Piers Plowman and Friends  
ENGL310C Non-Chaucerian Middle English Literature  
Professor Sarah Tolmie

Contact Information: Office Hours Tue/Thur 10:20-11:20  
Hagey Hall 266, ext. 6795  
stolmie@watarts.uwaterloo.ca

This course will focus on the late fourteenth-century text *Piers Plowman* by William Langland, one of the longest, hardest and weirdest poems in the English language. Because of the difficulties of its alliterative language and wide-ranging vocabulary, we will read most of the text in translation. The course will nonetheless provide an introduction to Middle English, and to the poetic language of Langland and some of his late medieval contemporaries. The poem itself, which is theological, social, political and apocalyptic, engages with almost every prevailing idea and cultural form of the fourteenth century. It does so by combining every available literary genre — romance, dream vision, allegorical *exemplum* or fable, sermon, mystical treatise, scholastic theological argument, *speculum principis* or advice text, and more — into a huge, freewheeling, ironic form. The course will contextualize the poem in its own age, but is also open to analysing the work with contemporary theoretical models and comparing it to postmodern literary and cultural forms, to which this medieval poem bears a startling resemblance.

**Required Texts:**  
*Piers Plowman: The B Text*, trans. A. V. C. Schmidt  

**Work required and mark breakdown:**  
One ten-minute oral presentation (consultation in office hours required) 15%  
One research essay, 3000 words (consultation in office hours required) 35%  
Midterm test 10%  
Final exam 30%  
Participation 10%

**Oral Presentations**  
Midterm test and **scheduled presentation dates** cannot be changed unless a doctor’s note is provided. Students must see me in office hours before their presentations, or make alternate arrangements to consult by e-mail.

**Essay Requirements**  
Late research papers will be **penalized a full letter grade** (10%) and will not be accepted after the final exam, resulting in a grade of zero for the assignment. **Office hour consultations are required** as part of the grade and are the student’s responsibility to arrange; students should schedule their meetings once they have chosen a topic, and **bring a preliminary bibliography of 2-3 items to be handed in**. Essays must be submitted with **a bibliography of at least five items** and be correctly formatted.
throughout according to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Incorrectly formatted essays will be marked down 5% automatically. Essays must contain a word count.

*Plagiarism* is a serious academic offence. Papers found to be plagiarized from books, articles or online sources will result in a grade of zero for the course. The instructor reserves the right to request e-copies of all essays for submission to turnitin.com. When in doubt, cite everything — all quotations, paraphrases of arguments, or new facts gained from another person’s work.

**Class schedule** (this may change slightly to accommodate oral presentations):

Failure to keep up with the reading will adversely affect your participation mark; I reserve the right to conduct spot quizzes.

Tue 6 May  Introduction to Middle English language and culture

Thur 8 May  Overview of *Piers Plowman* (reading: Prologue)

Tue 13 May  Genre: dream vision, allegory (reading: Passus 1)

Thur 15 May  Genre: romance, satire (reading: Passus 2)

Tue 20 May  the three estates (reading: Passus 3)

Thur 22 May  kingship, law and order (reading: Passus 4)

Tue 27 May  preaching, sacraments, pilgrimage (reading: Passus 5)

Thur 29 May  work, penance, pardons (reading: Passus 6)

Tue 3 June  MIDTERM TEST (one hour)

Thur 5 June  knowledge and inquiry, scholasticism (reading: Passus 7)

Tue 10 June  psychomachia (reading: Passus 8)

Thur 12 June  body and soul, marriage (reading: Passus 9)

Tue 17 June  poets and whores, intellectual pride (reading: Passus 10)

Thur 19 June  love, inner dream sequence (reading: Passus 11)

Tue 24 June  Ymaginatif (reading: Passus 12)

Thur 26 June  eating your words (reading: Passus 13)
Tue 1 July CANADA DAY (NO CLASS)

Thur 3 July Haukyn the minstrel (reading: Passus 14)

Tue 8 July talking to yourself: Anima (reading: Passus 15)

Thur 10 July the end of language: the tree of charity (reading: Passus 16)

Tue 15 July the old law and the new law (reading: Passus 17)

Thur 17 July affective piety: Will as witness (reading: Passus 18)

Tue 22 July paranoia and Apocalypse (reading: Passus 19)

Thur 24 July after the end (reading: Passus 20)

Tue 29 July Review and FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS
Department of English Contacts and Resources

Contacts:

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THE FACULTY OF ARTS REQUIRES THAT WE NOTIFY YOU OF THE FOLLOWING:

"Note on avoidance of academic offenses: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p. 1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean."

Dean of Arts: Robert R. Kerton
Associate Dean of Arts, Undergraduate Affairs: Sheila Ager
ML 236, ext. 2217
ML 254, ext. 3554