de Pizan (feminism already in the Middle Ages? The quest for the self through the gender debate)
- Dec. 9:** Marsiglio of Padua (religious differences, debate across religious boundaries, toleration)
- Dec. 16:** Johannes Tepl, *The Plowman and Death* (the ultimate meaning of life, marital love, the dignity of the human body, honor)