Piers Plowman and The Book of Margery Kempe
ENGL310C Non-Chaucerian Middle English Literature
Instructor: Dr. Jenifer Sutherland

Contact Information: Office Hours Tue/Thur 10:20-11:20
Hagey Hall 344E ext. 2295
jenifer.sutherland@utoronto.ca

This course will focus on the two late medieval texts, both of which pose challenging questions about the relationship of truth, meaning, language, and story. The first, Piers Plowman by William Langland, written in various stages between 1368-1385, is one of the most difficult poems in the English language. Popular in its day, it is sometimes credited with encouraging the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381. Because of the complexities 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 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 post-modern literary and cultural forms, to which this medieval poem bears a startling resemblance.

The second text, written between 1436-1438, is often called the first English autobiography, The Book of Margery Kempe, which we will read in the original Middle English. Many of the problems raised by Langland in Piers Plowman will return to us again in prose form, and from the different perspective of a married woman struggling to live a meaningful life in a changing, urban world. Although Margery was once accused of attempting to entice women away from their husbands, her Book is not associated with a rebellion, but rather an enormous social upheaval that continues to play itself out. We will look at the relationship of body to book at a time when most people were illiterate and Latin was still the language of men in power.

Required Texts:
Piers Plowman: The B Text, trans. A. V. C. Schmidt
The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Staley

Recommended Texts:
A Companion to Piers Plowman, ed. Alford
The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt
Work required and mark breakdown:
Participation (themes and quizzes) 10%
Sources and Analogues 15%
Midterm test 10%
Research essay (Piers Plowman), 3000 words (consultation in office hours required) (5% for preparation) 35%
In-class essay (The Book of Margery Kempe) 30%

Attendance and preparation expectations
The Midterm test and final in-class essay cannot be changed unless a doctor’s note is provided. Students must see me in office hours two weeks before papers are due, or make alternate arrangements to consult by e-mail. Detailed preparation requirements for the Research essay will be handed out in the first week of classes.

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 our work together):

Failure to keep up with the reading will adversely affect your participation mark. In-class responses to the texts, called “themes,” and translation quizzes will be given without notice throughout the course.

1. Tues May 4 Introduction to Middle English language and culture
   Thur May 6 Overview of Piers Plowman (reading: Prologue and Passus 1)

2. Tue May 11 Mede the mayde (reading: Passus 2-4)
   Thur May 13 The second dream (reading: Passus 5-7)

3. Tues May 18 Do Well (reading: Passus 8-10)
Thur May 20 Fortune, Faith, and Nature; Imagination (reading: Passus 11-12)

4. Tues May 25 Haukyn (reading: Passus 13-14)

Thur May 27 Do Better (reading: Passus 15-17) SOURCES AND ANALOGUES DUE

5. Tues June 1 Do Best (reading: Passus 18)

Thur June 3 The Last Dreams (reading: Passus 19-20)

6. Tues June 8 Review.

Thur June 10 MID-TERM TEST (Piers Plowman)

7. Tues June 15 Introduction to Margery Kempe

Thur June 17 Dictating and writing (reading: Proems 1-2)

8. Tues June 22 Childbirth and Confession (reading: Chapters 1-8)

Thur June 24 Marriage and Contemplation I (reading: 9-25)

9. Tues June 29 Pilgrimage (reading: chpts 26-42) RESEARCH ESSAY DUE

Thur July 1 CANADA DAY (NO CLASS)

10. Tues July 6 Pilgrimage, continued

Thur July 8 Ecclesiastical encounters in England (43-56)

11. Tues July 13 Teachers and tempters in Lynn (reading: chpts 57-72)

Thur July 15 Marriage and contemplation II (reading: chpts 73-89)

12. Tues July 20 Sons and daughters (reading: Book II chpts 1-8)

Thur July 22 Epilogue (reading: Epilogue)

13. Tues July 27 Margery, her Book, and her confessors: Review

Thur July 29 IN-CLASS ESSAY (The Book of Margery Kempe)
ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS
ENG310C
Summer 2004
Instructor: Dr. Jenifer Sutherland

Participation (themes and quizzes): 10%

Each lecture day we will do a close analysis of at least one short passage from the assigned reading. Your ability to translate these passages accurately will be tested from time to time throughout the course. In addition, the instructor will occasionally assign a written response of 200-300 words to the reading. Volunteers will be asked to read their response out loud in order to facilitate discussion. The quizzes and written responses will be collected and graded out of 5, to become the basis for your participation mark.

Sources and Analogues 15%

This assignment is due at the end of the fourth week of classes, on Thursday, May 27. This is a brief report (approximately 1000 words) describing an allegorical vision or dream from a work prior to or contemporary with Langland’s Piers Plowman. The assignment is designed to encourage you to explore the rich tradition that informs this complex work. It should also help to prepare you for your major research paper. An account of various examples of the allegorical dream tradition from biblical, Platonic, French, and English sources, can be found in Stephen Barney’s review: “Allegorical Visions,” chapter 4 of Alford’s Companion to Piers Plowman. A few of these are:

- Zachariah’s vision of the temple, Zach. 1-8 (the Bible)
- The Myth of Er, from Plato’s Republic
- The Journey to Hades, Odyssey, Book 10
- The Journey to the Underworld. Book 6 of Virgil’s Aeneid
- The Apocalypse, or Revelation of St. John the Divine (the Bible)
- The Gospel of Nicodemus (apocryphal scripture)
- Macrobius’ Dream of Scipio
- Consolation of Philosophy, by Boethius
- Pearl
- St Patrick’s Purgatory
- La Voie d’Enfer et de Paradis, by Jehan de la Mote
- Dante’s Purgatorio from The Divine Comedy

RESEARCH ESSAY 35% (5 plus 30)

The major essay is a comparison of a modern work that resonates with one clearly defined aspect of Piers Plowman. Your task is to explain the similarities and differences between the modern work and Langland’s text focussing either on a theme, a genre, a character, a setting, or some clearly identified aspect of the language. Many examples of how this might work will be discussed in class.
5% is assigned to a preparatory report you will show me during my office hours or email to me at least two weeks before the essay is due on Tuesday, June 9th. This will include the titles of four secondary sources that you have consulted for your research along with its bibliographic detail. You should state your thesis along with a list of examples from each of the two texts that you plan to use to substantiate your argument. In addition, you should include a “greatest hits” list of quotations from your most essential secondary source, a summary of its argument, and a paraphrase of one important paragraph of the work.

Students will be expected to make all citations according to MLA standard style.

PLAGARISM and YOUR RESEARCH ESSAY

The plagiarism-busting web tool “turnitin” is available through the English Department at UTSC. In order to make sure that the hard work and honest effort of each and every student is rewarded fairly, I will use this technology while I am grading essays. This means that I may randomly ask for electronic submissions of your paper through e-mail attachment IN ADDITION TO THE HARCOPY that I will actually grade. Other forms of plagerism, such as unacknowledged quotation and/or essays written to order, or by parents, friends, cousins, partners, etc. will be dealt with according to the University’s policy. Your old essays may not be recycled.

TERM TEST: 10%

There will be a term test on Piers Plowman on June 10. The test will be in two parts, one “identify and explain the significance of” a choice of terms; the second a short essay question requiring a close analysis of one of three passages.

IN-CLASS ESSAY: 30%

A choice of essay topics on Margery Kempe will be handed out early in July along with a list of recommended readings. Students will be expected to read at least one of the books on the list in order to prepare to write a detailed essay on the topic on the last day of class.