Piers Plowman and Friends
ENGL310C Non-Chaucerian Middle English Literature
Tue/Thur 11:30-12:50 EL 109
Professor Sarah Tolmie
Office Hours Tue/Thur 10:15-11:15
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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.


Work required and mark breakdown:
One fifteen-minute oral presentation (consultation in office hours required) 15%
One research essay, 3000 words (consultation in office hours required) 35%
A midterm test 10%
A final exam 30%
Participation 10%

Please note: late papers will be penalized a full letter grade (10%). Office hour consultations on both the paper and presentation are required as part of the grade. Essays must be accompanied by a bibliography of at least five items and be correctly formatted throughout in MLA style. The test and exam cannot be rescheduled without evidence of illness, emergency or exam conflict. Failure to keep up with the reading will adversely effect your participation mark; I reserve the right to conduct spot quizzes.

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

Week 1: Thur 3 Jan Introduction to Middle English language and culture

Week 2: Tue 8 Jan Overview of *Piers Plowman* (reading: Prologue)
        Thur 10 Jan Genre: dream vision, allegory (reading: Passus 1)
Week 3: Tue 15 Jan  Genre: romance, satire (reading: Passus 2)  
Thur 17 Jan  the three estates (reading: Passus 3)

Week 4: Tue 22 Jan  kingship, law and order (reading: Passus 4)  
Thur 24 Jan  preaching, sacraments, pilgrimage (reading: Passus 5)

Week 5: Tue 29 Jan  MIDTERM TEST (one hour)  
Thur 31 Jan  work, penance, pardons (reading: Passus 6)

Week 6: Tue 5 Feb  knowledge and inquiry, scholasticism (reading: Passus 7)  
Thur 7 Feb  psychomachia (reading: Passus 8)

Week 7: Tue 12 Feb  body and soul, marriage (reading: Passus 9)  
Thur 14 Feb  poets and whores, intellectual pride (reading: Passus 10)  
ESSAY CONSULTATIONS MUST TAKE PLACE THIS WEEK

WINTER STUDY BREAK 18-22 FEB.

Week 8: Tue 26 Feb  love, inner dream sequence (reading: Passus 11)  
Thur 28 Feb  Ymaginatif (reading: Passus 12)

Week 9: Tue 5 Mar  eating your words (reading: Passus 13)  
Thur 7 Mar  Haukyn the minstrel (reading: Passus 14)

Week 10: Tue 12 Mar  talking to yourself: Anima (reading: Passus 15)  
Thur 14 Mar  the end of language: the tree of charity (reading: Passus 16)

Week 11: Tue 19 Mar  the old law and the new law (reading: Passus 17)  
Thur 21 Mar  affective piety: Will as witness (reading: passus 18)

Week 12: Tue 26 Mar  paranoia and Apocalypse (reading: Passus 19)  
Thur 28 Mar  after the end (reading: Passus 20)

Week 13: Tue 2 April  Conclusions and FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS